

Flames on the Water Tears in the Sea

Con Aroney

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Asa Kent Jennings, the lion on the quay, the courageous Girdis and Caristinos families and all the other heroes of the Asia Minor Catastrophe.

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Front cover photograph: The destruction of Smyrna.

Back cover photographs: Wedding of Con Caris and Eugenia Girdis 1923; Nicholas and Maria Girdis circa 1912, Asa Kent Jennings.

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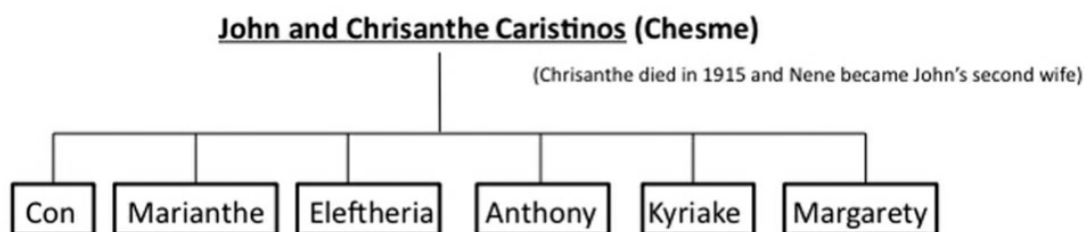
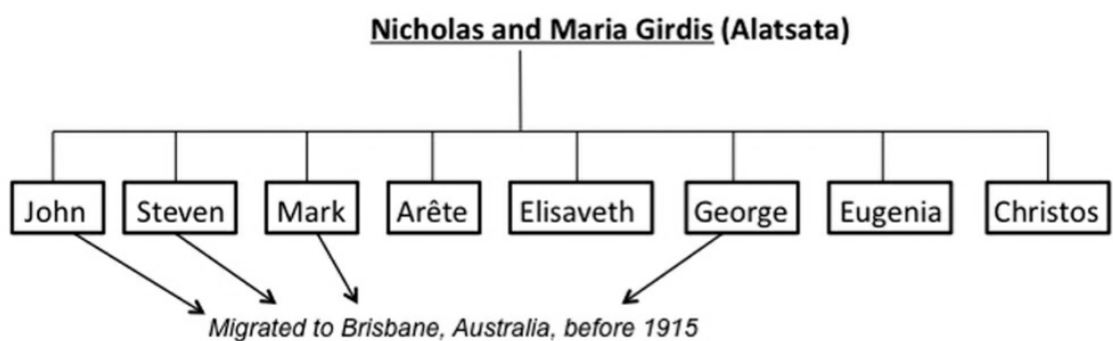
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Girdis and Caristinos Family trees



Asia Minor - 1922



Western Asia Minor - 1922



Sea of Marmara - August 1922

They were an unusual looking couple to say the least, and the other passengers on the Italian freighter steaming out of *Constantinople* that morning must have seen them as a curiosity. He was slight of figure, wore a white suit and Panama hat while she appeared much taller, although their heights may have been similar if his upper back hadn't been so severely deformed. She wore a plain grey ankle length dress, her face was free of makeup and her dark hair was swept around her face and tied neatly in a bun. They strolled along the deck, arm in arm, looking out of place and unfashionable alongside the elegant French women with rouged faces, wearing broad-brimmed hats and floral dresses or the Italian businessmen dressed in smart grey suits and smoking cigars.

On the deckchairs, Greek merchants sipped Turkish coffee and played backgammon, slamming the pieces down with unmasked aggression. The couple walked past an open lounge where a party of French army officers sipped champagne supplied regularly by scurrying Italian waiters in tuxedos.

Asa Kent Jennings, a YMCA worker from upstate New York was enjoying the afternoon sun with his wife Amy. On the deck, their three children Asa Junior, fifteen, Wilbur, thirteen and Bertha nine, had found the quoits, and the two boys were teasing Bertha as she struggled with the game.

'Be nice to your sister boys, her arms are not very strong you know,' he gently reprimanded them.

One could tell from his calm demeanour that this was not someone who would be overexcited by a sea voyage, even one to an exotic destination, but as he walked the deck, vivid memories flooded his mind. A few weeks before, they had left Budweis in Bohemia to sail down the Danube to the Black Sea and across to *Constantinople* (Istanbul). Jennings loved history and the great city was custom made for classical scholars. They had explored the ancient ruins of the old city, visited the great church of Hagia Sophia, with its towering domed roof built in the sixth century and now converted to a mosque, a source of eternal angst for the orthodox Christian Greeks who saw it as the centre point of their faith. His children were fascinated by the

bazaars and the people, an array of colours, red fezzes, black veils and gold jewellery. They experienced the mysterious smells of the spice markets and the falafel restaurants and marvelled at the mosaics in the church of Saint Saviour. They had even climbed the byzantine Theodosian walls, the ancient battlements that had been breached by Turkish cannon in 1453. Finally, that morning from the port in the Bosphorus, they had boarded the freighter for their voyage to Smyrna.

Smyrna was known as the pearl of the eastern Mediterranean, a Mecca for trade and shopping and renowned for its mixture of Greek and oriental mystique. But their journey was not for pleasure. As he looked at his innocent children playing on the deck, he worried about their safety because a war had raged in central Turkey for the past three years. But Jennings was a driven man and he had a mission.

‘We’ve come a long way from Ontario, New York, Amy. With God’s help, we have been blessed with healthy children, travels to distant lands and wonderful opportunities to help our fellow man. We are richer than the Sultan in *Constantinople*’, he said and put his arm around his wife’s shoulder. He recalled his nearly fatal illness, years before and considered himself lucky to be alive and to have fathered three children. The tuberculosis had deformed his back and prevented him from working his small farm, but his health had returned almost miraculously.

Amy smiled. ‘It certainly has become an interesting life with you so far Mr Jennings, and I expect more of the same.’

‘And when you ask, I always deliver Ma’am. That is my duty as your husband. The children are looking forward to a warm city on the Mediterranean, Amy; it should make a change from Budweis.’

Amy looked serious for a moment. ‘Let’s hope so Asa. I know you had concerns about going to Smyrna, but you seem happier now; the war is a long way from the city.’

‘Yes Amy, and Smyrna is a wealthy city, too important to the British, French and Italians not to be well protected and you can see from the festive atmosphere of the ship that our fellow travellers are not too concerned. If the worst happens, I have been assured that the American destroyers in the harbour will be ready to evacuate US nationals at a moment’s notice. We will be perfectly safe.’

It was true. The laughter and good humour of the passengers sailing to Smyrna that afternoon was contagious, and Jennings and his wife absorbed

the atmosphere; but whether it was his puritan upbringing or the memories of the terrible scenes that he had experienced previously in the Great War, something prevented him from relaxing. As he walked the decks amid the frenetic decadence, troubling thoughts entered his mind.

Ontario, New York, USA - September 1910 (twelve years earlier)

We are twice armed if we fight with faith.

Plato

For years, Amy and her two children had followed her husband from parish to parish. Jennings had been a devout Methodist pastor, a kind man and friend to all, the poor and the wealthy, with prejudice to none. He had seen illness and death frequently, giving comfort at the bedside or by the grave. He was only thirty-three years old and had been perfectly healthy until a dying man had coughed blood over his face and following this, he became unwell, developed back pain and in the last few months his upper spine had bent into an ugly curve. As a pastor he was forced to work as a farmer to supplement his income and support his family, but the pain in his spine made this impossible and he had joined the YMCA. He loved the way this organisation allowed him to empower young people to take responsibility and strive for spiritual, intellectual and physical well-being; and it had become his vocation. Jennings returned that morning from a nearby town where he had supervised an athletics carnival and given a lecture on character development for the local chapter of the 'Y'.

'The boys are doing very well and the Y meeting was well attended', he said.

'That's wonderful', Amy replied and reached towards him, taking his coat from his back. 'But my darling, I have some worrying news.' She turned to look at him. 'Your physician called in yesterday when you were away and said he had information about your illness.'

Jennings tilted his head. He could see the concern in her eyes. 'What news Amy, don't be afraid to tell me?'

'He told me that the pain and deformity of your spine was caused by tuberculosis which had spread to your spine. He called it Pott's disease.'

‘Ah, so that explains it. I understand, it’s alright, the pain is not too bad’, Jennings replied.

‘My darling, there is more. He said that the mercury salts had not helped and there was no other treatment of any use. He thought that you would die within a few months.’ She stopped and held his hands. Jennings calmly nodded his head.

With tears in her eyes, Amy spoke. ‘The doctor suggested that I give you this news, as I would pass it on more gently than he could. Asa, I was totally shaken. I prayed that he was wrong. What does he know after all? Who has ever heard of Pott’s disease? Tuberculosis kills people by infecting their lungs, how can your spine be affected and your lungs be spared?’

‘Hush Amy. It is God’s will. But no one else must know this and I will work for as long as I can.’

‘Asa, I was scared and upset, and I cried for hours till I fell asleep from exhaustion. But this morning I woke with a clear head and I did what I have done before when I was confused or lost, I let the Bible fall open, put my finger on a page and read whatever passage it was touching.’

‘Read it to me Amy.’

‘You know this passage well, Asa. It fell open at John, Chapter 11.’ She opened the Bible and spoke in a clear strong voice.

Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified.

Jennings smiled. ‘Asa I had my answer from God himself. It will be a miracle. You will be saved and go on to live and glorify God.’

They held each other strongly and Amy wept again as she embraced him, but this time she wept with hope for the future. Jennings spoke slowly. ‘Amy, you are my rock. I am not worried because I truly believe you and your message. In fact, I have known for some time that God has a great mission for me. In this I have faith.’

Amy went and fetched three year old Asa Junior and baby Wilbur into the room. She spoke calmly to the toddler. ‘Father has been very sick, but he will be getting better now. Let’s pray for him.’ Amy, holding her baby, got

onto her knees with Wilbur and they bent their heads as she spoke. 'We ask you Lord, to restore the health of your servant Asa Jennings, as we need him to live for many more years as he has much to offer the world.'

Jennings felt tears in his eyes. He had never seen a more gentle and beautiful sight.

Alatsata, Asia Minor - May 1914

The Great Persecution – *O Megalos Diagmos*

In 1914, the influence of a new political party, the Young Turks, had begun pressuring for an ethnic cleansing of non-Turks from Asia Minor and the murders of both the Greeks and Armenians began. They espoused the principle of ‘Turkey for the Turks’ despite the fact that both the Greeks and Armenians had predated the Turks in Asia Minor for thousands of years. The persecutions were encouraged by the new administration and the provincial governors did not intervene. The situation worsened further with the beginning of the Great War when Germany strongly supported the Turkish policy of removing both the Armenians and Greeks from Asia Minor, enabling the Germans to move into the commercial vacuum. Methods included seizure of assets, restriction of privileges, forcible conversion to Islam, deportation, enforced marches into the interior and outright murder. When the first attacks in Asia Minor were not investigated by the authorities, the deaths mounted, resulting in a wholesale exodus of the Greek population from many villages to the neighbouring Greek islands and to Athens. Global politics were having a dramatic effect on the Christian people of Asia Minor and millions of Greeks and Armenians would be killed. The Greeks called this ‘O Megalos Diagmos - The Great Persecution’. The Armenians would later call it ‘The Genocide’, a term which would not be coined until after the holocaust of the 1940s.

Nicholas and Maria Girdis were Ionian Greeks, a people who had lived on the coast of Asia Minor since ancient times. Politically, the area came under the control of the Ottoman Turks in 1453 after the fall of *Constantinople*, but the majority Greek population of Smyrna and nearby townships such as Alatsata had lived in relative harmony with the moderate Ottomans till 1914. They were allowed to build churches and practise their Christian orthodox religion. One law which the Girdis family could not tolerate however, was the forced conscription of eighteen year old boys into labour gangs supporting the Ottoman Turkish army and because of this, their four oldest sons had left Alatsata and migrated to Australia. In 1914,

remaining with them in Asia Minor were their three daughters and their seven year old son.

It had been a long difficult day for Nicholas Girdis who had been organising the transport of crates of tobacco leaves from his plantation to the nearby port of Chesme, but it wasn't the work that troubled him. A month before, in the early evening, an unknown assailant had killed a prominent Greek shopkeeper in a knife attack on a village street and then a few weeks later an Armenian businessman returning home from Smyrna was shot and killed in his carriage on the outskirts of the town. Then, a young Greek priest was shot in Alatsata whilst visiting parishioners and had died the following day. The local Ottoman mayor had promised that they would find the culprits, but nothing had been done. There were no obvious police investigations. Worst of all, there were now rumours of a terrible massacre of residents of the Greek village of Phocaea, north of Smyrna, and many residents had packed up and left for the neighbouring Greek islands.

It was a dark moonless night as Girdis walked home through the streets of the village and unusually all was quiet. Gone were the couples parading arm in arm around the market square or under the spinning sails of the three stone windmills. As he walked, the gaslights on each corner cast long shadows which danced across the road and onto the houses. A dog's bark broke the silence and echoed through the streets and he quickened his pace. When he finally arrived at his front door, Maria and the children were waiting for him. He couldn't help but admire his three daughters who were all beautiful young women. Elisaveth put her arms around him. 'We have been so worried about you *patera*' she said, the concern showing in her large brown eyes. Arête, Eugenia and his young son Christos came forward to kiss him.

'How is everyone in the village?' he asked them.

'Very worried *patera*, everyone was talking about Phocaea' Eugenia replied.

Maria also spoke. 'You must speak to the mayor again and ask him to organise the village defences and find these criminals. How can we go on living like this?'

'These are difficult times Maria but we can't let these people drive us from our homes. Enough of this talk, I'm starved and it's time for dinner.'

After Girdis had washed up, he sat down at the table with his family and Maria took off her apron and sat next to him, crossing herself. 'Dear Lord,'

she began, 'thank you for the meal we are about to eat. Bless this house and this family'. As they began to eat, two gun shots rang out from the street. The children screamed and ran to their father.

'My Lord, that's very close. Quickly children, up you go to the bedrooms,' Maria demanded and herded the three girls and Christos upstairs and as she ran up, she called back. 'Promise me you won't go outside Nikos, your children will have no protection if you leave us.'

'I'll stay right here, protecting the house.' He took his shotgun out of its case, and loaded it with two shells. Then he pulled the table across to barricade the front door and sat behind it in a chair with the loaded gun on his lap.

Soon after, he heard a terrible scream and thought he recognised the voice as that of Mrs Sotiros who lived a few houses away. 'What sort of a man am I? Women are being attacked and I sit here, trembling behind my locked door.'

He stood up shaking his head and pulled the table away from the door. Pushing it open he peered up and down the street and below the gaslight about fifty yards away, he could see a woman crouching down, sobbing and he walked towards her holding his shotgun.

'Is that you Irene?' he asked, looking in both directions.

She stood up, and he noticed that her hands were covered in blood and then he saw the body lying on the ground.

'They have killed him Nikos, they have killed my Michaelis. Holy Mother of God.'

'They came to our door and as soon as he opened it they dragged him outside and shot him. How can human beings do this Nikos? Now my three children have no *patera*. Holy Mother of God. Holy Mother of God.' She repeated the words again and again.

'Who were they Irene?'

'I don't know. There were three of them, speaking Turkish.'

'Were they from our village?' he asked.

'No. I've never seen them before. They were xeni - outsiders'.

Girdis could see the faces of her children looking out from the window. They were crying. He helped Irene back inside the house and by this time, two other neighbours had ventured outside towards them. He and the others carried the body of Michaelis Sotiris back inside his home where the children gathered around their dead father.

Girdis spoke to his neighbours. ‘We need to protect the village tonight. The three of us will patrol the streets with our guns. Together we have strength, alone we are vulnerable and anyway these cowards only attack unarmed men.’

He and his friends were soon joined by several others and they spent a long night guarding the streets surrounding the Church and the market, trying to reassure their families that they would be safe that night. But the village folk of Alatsata were now in total panic.

Chesme (three miles from Alatsata) - July 1914 (two months later)

Know Thyself

Thales of Miletus - inscribed on the temple of Apollo, Delphi

John Caristinos had a large general store and wholesale warehouse in Chesme, close to the wharf. He sold almost everything, and if it wasn't in the store he could have it imported within a week. His shop stocked Italian furniture, French porcelain dolls, crystal from Ireland, clocks from Switzerland, Turkish rugs from Damascus as well as the softest leather coats from Ephesus. He even had boxes of the sweetest loukoumis, a fruit and vegetable section where he sold figs and peaches from the Girdis family orchard and he was a distributor of products to stores all over Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean. Caristinos was one of the largest employers in Chesme with Greek, Turkish and Armenian workers and he was widely respected throughout Asia Minor, though what he enjoyed most was not his undoubted commercial success but the good will and team spirit among his ethnically diverse workers.

His house was a short walk to his business and he had established large gardens both in the front and back, radiant with the vivid colours of purple hyacinth and white narcissus and fragrant with the scents of jasmine and laurel. He tended the flowers and trees every morning before he went to work. In the front garden, amongst the flowers, was a statue of Homer which looked out towards the island of Chios, whilst behind the house there was a bust of Socrates and it was here in the evenings, secluded amongst his myrtle trees, that he would sit and contemplate the meaning of life. His first wife had died during the birth of their sixth child and he remarried several years later to Nene.

That afternoon, he sat with his friend Nicholas Girdis underneath a large fig tree, in the open air *taverna* on the Chesme waterfront, playing

backgammon or tavli. Chesme was a village on the end of the Erythraia peninsula, south of Smyrna, and was very close to the Greek island of Chios. Behind the *taverna*, dominating the waterfront, was the large Ottoman Castle built in the 16th century, with its large rusted cannon pointing towards the sea, whilst before them the blue Aegean sea sparkled in the sun. It was a warm Sunday afternoon in Chesme and the backgammon competition had been long and fierce. Caristinos had thrown lucky dice and won his fourth game in succession and his adversary, an unhappy Nicholas Girdis, began resetting the pieces for the next game.

‘When you suggested one last game before I left, I didn’t expect you to be so ruthless. Not only that, but so much luck and so many wins, John; you have broken the ancient Greek dictum which you love to quote – “nothing in excess”. Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?’

Caristinos laughed. ‘My response to you Nikos is - “know thyself”. It may be best if you play chess in the future.’

‘Ah, no, I will practise my tavli while I’m away in Athens, but what will you do now that I am leaving Asia Minor?’ Girdis asked.

‘It is a sad day for me Nikos, I will miss you, as you have been a good friend,’ Caristinos replied.

‘If it weren’t for my young family, I would stay in Alatsata and defend myself, like you John. A few months ago, there were over thirteen thousand Greeks in Alatsata and only a hundred Turks and now almost all the Greeks have left. The town is virtually empty and we can no longer defend ourselves,’ Girdis replied.

‘I am sending my family to Chios, Nikos. I have a home there and you can almost see the roof from here.’ Caristinos pointed at the island a few miles away. ‘You can go there too, but I am staying here to maintain my business.’

‘Thank you for your offer John, but I will have to work and there is none in Chios for me. I have relatives in Athens who can help me and I’ll take my family there and when the bloodshed stops, we will return. You are a very important man in Asia Minor and the Ottoman mayor and your Turkish employees will help defend you, I’m sure,’ Girdis said.

‘It is very wrong that they can drive out our best citizens Nikos. These brigands are destroying businesses that have taken generations to build, but you must listen to your heart my friend and I hope that you will return soon and we can play tavli together again.’

In late 1914, the Girdis family of Nicholas, his wife Maria, their three daughters and young son fled from the Greek village of Alatsata to Athens to escape the violence. Their Turkish neighbour begged them not to go but promised that he would care for their house till they returned. John Caristinos sent his own family to the nearby island of Chios, while he remained in Chesme, armed to the teeth and surrounded by his devoted Turkish workers.

Athens during the Grear War - 1918 (four years later)

Illness strikes men when they are exposed to change.

Herodotus

Eugenia and Christos Girdis liked to play in the large garden behind their apartment, in Athens. It reminded them of their orchard in Alatsata, where they could run around the peach trees and chase the sparrows through the grass. Their mother wanted them to stay out of the apartment as much as possible as their father Nicholas, was very sick. He had developed a terrible cough and fever that winter and now he had taken a turn for the worse.

In 1917, Greece had entered the Great War when Bulgaria invaded Macedonia in the north. This day, ten year old Christos was pretending to be a Greek soldier and his older sister Eugenia was playing his Bulgarian enemy. The garden was the forest of Macedonia, and the children used branches like rifles and hunted each other amongst the trees and bushes.

Eugenia hid behind an oak tree, but Christos crept around behind her, raising his branch and firing.

‘Bang! You are killed Bulgar invader,’ he shouted at Eugenia. She fell to the ground, in mock death, her arms falling apart.

Christos, walked over to her, and put his foot on her chest, holding the tree branch rifle in the air above his head. ‘The great sniper Christos has stopped the Bulgarian invasion once again,’ he shouted in exultation.

Eugenia reached up and pulled his leg, bringing him to the ground. Laughing, she pointed her tree branch at his head. ‘You missed me; I only made out being dead and now you are captured Greek soldier child,’ she bragged. Christos, pulled the branch away from his head and laughing, the two wrestled with each other in the long grass.

Nicholas Girdis had developed a hacking cough each winter he had spent in Athens, but that year he had developed regular fevers and drenching sweats and in the last few weeks he had begun coughing up blood. His doctor

had diagnosed pneumonia and he had become so weak that he now became confined to his bed.

Girdis had been a tall and distinguished man with grey hair, but had become painfully thin and the skin on his face was now moist and white. He sat propped up in bed, with a woollen blanket pulled up under his chin. His wife, Maria, had just washed him and wiped his forehead with a cool sponge and now sat on his bed, using a large spoon to feed him steaming egg-lemon - avgolemono - soup. Although his cheeks were drawn in and his short breaths came quickly, he could still argue with her.

‘I should have stayed in Asia Minor, Maria. My friend John Caristinos is doing fine in beautiful Chesme and his business is thriving while our orchards have filled with weeds and the Turks are enjoying our peaches and figs. And we are here, sickened by the long miserable Athenian winter and I am being fed like a baby.’ He gave a long rasping cough.

‘Yes, you could have stayed and been murdered like my cousin Athanasios. Just hush and eat your broth Nikos. One day we will return and you will be happy amongst your trees again.’ Maria fed him another spoon of the delicious broth.

Girdis had been very feverish for the past week and the previous night he had coughed up a large amount of blood. The doctor had said yesterday that he was gravely ill and gave instructions that he should be kept cool and well fed. Elisaveth and Arête had spent the day helping their mother Maria sponging his wet face and chest. After feeding him the last spoonful of soup, Maria went into the kitchen and spoke to her daughters. ‘Your father looks better this evening. He liked the soup tonight.’

Elisaveth rose from a chair. ‘Your wonderful cooking would cure anyone Mama and there’s enough for everyone. I’ll call the children up from the garden.’

Suddenly a cry came from the bedroom and Maria and her daughters ran in to find him grey and making short gurgling breaths. There was blood stained froth on his lips and his eyes were open but blank. Maria called to him. ‘Nikos. Nikos. Cough it up!’

His breathing slowed and she tried using a fan to wave air into his mouth but after a few minutes his weak gasps stopped. Maria cradled her husband’s head and his two eldest daughters held his hands as he died. After a time, Elisaveth took her mother and sister to the couch and lay them down. She then used towels to clean up her father’s body and lay him in a peaceful

position on the bed. Only then, did she go downstairs to the two younger children.

When Eugenia saw Elisaveth, she could see that something was wrong. ‘What is it Elisaveth? Is father alright?’ she asked.

Elisaveth, shook her head and looked at both of them. ‘He is very sick and the Lord is taking him to heaven,’ she said. ‘Come and say goodbye to him.’

She walked between them with her arms around their shoulders. They were joined by Maria and Arête and together they sobbed and said goodbye to their father. Elisaveth was like a rock, calm and accepting in the face of disaster and as always she spoke. ‘Dear Lord, please take our father Nikos to your bosom. He has been a good man and a kind and loving father and husband. We entrust him to your care.’

The island of Chios, Eastern Aegean, during the Great War - 1918

*In peace, sons bury their fathers.
In war, fathers bury their sons.*

Herodotus

There was an interesting relationship between the Turks of Asia Minor and the Greeks of the neighbouring islands. The Turks looked on the islands like Chios with envy and wondered how they could belong to another nation, when they were so tantalisingly close to the mainland. The Greek islanders on the other hand, looked resentfully at the Asia Minor coast and felt that it was historically Greek Byzantine, stolen from them by the Ottomans four centuries earlier. John Caristinos and the other Ionian Greeks were caught between these two conflicting ideologies, but he was a strong-willed man and he hoped for an end to the violence that had separated him from his family. He knew that they were safe from the dangers of the Great Persecution, and was reassured when he visited them in his boat.

Caristinos had good relations with his Turkish employees, who had urged him to stay with them in Chesme, but his business struggled during this period and only his trading connections with Smyrna provided him with an income. He was a tall man and although he had lost his hair and walked with a limp, he knew that he could use a gun if required and was confident he could defend himself. He had always been a good shot.

Caristinos had a routine of visiting his family every month, but things changed in 1917 when Greece joined the Allies and was at war with Turkey, so that the crossing to Chios became illegal. He had not seen his family for six months and in frustration told the harbourmaster that he was taking his boat to go fishing and secretly set off for Chios. The Caristinos family was enjoying the morning, in their house which sat on a hill above the harbour of Chios, an idyllic Greek island which sat like an emerald, just a few miles off

the Asia Minor peninsula, opposite Chesme. Anthony Caristinos was leaving the island for Athens that afternoon to join the military academy and his older brother Con was talking with him in the garden. 'Nothing good can come of joining the army Anthony,' Con spoke carefully. 'The Turkish army is very strong – they trounced the allies at Gallipoli three years ago. How could a small Greek army defeat them?'

'Our father is alone in Chesme whilst the Turks murder his friends, and we sit here, just across the water, happily enjoying this beautiful house and gardens that he has given to us. I can't live this way, Con. Greece is at war with Turkey and at least by joining the army, I may be able to help him.'

'You'll probably be sent north to fight the Bulgarians instead. Thousands are dying there Anthony and it's a terrible stalemate.'

Anthony looked across the water towards Asia Minor. The city of Chesme was just visible in the morning light. 'Some mornings I swear I can hear our father - our *patera* - laughing in his shop, or see him tending the flowers in his garden. And he's alone there now, protecting his business for us.'

'No he's not, he's right here.' John Caristinos laughed as he walked out of the house towards the two brothers, his arms around his daughters Marianthe, Eleftheria and Kyriake, and youngest son Margarety. 'I couldn't miss your going away party Anthony. You all look well; life must be good here in Chios.'

Anthony's face broke into a wide smile. '*Patera*, it's great to see you.' The older boys embraced their father and walked towards the edge of the garden overlooking the water.

'Your boat looks good in the water, *patera*. Did you have a good crossing?' Con asked.

'A very nice trip, the water was very calm.'

'How's your shop? Is business good?' Anthony asked.

'My exports to Smyrna keep us in profit, but it'll be better after the war, when all the Greeks come back. There will be a good living there for both you boys when you return to Asia Minor.'

'Stay with the family here in Chios, *patera*. Ahmet can keep our business running,' Anthony implored his father. 'We worry about you every day in Chesme by yourself.'

'I have my shotgun and I'm safe and happy. I can't leave Asia Minor; remember what Euripides said, "that there is no greater sorrow than the loss

of one's native land". As for the army Anthony, you know my views, the Great War will be over soon and peace must be allowed to return. Our only future in Asia Minor is to share this land with the Turks. Don't join the army Anthony, stay here with your brothers and sisters and later we will be reunited in Chesme.'

Anthony shook his head. 'My mind is made up *patera* and I can no longer live under the yoke of the Ottoman Sultan or the oppression of the Young Turks. Did you know that the ancient Greeks in Chios had their own democratic assembly here in the sixth century BC, whilst there has never been democracy under the Ottomans. Modern Greeks are free and that is what our army might bring to Asia Minor - freedom and democracy. I am packed and I leave for Athens today, now let's go inside and drink our health with good Chioti *ouzo*.'

John shook his head. 'I have taught you too well about history and philosophy Anthony, but in Asia Minor we can never have the freedom you seek. We can coexist with the Ottomans and we may prosper, but that is all. For us, democracy under their rule is not possible. Ever! If you go to Asia Minor to fight the Turks, you will be fighting for a pipe dream.'

'I hope you are wrong. We will come to protect you in Chesme *patera*, and you cannot change my mind.'

'I was hoping you would choose a different path Anthony, but you are now a man, so the decision is yours to make. May God be with you.' Caristinos knew what it was like to be an impetuous youth. 'He will learn if he survives the war', he thought, and walked into the house with his arms over his two sons' shoulders.

Chesme, Asia Minor - 1918

If my body is enslaved, still my mind is free.

Sophocles

When John Caristinos arrived back in Chesme with his boat the Ottoman police were waiting for him.

‘So was it a good fishing trip Caristinos?’

‘No luck today. Poseidon was not listening to my prayers,’ he replied.

‘You are under arrest.’ The police officer took him by the arm.

‘What is the meaning of this? What have I done?’

‘We are at war with Greece and you think you can go back and forth freely to the island? You are arrested for espionage. No longer will you take our military secrets to the Greek army in Chios.’

‘This is an outrage. I have never done any such thing,’ he protested.

‘You will be held till next week when you will come before Delzum Bey, the magistrate. You can complain to him.’

Caristinos was taken to the jail in Chesme where chains were put around his ankles and he was placed in a single windowless cell. There he was made to sleep on a blanket on the floor, but despite the poor conditions, he did not complain and was very respectful to his captors. The only concession he was given was that his Turkish employee was allowed to visit him. Ahmet was his shop manager and wholesale merchant, who had worked for him since he was 15 years old. He was now in his 40s but was still single and usually wore a fez in the Ottoman style, as well as a dark suit and bowtie. Ahmet sat with Caristinos every afternoon and brought him Turkish meatballs and vegetables as well as fruit and sweet cakes. ‘God bless your mother Ahmet. I don’t know what I would have done without her cooking. Her *baklava* along with your company make my imprisonment here quite bearable, just like Socrates who enjoyed his last days with his friends.’

‘These aren’t your last days John, although both he and you were unfairly imprisoned. Remember, he was held by his fellow Greeks whereas

you have been jailed by your old enemy. We will see who is kinder.'

'We are not so different Ahmet, both our cultures respect knowledge and courage and pray to the same God, but please do not compare me with Socrates, the paragon of Greek virtue.'

'John, I've never understood it. Socrates was so wise and yet the Athenians killed him. How could this have happened?'

Caristinos finished eating the honey covered pastry. 'Socrates asked questions of everyone he met. It was his method of seeking truth and virtue which he said were the source of all true happiness, but his repeated inquiries pointed to the conclusion that the traditional Greek Gods were jealous and proud, which they were. It also raised the idea of a single God as the source of morality in the world, whilst the Greeks had many Gods. The Athenians were unsettled by this critical examination of their beliefs and claimed he was attacking their religion and corrupting the youth. The very democratic process which Socrates believed in, led to a vote where he was convicted and condemned to death.'

'He must have known this was unjust. So why didn't he escape? He had the opportunity,' Ahmet asked.

'Escape was against his principles Ahmet. Socrates believed in the rule of law and stable government. He did not wish to incite a revolt and chose to obey these principles and accept his fate. Not many men die for their principles Ahmet and although few men have to make that choice, Socrates will never be forgotten for what he did.'

Ahmet replied. 'Very strange John. Many say that democracy was ancient Greece's greatest gift to civilization, but it killed its greatest hero. This is a contradiction I cannot understand.'

'The Greek ideal of democracy was not just a political concept Ahmet; it was an individual one. Before democracy developed, they accepted the principle of isonomia - equal rights for all. The concept of personal freedom was new in the ancient world, unknown to all who came before, such as the Persians and the Egyptians, and not understood by the Romans who came later. The individual's freedom of thought and speech were the fertile soil that led to the birth of democracy, the explosion of science and the arts and the growth of western civilisation itself. After the Greeks were subjugated by the Romans it would take fifteen hundred years till this idea was reborn in the French and American revolutions and the western liberal democracies. This is what Socrates died for, Ahmet. This is ancient Greece's greatest gift

– freedom of thought and speech. He lived and died to protect this ideal. That was his legacy.’

Ahmet thought for a period before answering. ‘This freedom is foreign to an Ottoman Turk. We pledge our lives and promise our obedience to the empire and the Sultan. The individual is much less important.’

‘Yes Ahmet and this is the proof that the Ottoman Empire has not entered the modern era, and is doomed.’

‘John I agree, but you are guiltless. This arrest is not just and you are not defending an ideal like Socrates. I could give the sergeant some money and you could escape to Chios tonight.’

‘That is where you are wrong Ahmet. It is my choice to seek justice and stay in this town. I’m not a spy and I will remain in jail and fight these charges.’

A week later, John Caristinos walked free. There was no evidence against him, only rumours. He stayed in Chesme and in his own home, but he would never take his boat to the Greek island of Chios again.

Camp Hospital 52, Le Mans, France - 1918

It is the task of a good man to help those in misfortune.

Sophocles

In December of 1918, the French city of Le Mans was the site of an American hospital for US soldiers returning from the front. Camp Hospital 52 was established in a monastery with high ceilings, long halls and stone floors which meant that the building was very difficult to heat, had poor plumbing and inadequate wiring. Tents and schools nearby enabled the entire complex to house almost two thousand badly injured soldiers and as the number of the camp suggests it was one of over fifty major US hospitals in France. The hospital was staffed by surgeons and nurses who had not been relieved since their arrival one year before. There were wards for amputees, others for facial and head injuries, chest and abdominal trauma and another for gas injuries. A separate isolation tent hospital seven hundred yards away was just used for mumps patients. Perhaps the most difficult cases to treat were those suffering from shell shock, who were housed in an adjacent school. These unfortunates were crippled with uncontrolled shaking, or cried and hid under their beds. All the patients were considered too weak to survive the Atlantic crossing to return home.

That morning, a small stooped man wearing a white suit and Panama hat walked through the gates surrounding the old monastery. He was drafted from the YMCA and his role would be to provide spiritual support and assist in the physical rehabilitation of the injured soldiers. Jennings arrived holding the hand of a frail sick young girl. She was very pale with tattered clothes and carried a towel into which she had been coughing blood. The two walked past the front lawn where many soldiers were walking with crutches or with the assistance of nurses. Many had missing limbs, whilst others sat on benches and had bandages on their heads or chests. He opened the large doors of the old monastery and they entered a long ward with hospital beds running down both sides, each occupied by a wounded soldier. Some were in

traction and others had glass flasks with intravenous fluids running into their arms. Apart from one soldier with a rasping cough, the room was quiet and dark and the mood sombre. As he turned into a side room, he noticed other patients with gaping wounds in their faces or burnt and infected skin wounds; several were quietly moaning in pain.

A nurse in a white apron and cap came up to him. 'What are you doing here?' she asked.

'I am the new YMCA worker, Jennings, just arrived from the US, and here to assist in your rehab section. But first I need to speak to your chief doctor about this girl I found at the railway station.'

'Well you can't stay here with a sick child.' She showed them into a small room. 'Wait here, Mr Jennings, I will get Dr Hargraves for you.'

In a few minutes she returned with the tall bearded surgeon. 'I am pleased to meet you Mr Jennings. We have been expecting you.'

Jennings reached out to shake his hand. 'I have heard much about you Doctor. Sir, this poor innocent child is very ill and she was wandering around the railway station, looking for food. Can you help her?'

The American surgeon looked down at the thin girl. He listened to her chest with his stethoscope and took Jennings aside. 'She has galloping consumption I'm afraid and probably has little time left.'

Jennings shook his head. 'I had tuberculosis ten years ago and I was treated with mercury salts. I was cured. Surely you can try that for her; she is so young, she deserves our mercy and a chance at life.'

'I don't have any to give her Mr Jennings, and anyway, there is no evidence that mercury salts will help her. Her only chance is to get good food and rest in a sanatorium with fresh air.'

Jennings replied sadly. 'But her family was displaced from a village on the front line. They have no home and are destitute.'

'I'm sorry, we can do nothing here and her coughing could give tuberculosis to my injured soldiers. You must take her away from here, Mr Jennings.'

Jennings nodded, took her by the hand and slowly led her out of the hospital. As he walked he spoke quietly to the girl. 'The doctor thinks your lungs will heal if you can get good food to eat and lots of rest. I'll explain to your mother what needs to be done.' She didn't understand anything he said, but she smiled up at his kind face. He made her feel safe. Slowly they walked

back to the camp on the outskirts of the city. He would give the girl's mother all the money he carried.

Alatsata, Asia Minor - April 1919

*The secret to happiness is freedom ... and the secret to freedom is
courage.*

Thucydides

After the defeat of Turkey in the Great War, the allies agreed to cede Smyrna and the surrounding countryside including the Erythraia peninsula to Greece and it was planned to send Greek troops to defend their newly claimed lands. The Greek government however, had much greater ambitions than to merely defend the region. After the Great War, the Ottoman Empire, the 'sick man of Europe', had collapsed, its army was in disarray and the Greek King saw an opportunity; he had a 'grand idea', and a dream of conquest. With the promise of the first Greek troops arriving in Smyrna and assuming that their safety was assured, many thousands of Ionian Greeks who had been displaced by the Great Persecution returned to Asia Minor in 1919. Maria Girdis and her four youngest children were returning to Alatsata to take back their family home, plantation and orchards. After arriving in Smyrna from Athens they travelled all morning along the peninsula towards the village and as they rode in the open carriage, Eugenia and Arête remembered the day when they had left their house five years earlier, at the height of the violence. Their father Nicholas had said it was too dangerous to stay and they had packed their belongings for Athens and wept as they left their beautiful village. They had hoped the move would be for a short time but the Great War had delayed their return till now and they had buried their father in Athens. They had dreamed of this homecoming for years, and hoped to be reunited with their childhood friends.

Elisaveth, however, had made other plans for her return to Asia Minor. She was attracted to a life of quiet contemplation and dedication to the Lord and had made the decision to become a nun. There was an Orthodox abbey south of Smyrna which was looking for novices and she would apply to join them. She was sure her family would support her decision.

As the carriage arrived outside Alatsata, the family saw the tall stone windmills on the outskirts of the village and as they passed underneath, they heard the familiar sounds of the wind in their sails and the rotating cogwheels.

Arête looked up as they passed under the towering sails. ‘The air here is so clean, not like the smog of Athens. It is so exciting to be coming back to our home,’ she said.

‘I feel like a bird that has been freed and has flown home, I am so happy,’ Eugenia replied. Elisaveth reached across and embraced both of her sisters.

The carriage wheels and the horse’s hooves echoed on the cobblestones as they entered the village. The girls waved at the familiar face of Melpomene Dragounis, who appeared in a window close to their street and finally, they turned the corner into the market square where they had lived. The house had been boarded up, but the front door had been broken and sat open. Elisaveth was the first to enter, followed by Maria, holding Christos’ hand with Arête and Eugenia close behind. Elisaveth’s body trembled as they entered their derelict home but she kept her jaw firm, not wishing to show her emotions to the others. The rooms were almost bare and puffs of dust rose from her shoes as she walked through the house. The dining room table on which they had enjoyed so many festive occasions was gone, as were the chairs and lounge. Only a cupboard was left in the kitchen and shattered plates and cups lay on the floor. Upstairs, the bedrooms had been stripped and just a cracked mirror remained.

Christos pushed the balcony door open and the family walked onto the terrace. The view across the square towards the church was as beautiful as they had remembered and the girls held each other as happy memories flooded back. In contrast to the painful recollections of Athens, the village reverberated with wonderful moments from their childhood; memories of laughter, joy and innocence.

Elisaveth spoke. ‘It’s not important that we have lost our belongings. We are back in our own home, this is our town, our beautiful square and our lovely church and many of our old friends are returning. We are blessed.’

‘It is truly wonderful Elisaveth. I love this place and we will never leave again,’ Eugenia responded.

Their mother embraced them all, with tears in her eyes.

‘We are home my darlings. Your *patera* would have been so proud of us coming back and he will be at peace now. This is where we belong and here we will rebuild our lives.’

Chesme - 1919

*Love is the joy of the good, the wonder of the wise, the
amazement of the Gods.*

Plato

When the Greeks returned to Chesme in 1919, they regarded John Caristinos as a hero. He was one of a very few who had remained on the peninsula, south-west of Smyrna, in the difficult period during the Persecution and the Great War. Apart from his short time in jail, he was otherwise undisturbed by the Turks, while elsewhere throughout Asia Minor, many thousands of Greeks and Armenians had been murdered.

The Greek troops would be landing in Asia Minor in a few weeks and the mood had changed. The peninsula was now considered safe and Caristinos's wife, Nene, and five of his children were coming home to Chesme from the island of Chios. His three daughters, Marianthe, Eleftheria and Kyriake and two sons, Con and Margarety were returning today, while his other son, Anthony, was due to arrive with the Greek army.

Caristinos stood on the pier with his friend Ahmet. The years without his family had changed him. His forehead and cheeks were deeply wrinkled and he walked slowly using a cane, but that morning, he watched with tears in his eyes as the boat with his family sailed into the harbour. He wanted to show them the depth of his love and was determined to make the homecoming a joyous occasion. He and Ahmet had been preparing the feast for the past three days and the tables at home were laden with *dolmades* and *pittes* as well as *baklava*, *finikia* and *kourabiades* for dessert. Caristinos had filled vases with fresh flowers from his garden. He had bunches of narcissus and a gift wrapped in paper placed on each of his children's beds and there was a huge basket of purple and white hyacinth and a special gift for his wife. As the boat was moored on the wharf, Caristinos shouted to his family '*Kalos erthate* – It is good you have come!' His son Con replied '*Kalos safrikame* – It is good that we have found you'.

Con was shocked to see how his father had aged. The years and the stress had taken their toll on the brave man. Caristinos embraced Nene and his children and they walked the short distance from the wharf across the road to his home. Ahmet held a tray of glasses filled with wine, water or *ouzo* to begin the festivities; and the family greeted him and toasted his health.

‘Have you been living by yourself *patera*?’ Con asked.

‘Yes and I have been very well and Ahmet and his mother have treated me like a member of their family. So much so that I’m getting used to drinking *glyko cafe* – (sweet coffee) – in the Turkish style.’ He patted Ahmet on the back.

‘Did anyone try to shoot you *patera*?’ Margarety asked him.

‘They weren’t brave enough to try because everyone knew that I had my loaded shotgun ready. Your father can look after himself Margarety.’

‘You were very brave John, if not a little foolish; and I’m amazed at how clean the house is,’ Nene replied and kissed him. Caristinos smiled to himself, he had a cleaner come the previous day and it had been a good decision.

‘Go and have a look in your bedrooms children,’ Caristinos told them.

Excited they ran back to their rooms and emerged with their gifts and flowers in delight. ‘This is like Christmas *patera*,’ Marianthe said, unwrapping a box which revealed a Jade bracelet. ‘It is beautiful.’ She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. Nene was beaming as she opened her gift, a beautiful pearl necklace.

Caristinos sat down at the table and stretched his painful hip. As he looked at his family he reflected that this was the first time they had been together here for five years. ‘The world has been empty without my family and I have borne the loneliness silently’, he thought. ‘The children have grown into very different people from the youngsters who left here so long ago and are now young men and women, intelligent and full of life. I’ve missed so much of their lives but the sadness of that loss is almost overtaken by the joy of this moment, a happy return, brimming with laughter and curiosity; it is like a new beginning, a new life together. I am reborn, and it is wonderful.’

The family was home, and the celebrations would last long into the night.

Smyrna - May 15, 1919

*Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the
courage to defend it.*

Pericles

The occupation of Smyrna by Greek troops was strongly supported by the English Prime Minister Lloyd George principally to thwart Italian and French ambitions in the region. After the Great War, the victorious allies had agreed to partition the Ottoman Empire amongst themselves; *Constantinople* and the Dardanelle Strait as an international zone patrolled by the British, central Asia Minor to the Italians, southern Turkey and Cilicia to the French and Iraq to the British. Although Smyrna and its environs were promised to Greece, this was disputed, in particular by the Italians as they had controlled the nearby twelve 'Dodecanese' islands including Rhodes and Kos since a war with the Ottomans in 1912 and felt they had special rights to the entire Aegean coast of Asia Minor. By early May 1919 the Italians had already landed some of their own soldiers nearby and were threatening to occupy Smyrna while the French, with major mercantile interests in the region also wanted control over the important port. The British knew that the landing of twenty thousand Greek soldiers, supported by their navy would prevent an Italian or French takeover of the city. British support of a successful Greek annexation of Smyrna would also give them a trading advantage, including railway access to the oilfields of Mosul, Iraq, which they controlled.

This was a momentous day for the Greek people of Smyrna, the return of the first Christian troops since the Byzantines were thrown out of Asia Minor in the fifteenth century. The quay was crowded with people who had assembled to welcome the arrival of the Greek army, and the popular local Greek Bishop Chrysostomos, resplendent in his robes and mitre, would officially welcome the soldiers. John Caristinos's son Anthony was arriving later that morning as a lieutenant in the cavalry, making this an especially proud occasion for his family. Caristinos and his family had driven from

Chesme to celebrate the day and he wore a top hat and suit while his wife Nene was resplendent in a long blue dress and yellow hat. Maria Girdis was also there with three of her children, Arête, Eugenia and Christos who each carried a small Greek flag. Elisaveth was not with them as she was living in seclusion in the abbey.

That morning, there was an incredible festive atmosphere in the European and Greek quarters and on the quay. People were singing and drinking champagne on the balconies of the hotels and others were dancing in the streets. The two families from the peninsula were less flamboyant; drinking Greek coffee in a quayside restaurant.

‘You must be very proud of him John, coming home as an officer in the Greek army,’ Maria spoke to Caristinos.

‘I am proud Maria, but I am also fearful. There are still Turkish soldiers in the barracks here. Do you honestly think that they will just surrender when our boys arrive?’ Caristinos responded.

‘Our two countries have been at peace since the armistice at the end of the Great War, John, and the English have promised their battleship and fleet will support the landing,’ Maria replied.

‘Maria, I don’t trust the Great powers. They are only concerned with their own self interest and access to Smyrna’s rich port and rail facilities. The decision of the Paris Peace Conference means the Greeks have a legitimate political reason to take control of Smyrna, but the British will only support us if we are successful. If we fail they will cast us adrift.’

‘You are probably right John. Lloyd George is no Lord Byron,’ Maria responded.

‘Sentiment doesn’t carry weight in the modern world Maria. There are also rumours that the Greek King will use our soldiers to invade the centre of Turkey in order to take back *Constantinople*. Can you imagine such a war? This would be a grave mistake.’

‘A terrible mistake John. This land deserves peace, after all that has happened,’ Maria agreed.

Caristinos nodded, and looked out at the deep wide bay of Smyrna and the many freighters which carried goods to dozens of European destinations. The railroad pier at the northern end of the quay connected Smyrna with Syria, Arabia, Persia, Western Anatolia and *Constantinople* with exports of oil, silk, cotton, tobacco, figs, peaches, raisins, spices and wine. This was

the source of the city's wealth. In comparison, his town of Chesme had only a tiny harbour and no rail connection.

'Smyrna is a prize being fought over by five nations, Greece, the Turks, England, Italy and France. The Jewel of Asia, the Crown of Ionia, the Pearl of the Levant, she is a beautiful woman with many suitors, but the riddle of her future is that like most ladies, she can't be taken by force, only with love,' Caristinos said, smiling at Nene and Maria.

'I didn't know you were such a romantic John, so which nation will capture her soul? Does King Constantine of Greece offer her this love?' Maria asked.

'He might land his soldiers on her quay Maria, but if the King's intentions are not pure and he is seduced to attack *Constantinople*, he will fail,' Caristinos responded.

Their children stood down by the water. 'I just love the quay at Smyrna,' Eugenia spoke as she looked out over the magnificent harbour, a light sea breeze blowing her hair over her shoulders. 'One day I will sail on a fine ship from this quay and go for a long cruise around the Greek islands and you can all join me if you like.' She looked sideways at her sister and Con and Marianthe Caristinos.

Con had not seen Eugenia for five years and observed that she had grown into an attractive young woman, slim with a delicate nose, long eyelashes, almond brown eyes and long, light brown hair, tied with a bow on the right side.

'I've only been to Chios, but I'd love to see Santorini and Rhodos. Perhaps your mother will pay for the four of us all to go, Eugenia? Your orchard is making lots of money,' Con responded.

'Our mother would never consider that Con, and you know it,' Arête replied. 'We aren't even allowed to go to Church without her, you two are both dreamers,' she barked at Eugenia and Con.

'I think you are wrong Arête. It is in our destiny to travel together, I feel it in my bones,' Con spoke with a broad grin.

'Yes, it is our destiny Arête. I'm a proud dreamer, unlike you, and if you don't hope for better things, you will never achieve them,' Eugenia responded to her sister.

'Here comes your cruise ship,' Marianthe spoke as the first of the Greek troop ships came into sight.

The four younger children, Margarety, Kyriake, Eleftheria and Christos had walked out onto the pier to get closer to the arriving ships, and when the fleet came into sight, Christos gave a hoot and raced back to the restaurant. Leading the fleet was the Greek battleship, the *Kilkis*, followed by the troop transports and the English battleship, the *Iron Duke*. The first and largest of the troop ships was the *Propontis* and on it were the elite Evzone division, as well as the cavalry which included Anthony Caristinos and his friend Pavlos Politis. Ominously nearby, a few hundred yards off shore, were the Italian and French battleships.

Anthony was nervous as this was his first military posting after graduating from the Military Academy in Athens. The official reason for their deployment was to form a defensive perimeter around Smyrna to uphold the terms of the Treaty of Sevres, which had not even been ratified. As a cavalry officer, Anthony had selected his horse a year earlier and he had trained with it daily, till it was adept at jumping over obstacles and crossing streams. It was a magnificent bay gelding with a white forehead he had called Achilles and he was patting its shoulder as the ship sailed into the bay. After two years at the academy and with the Turkish administration gone, Greek men could come home without being conscripted by the Ottomans but Anthony was particularly proud; he came not only as a soldier but as a defender of his community.

Pavlos was a tall, slim man with black curly hair and striking blue eyes. Like Anthony, he was a lieutenant in the cavalry regiment, wore a blue vest, black trousers and black cap and had a pistol and sword. He and Anthony had become great friends and became inseparable during their officer training. Anthony turned to him. 'This is where it begins Pavlos. You have never seen it before, but far to the right on the tip of that peninsula is Chesme, where my family lives. In front of us is Smyrna, and that is the wonderful long quay which is part of the European quarter with the Greek neighbourhood behind. To the south is Mt Pagus and leading down from its heights is the Turkish quarter, with the Armenians living between the Turks and the Greeks. This is my homeland Pavlos, and for the first time in my life, this afternoon, it will be free.'

'Enjoy it my friend, it is now part of the new greater Greece, and we are here to defend it,' Pavlos replied.

After the *Propontis* tied up at the quay, the cavalry mounted their horses and waited for the Evzones to disembark. The soldiers could see the

waterfront bursting with crowds of people while behind, all the buildings had Greek flags flying from their windows or balconies. The Evzones were the elite light infantry who also acted as guards for the royal palace and parliament and they were to be the first soldiers to land that afternoon. They were dressed in a traditional white kilt or *foustanella*, gold and maroon vest over a white shirt, a scarlet cap with a black tassel and red shoes with a black pompon.

The Greek Admirals, Generals and the Evzones were the first to march proudly onto the quay, and the Bishop of Smyrna, Chrysostomos, dressed in his golden robes and mitre walked forward to the Evzone flag-bearer and kissed the Greek flag.

‘Welcome to our Christian soldiers, here to save and defend us! May their arrival herald a rebirth of our faith in this land, where St Paul first established the Christian church. We are the site of one of the seven churches of the Book of Revelation, where it was prophesized that the church of Smyrna would suffer persecution; but now that you have come to save us, our days of hardship are over. Blessed be these soldiers and this community. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.’

The crowd gave a mighty cheer and children and adults alike waved their small Greek flags at the incoming troops. Resplendent in their colourful uniforms, the Evzones filed past the Greek Bishop who held a large bowl of holy water from *Constantinople* and a branch of basil which he used to cast the water onto the passing soldiers. As they walked past the ecstatic throng, the people cheered and threw flowers onto the soldiers and some even came forward and put laurel wreaths on their heads.

Soon after, Anthony carefully rode down the gangplank onto the wharf. He was at the head of the second cavalry platoon to arrive on the quay and as they rode past the official rostrum, the noise of the Greek crowd cheering them was deafening. He sat erect in the saddle and saluted the Bishop while children threw handfuls of flower petals over his horse. They rode into the congested quay and he looked around, straining to see his family whom he knew must be somewhere in the crowd. Then he saw them, his sisters, the Girdis family and finally his father, waving his top hat high in the air. The emotions flooded through him and a smile broke through his steely visage. He beckoned them to follow as his platoon filed into a side street and dismounted. No sooner had he and Pavlos stepped onto the cobbled street

than they were surrounded by the two families. His sisters ran forward, Marianthe kissing him on the cheek and Kyriake touching his uniform.

His father gave him a bear hug. 'Welcome back Anthony, it is good to have you home.'

'Thank you *patera*. What a splendid home coming.'

Christos Girdis was most interested in his horse, and he stroked the animal's smooth glistening neck.

'His name is Achilles, would you like to ride him?' Anthony asked.

Christos beamed. 'I would very much,' he answered and Anthony picked him up and swung his light frame onto Achilles' back.

'Do you know how to use that sword?' Con asked his brother. Anthony slapped him on the back and carefully removed the sword from its sheath for him to see. 'It's a little different from the wooden ones we played with as children,' he replied. 'A little sharper and heavier, but I'm hoping I won't need to use it.'

'So you are a cavalry man Anthony. Is there really still a role for cavalry in modern warfare?' Con asked.

'Our commanding officers believe so, Con. They point out the battle of Beersheba in Palestine in the Great War, where the Australian light horse had great success against the entrenched Turkish positions. The galloping Australians were amongst the Turks before they had a chance to retaliate and achieved a great victory. The slow lumbering tanks on the western front never achieved a victory like that.'

'These cavalry generals are living in another age Anthony. The machine gun and the mortar are stronger than the horse and the sword. Just don't blindly accept any orders to charge your horse into Turkish guns; I hope you're too smart to do that,' Con spoke gravely.

'Like the ancient hero, my horse Achilles is invulnerable to bullets Con. Our charges will be protected by the Gods,' Anthony winked at his brother.

John Caristinos put his arm around his son's shoulder and walked with him toward to the wharf. 'Anthony, we are very proud that you are here to protect us but remember we are Ionians as well as Greeks and we have successfully lived with the Ottomans for four hundred years and though it has been difficult we have survived and prospered.'

'And you will continue to prosper *patera*, because now you are free and twenty thousand of us are arriving here today to protect you,' Anthony replied.

‘Our freedom may be an illusion. It is something I have never known before and I feel I need to pinch myself to waken from this dream, but what worries me most Anthony are the strengthening rumours that the Royalists in the Greek army wish to attack Turkey in an effort to capture *Constantinople*. This is insanity and I hope that the politicians are not serious; not only will another war kill thousands of good men, it could destroy us all.’

‘*Patera*, we are here to safeguard Smyrna and the peninsula and beyond that I’m not sure what will happen, but I’m a soldier in the Greek army and I am sworn to obey whatever orders I am given. Our brigade is brave and well trained and I can tell you that at the moment there are no plans for any invasion inland. We will be close by, protecting you and the family.’

‘I hope I am wrong Anthony. It is so long since we have had security here, that I can’t really comprehend it. I want it to last, but I know what effect greed and jealousy can have on men’s hearts.’

Pavlos

In youth and beauty, wisdom is but rare!

Homer

The older girls were not interested in military conversation, but they surrounded Pavlos, touching his uniform.

‘Pavlos, you must look after Anthony. We need him to chaperone us, when we go shopping in the Rue Franque,’ Eugenia told him.

‘I will do my best, but he can be very selfish and I don’t think he would be a very good chaperone. He would probably go to the cinema and leave you to yourselves.’

‘That’s the sort of chaperone we would like’, Eugenia replied, laughing. Pavlos couldn’t help but notice her fine features profiled by the water. ‘You and Anthony must visit us when you are on leave Pavlos. We live in Alatsata, not far from Chesme and mother is a very good cook,’ Eugenia beamed back at him.

‘That would be nice. It’s been a long time since I have had a home cooked meal.’

Eugenia thought that Pavlos was wonderful. The Caristinos boys had been like brothers to her since she was a small girl, but this tall handsome soldier made her feel differently. John Caristinos and Anthony returned to the group and escorted them all to the nearby *taverna*, where he ordered champagne. He raised his glass. ‘To Anthony and Pavlos, no braver soldiers ever graced these shores. Welcome to Asia Minor. Your arrival and defence of our communities gives us all hope for a peaceful and prosperous future. We are proud to have you here, but above all, and at all times keep your heads down.’ The families laughed nervously. ‘Many thanks *patera*,’ Anthony responded. ‘We will do our best to make you proud of us. A toast to Asia Minor and to Greece.’

The two families toasted their communities, and felt hopeful and protected by the men in uniform who proudly walked on the Smyrna quay.

Eugenia however, was excited for other reasons. There was something about Pavlos's eyes that struck her and as he raised his glass and smiled at her family, she noticed what was happening; although he was trying not to show it, every few seconds he was glancing at her. She couldn't believe it. Could this strong handsome soldier be interested in her? The next time he looked at her she decided she would return his gaze. She had never acted this way before, but she had to know. As his eyes turned towards her, she looked back directly at him. The two stared at each other for only a few seconds, but to Eugenia it seemed like an eternity. They were connected and she felt that their hearts had locked together and trembling she lowered her eyes. She knew then that her life had changed. Pavlos turned to speak to her but suddenly gunfire rang out on the quay to the south and hundreds of people screamed and began running.

'Wait here where it is safe. We will have to go and help.' Anthony turned towards his platoon and Pavlos followed. As Pavlos mounted his horse, he turned to Eugenia and touched his cap. She thought she noticed sadness in his eyes and then they were gone, galloping down the quay. Arête had noticed the silent exchange between the two of them. She put her arm around her sister and whispered in her ear. 'What are you doing? Mother will kill you if she finds out you are making eyes at him.'

Eugenia was blushing. 'I don't care what mother thinks. I think I love him and he might love me.'

'You don't know anything about him Eugenia. He might make eyes at all the girls he meets. We don't know his family and mother will never allow it.'

'Ha. You think that matters. I will follow my heart Arête.'

Smyrna - May 15, 1919

If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed.

Herodotus, response of the Delphic Oracle to Croesus

The sound of a major battle rang out and as they rode towards the gunfire Pavlos asked, 'What happened? Are the Turks shooting?'

'I don't know but get your pistol ready. It sounds like it's coming from the barracks,' Anthony replied.

Their horses had to avoid colliding with the hundreds of Greek civilians running in panic along the quay towards them, away from the sound of the guns. When they got closer they noticed some were wounded and calling out in pain. Soon they came to the military barracks which were surrounded by Greek soldiers lying on their bellies, firing at the windows. Nearby was the incredible sight of dozens of dead Evzones lying on their backs with bloodied white cotton shirts and their black pompons pointed at the sky.

Anthony talked to an Evzone officer. 'Without warning, the Turks threw a grenade and started firing at us as we marched past. We had no cover and many of our men were killed. They will have hell to pay for this.'

'What do you want my platoon to do?' Anthony asked.

'Our men have them surrounded now but half of these cowards escaped into the city. Get after them.'

Anthony raised his hand and wheeled his cavalry platoon east into the city. By now, there were thousands of panicked people, dressed in suits and flowing dresses running through the streets or injured and dead, lying on the road or huddled together on the footpaths. They rode towards the sound of gunfire further to the east until they reached the Cathedral of Saint Fotini, where earlier the Bishop had given mass before leaving for the quay, and next to the cathedral they found a hundred Turkish soldiers and irregulars shooting at anyone who moved. Anthony's troops dismounted, began firing back and were soon reinforced by hundreds of Greek infantry, while the Turks were joined by scores of armed Turkish civilians. A pitched battle

developed in the centre of the European quarter, while smaller skirmishes broke out elsewhere throughout the city.

The fighting raged all afternoon and hundreds of people were killed, Greeks and Turks, soldiers and civilians alike. By the late afternoon, more than twenty thousand Greek troops had landed on the quay, secured the military barracks and entered the Greek and European quarters of the city. The Turks were overwhelmed. Their remaining soldiers surrendered, were arrested and taken onto the Greek ships in the harbour. About a dozen Greek soldiers were also arrested for attacking and killing disarmed Turks. The day which had begun with so much Greek optimism, had ended with hatred and bloodshed. The Turkish community were furious at the killing of their soldiers and militia who they claim were defending themselves. For the first time the Turks of Smyrna felt alone and defenceless and they blamed not only the invading Greek soldiers but their Smyrniot Greek neighbours for the incursion. A rift had developed between the two communities which would not be easily healed.

It wasn't till late in the day when the fighting ended, that the Greek civilian population began to bask in their new found security. During the afternoon, the Girdis and Caristinos families had remained on the northern part of the quay, protected by the Greek army. As the gunfire continued, Caristinos said that Anthony and his platoon would be busy suppressing the Turkish revolt and it was best if they all left the city as soon as possible. Before they left, Eugenia walked down to the water's edge and looked south towards the barracks where she imagined Pavlos would be staying. She couldn't remove the image of his piercing blue eyes out of her mind. Considering what had happened she was unusually relaxed and later as the family rode in their carriage back to Alatsata, she felt a lightness and freedom that she had never known before. Arête was initially irritated at her sister's smugness, but realised there was no point in feeling jealous. She rested her head on Eugenia's shoulder, and whispered to her, 'He is very handsome, a good catch'.

Eugenia smiled, 'Yes he is. Maybe too good to be true. I may never see him again'.

The mood amongst the Caristinos children was also buoyant, with Margarety saying it was the most exciting day of his life. John Caristinos had different thoughts. As he and his family walked to his Buick they passed a group of Turkish militia who had been arrested by the Greek troops. Their

faces showed a resentment arising both from their own capture and the new found realisation that theirs was now an occupied city, no longer ruled by a sympathetic Turkish administration. 'The Turks here are usually a friendly people,' Caristinos thought. Their menacing looks were an ominous sign in this normally carefree cosmopolitan city, and it reminded him of the term that the Young Turks had used for the city – *giaour* Smyrna – infidel Smyrna.

Today's events made him think of an ancient Greek legend. Croesus, King of Lydia, now Asia Minor, had travelled to Delphi to ask the oracle a question. He asked what would happen if his army attacked Persia. The devious answer given by the Pythia, the mouthpiece of the Delphic oracle, was that '*If you cross the river and attack the Persians, a great empire will be destroyed*'. Croesus saw this as an indication for victory and on his return from Delphi he attacked, but shortly afterwards he lost a great battle and ultimately, the empire that he destroyed was his own.

Caristinos wondered whether the oracle's prophecy, two thousand five hundred years ago, was comparable to the Greek invasion of Asia Minor today, and so was doomed to failure just like the attack by Croesus on the Persians, so many years before? Would the outcome be the same, the destruction of the Greek army and the loss of King Constantine's dream of empire?

As he travelled back to Chesme in his car, the Pythia's rasping voice reverberated in his ears.

Chesme, Asia Minor - July 1919

*Excellence is not an act but a habit.
Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit.
We become just by doing just acts,
Temperate by doing temperate acts,
Brave by doing brave acts.*
Aristotle

After working in the shop that morning, John Caristinos looked out over Chesme harbour and his thoughts returned to his old friend Nicholas Girdis who had never returned from Athens. He missed his wise counsel and his good humour, but that afternoon he was looking forward to the visit of Nicholas's wife and children. Both their families had been close before the Persecution and had been reunited after the Girdis family had returned to Asia Minor. They would often travel to Chesme on weekends where the children would laugh together and Caristinos would play backgammon with young Christos Girdis, just as he had played with his father.

John Caristinos's son, Con, who after his return had began working in his father's shop, was also looking forward to the visit. The young man had been close friends with Eugenia Girdis since they had been small children. She, more than anyone, understood his dry humour, felt his pain when he was upset and even helped him with difficult decisions. He had missed her terribly when they had been away in Athens, but now Eugenia had returned as a very attractive young woman. His feelings for her had changed, but he was unsure if she felt the same way about him.

Eugenia also liked Con, although she never considered it a romantic relationship. As well as being striking, tall and fair haired, with sparkling green eyes, he had a wicked sense of humour and never failed to lift her spirits. She loved teasing him and enjoyed his clever responses, but was unaware of his feelings for her. He reminded her of her older brothers who

were living in Australia and she joked with him in the same way she imagined she would treat them. Shortly after their arrival at the house, the two walked out into the back garden together. Eugenia was ready to resume her verbal contest with him.

‘You look very tired today Con, perhaps you have a weak constitution and you aren’t fit enough to tend your father’s garden? It may be easier for you to stay inside and just work in his shop,’ Eugenia teased.

‘I am perfectly sound Eugenia and I’m not tired at all except of your weak attempts to upset me. I have often wondered why the smallest sparrow has the cruellest tongue and the loudest voice.’

‘You must bring out the worst in me Con, I have no idea why. I’m such a demure girl; I wouldn’t dare to speak like this to your brother Anthony. Soldiers scare me.’

Con smiled. ‘It must be your spoilt nature and lack of firm discipline. Perhaps I should suggest to your mother that I provide you with some tuition in good manners. We could have regular meetings to try and improve your behaviour.’

‘I’m afraid it’s too late for that Con, my bad behaviour is very ingrained now. My mother has said there is nothing more that can be done,’ Eugenia smiled back brightly.

Con shook his head. ‘Sad, it’s so very sad that you are beyond all help. What a waste that such a dreadful disposition is found in a girl with such a fine complexion.’

Eugenia blushed, a big brother wouldn’t say that, she thought, but she quickly retorted. ‘True, it’s a pity that I speak my mind and don’t blindly follow directions. Better if I was slow-witted like your donkey Con, then you could always rely on my obedience.’

‘I don’t need another donkey Eugenia, but one day I hope to own a fine pony.’ She blushed more deeply. Now she knew he was flirting with her, but she was pleased with his reply.

‘A spirited animal like that would throw you off Con, best you stick to something slower,’ Eugenia smiled sweetly.

Con Caristinos shook his head. He didn’t want to argue further with her and decided to let her win this battle. He had laid the foundations for the future, however, and as Sophocles had said, ‘You win the victory when you yield to friends’.

Nearby, John Caristinos played backgammon with Christos Girdis, while Ahmet watched the game, smoking his water pipe. 'Christos, do you know what your sister's name Arête means?' Caristinos asked.

Christos shook his head; he didn't know his sister's name meant anything.

'Arête is one of the most important concepts of ancient Greek philosophy. It means excellence, the highest form of virtue.'

'Why is it so important Mr Caristinos?'

'Well, Christos, Plato said that the perfect citizen was one who sought and gained *arête* in all things, an all-rounder. Let me give you an example. Odysseus, a hero of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, was a brave warrior and tactician; the Trojan horse was his idea, he was also wise, a great speaker and an inspiring leader. This was *arête*. A simpler Hellenic ideal was a sound mind in a sound body, but *arête* is much more than this, it is the concept of a person who possesses all human virtues, a person achieving a good human life. It is what we all strive for Christos.'

'Don't tell my sister this Mr Caristinos. It will swell her head too much.'

Caristinos laughed. 'Your sister is blessed with this name,' he said.

'If I win at backgammon, does that give me *arête*?', he asked.

'It is a good beginning, along with your talent at the violin, and doing well in your studies at school.'

'I am one of the best in my class at science and mathematics,' Christos replied.

'Very impressive Christos. Did you know that the greatest scientists and poets of ancient times came from here - the coast of Asia Minor - Ionian Greece? You didn't know?' Christos shook his head.

'It is true. Thales, the world's first scientist, was an Ionian Greek from near here and first to show that natural phenomena had physical causes rather than being explained by the actions of Gods. Long before Copernicus, another Ionian, Aristarchus, said that the earth and other planets orbited the sun. Democritus was an Ionian who first had the idea of atoms as the building blocks of all things. This was two and a half thousand years ago. Do you know which famous Greek was born there, on Chios?' Caristinos pointed at the island. Christos shook his head.

'Homer was the first Western writer, and our ideas about family and marriage come from his book, the *Odyssey*. His statue is in my garden.'

Herodotus the father of history, Pythagoras the mathematician and Hippocrates the father of Greek medicine were all born near here. These Ionian Greeks are your forefathers. That is your heritage, Christos.'

'If I study hard at school, can I be great like them, or is there nothing left to discover?' Christos asked.

'Human knowledge can never be complete, Socrates told us that.' Caristinos paused. 'You have many talents, a fine mind and a good family. You should always strive to do better and seek *arête* in all things, but never accept that you have attained it. That will be decided after you are gone, by those who have known you.'

Christos played his final piece and won a gammon. 'I may have striven too hard Mr Caristinos. You are defeated.'

Caristinos tilted his head and laughed with Christos. 'Enjoy your victory Christos, because you will not always be this fortunate. It is time for you to play my friend Ahmet, but be careful. He is a good player, but more importantly he is very lucky.'

Christos looked at Ahmet, his next adversary and he was sure playing him would be a great challenge. He loved the competition and learning about the history of Asia Minor. 'What a wonderful afternoon I am having. It couldn't be any better', he thought.

Alatsata, Asia Minor - August 1919 The hero of Belleau Wood

Come back with your shield ... or on it.

Farewell message Spartan mothers gave to their sons, leaving for battle

Eugenia and Arête often enjoyed sitting on their balcony overlooking the square and church at Alatsata. From here they could see everyone who came into the village and were particularly interested if any young men wandered past; but no ordinary man would pass by today, this was a special day in Alatsata, the hero was returning home.

As a twelve year old boy, George Dilboy and his family had left their village and migrated to Boston USA, in 1908. Arête had grown up with him in Alatsata and had known him very well and even before he left. He was known as the best shooter of birds in the village, a talent which would serve him well later. Before he was twenty-one years of age, he had fought in three wars on two continents, in the Greek army during the first and second Balkan wars and with the US army in the Mexican Border War. He readily volunteered for the US army in the Great War and in July 1918, Dilboy was serving as a twenty-two year old doughboy in Belleau Wood, France.

After several heroic actions, his platoon had become pinned down by several German machine gun nests and trapped in an open field and when several members of his platoon were killed, Dilboy, without being ordered, leapt up and shouted, 'I will get those guns'. He ran forward alone, zigzagging through the wheat field towards the closest gun. With several machine-guns sending enfilading fire towards him, he was hit in the leg but took aim through the wheat and killed the German gunner and when a second soldier, the feeder, took over the gun, he also shot him dead and the first nest was silent. The second machine-gun now turned to concentrate its fire on him and Dilboy ran towards it firing as he ran. He dropped to the ground twenty-five yards from the gun but was hit repeatedly and his leg was almost

severed. Calmly he took aim and killed the gunner and when two German soldiers leapt forward out of the nest shooting at him, Dilboy calmly killed them both with his Springfield rifle and the second gun was now silent. After seeing the action, the soldiers in two other nearby German machine-gun nests abandoned their position and ran for the safety of the woods.

When his platoon came forward and discovered him in the field, he was bleeding profusely. As well as his bloodied leg, he also had several bullet wounds in his chest and was evacuated to a field hospital. He tragically died of his wounds the following morning. General Pershing described Dilboy as one of the greatest heroes of the Great War and he was the first Greek American to be awarded the US Medal of Honour. The remains of the famous man were now coming home to Alatsata, his village in Asia Minor. After the ceding of Smyrna and the Erythraia Peninsula to Greece by the allied powers at the end of the Great War, Dilboy's father had requested that his body be brought back, to be buried in the place of his birth. A crypt for his remains had been created in the church in Alatsata, and that afternoon the biggest funeral ever seen in the village was planned.

Thousands of people had arrived from Smyrna and the surrounding countryside to witness the event and had been enjoying the Saturday morning market stalls outside the church. Elegant cars and carriages with clergy, merchants and politicians from Smyrna had been arriving all morning and Alatsata's population swelled from thirteen to seventeen thousand.

John Caristinos and his wife Nene had driven up in their new Buick tourer to have morning tea with the Girdis family before joining the invited congregation in the church. The two Girdis girls had donned their finest dresses and as they stood on the balcony overlooking the square, they drew many admiring glances from below. Prudishly they looked away from the stares and refused to return any conversation. Suddenly they heard an angry voice. 'Why are you two shameless girls parading your selves for all to see?'

They looked down to see who was reprimanding them and were shocked to see their brother Mark Girdis, dressed in a suit and looking up at them from the street. They had not seen Mark for six years. He had returned from Australia to visit his family and had arrived on the day of the funeral of Alatsata's most famous son. Mark walked into the house and into the arms of his mother and family.

'What is it like living in Australia?' Christos asked.

‘I live in Brisbane which is a great city on a broad river, with fine sandstone buildings and wide streets. It is the capital city of Queensland which is more than twice the area of Turkey, so there is plenty of land for everyone, Greeks and Turks.’ The girls laughed.

‘How are your three brothers doing? Are they well?’ Maria asked.

‘Yes, and doing well in business. All the Greeks in Brisbane have good jobs and can quickly earn enough to buy a house. Our brothers John and Steven have just become betrothed to lovely Greek girls. They both have houses in South Brisbane and soon George and myself will also have enough money to buy our own.’

Mark talked for over an hour about Australia and his enthusiasm for his adopted country was obvious. He told how he often travelled hundreds of miles to places called Toowoomba, Roma and Longreach and spoke of seeing hundreds of kangaroos, huge flocks of sheep and the plains dotted with beef cattle. He said Queensland had a coastline a thousand miles long, with wide white beaches and drenching summer rain storms, and described Australia as a land of plenty, where hard work was amply rewarded. Most importantly, it was free of war and a place where people could live without fear.

‘And is Steven involved in the church in Brisbane?’ Maria asked. Steven had gone to theological school in *Constantinople*, before leaving for Australia.

‘There is no Greek church in Brisbane yet, but Steven has organised a Sunday school in South Brisbane, and is very loved by the community.’

Maria smiled ‘We are very happy for you and your brothers, Mark. Tell them when you return that things have improved a great deal in Asia Minor now, with the Greek army protecting us. I will remain here and Elisaveth will stay in the abbey, but the other children will decide as they grew older where their future lies.’

‘I understand mother, but always know that you will be welcome to come to Australia and live with us.’

‘An old woman like me couldn’t travel that far Mark, and I am very happy here,’ Maria replied.

At 1 pm they heard the sounds of drums and as they looked from the balcony, they saw the first of the Greek Military Guard leading a long procession. Behind them were the American sailors marching slowly into the square in pairs, dressed in white uniforms, white gaiters and carrying guns.

There were over a hundred sailors and a drummer playing a slow beat followed by a young boy, one of Dilboy's cousins, carrying a large photograph of the hero in his army uniform. Then came the casket pulled by two horses, draped in the American flag and walking behind the casket was Antonios, Dilboy's elderly father, followed by several American officers and other dignitaries, who carried their hats.

The old man had white hair and his back was curved, but he walked proudly in perfect unison with the drums and tears streamed down his face. It was an incredible sight and together with the sounds of the heavy boots on the cobblestones echoing around the village square, added to the drama of it all. The streets around the square were filled with people, dressed in their finest outfits and waving Greek flags and as the casket passed, the Greeks took off their hats, the Turks removed their fezzes and all bowed their heads. The casket was to lie in a special crypt to the right of the altar, permanently draped with an American flag.

Eugenia cried as she saw Mr Dilboy's tragic face. She couldn't conceive of the old man's pain at his son's funeral but was comforted when Arête came to her side and put her arm around her. Christos was amazed at the surreal sight as it unfolded in front of their house. Seeing the old man, it reminded him of the story in the *Iliad* when Hector's body was brought back to Troy by his father Priam. The hero had returned to the bosom of his family home, to rest forever. A real-life Greek tragedy and it was in his own town.

Budweis, Czechoslovak Republic - October 1919

*What is the proper time for supper?
If you are a rich man – whenever you please
If you are a poor man – whenever you can*
Diogenes

Camp Hospital 52 in France was closing and Jennings had a new posting. He left the train station in Le Mans arriving in Paris two hours later and it was then a twelve hour journey to Prague and a further three hours to Budweis in the southern Czechoslovak Republic. He arrived the following day in the centre of town carrying a suitcase and wearing his distinctive Panama hat. His job was Boys' Work secretary to the YMCA, and his destination was the Y office, which adjoined the high school south of the square. Walking past the baroque town hall he noted the four statues denoting fairness, bravery, wisdom and caution, but below the stone figures were children begging for food and money, and a long line of people waited for food outside a Catholic Church where a priest was handing out bread.

He arrived at the office and found he had a room on the third floor. His job was to organise sporting and community programs for the boys to enhance their growth and development, and he knew immediately what activities he would engage them in. Close to the school was an old city hospital and he decided to introduce himself to its manager. He was taken on a tour of the wards and operating theatres and found they were poorly equipped and overrun with rats and cockroaches. Jennings promised he would help.

After three days, he had obtained a regular supply of left over bread from the city's bakeries and arranged a program of community assistance. After school, he and the boys would offer food and first aid to the refugees and other destitute people in the street. He contacted the Red Cross in Prague and was able to obtain sufficient medical supplies to greatly assist the

hospital doctors. He even wrote to charities in the US and England and after a few months had obtained funding to rent several floors of an apartment building for the homeless and arranged for regular cleaners to service the hospital. His YMCA work had developed into a fully operational relief centre staffed by his students.

Begging on the streets or sleeping on the footpaths, hundreds of dispossessed people had come from all over the defeated Austro-Hungarian, German and even Ottoman Empires. They included crippled soldiers from Prague and Budapest, orphans from Serbia and Hungary and penniless refugees from the Pontus Black Sea coast of Turkey. Jennings noted, in particular, the large number of Armenian women and children requiring assistance, and the story of one such woman who had escaped from Turkey with her two young children was typical. She had lived in Trabzon on the Pontus, and after the war her husband had been hanged by the Turks, along with hundreds of others who had been accused of being sympathetic to the 'White Russians'. Her father and three brothers were killed after being tied up and put into a boat which was towed into the sea and sunk. Typically these women were quiet, uncomplaining and capable of withstanding terrible deprivation. They had been hardened by the cauldron of war and he was amazed at their bravery.

Soon after, the Y asked Jennings to remain in Budweis long-term and offered to transport his family from the USA and provide a small increase in his wage for their support. He wired Amy in Ontario New York and she immediately accepted. She and the children had not seen him in the past eighteen months and they boarded the next steamer for Europe. The family would be reunited in war-torn central Europe.

Jennings' reputation as the man for a crisis was growing, but little did he know that upcoming events would test these qualities to the full.

Chesme, Asia Minor - January 1920

*Nothing exists except atoms and empty space; everything else is
opinion.*

Democritus

Eugenia was excited because she was going to meet Pavlos again. He and Anthony had leave for two days and were going to Chesme where Mister Caristinos had arranged a going away party for his son Con who was leaving for Brisbane, Australia, the next day. Like Eugenia's older brothers, he had decided that his future lay in this new country, and Eugenia was sure he would do well there.

The two sisters talked quietly, as they sat in the back of the carriage on the way to Chesme. 'Are you going to tell Pavlos that you love him?' Arête whispered in Eugenia's ear.

'Are you crazy Arête? I've only met him once. He probably won't even remember me,' Eugenia replied nervously.

'He'll remember Eugenia. He's a soldier and you know what they say about soldiers. What do you think he has been thinking about whilst he's been fighting?' Eugenia felt herself blushing. How could her sister talk like this to her?

When the Girdis family arrived at Chesme that afternoon, John Caristinos shouted from the front door, 'Welcome to the Girdis family. Maria come and sit down here for coffee. Christos, have you been practising your backgammon? Anthony and Pavlos will be arriving soon.'

Con Caristinos clapped Christos on his back and kissed Arête and Eugenia on their cheeks.

'So you are finally leaving this week Con,' Eugenia said. 'I hear you are going to Brisbane where our older brothers are living.'

'Yes, their letters convinced me, I'll be in Australia in about six weeks. It will be a new life for me Eugenia and just like your brothers, I'm sure it's your destiny to live there also.'

‘Australia sounds wonderful, but we are happy again here now Con. Arête has a husband coming from America and they will live here. Mama and I love it back in Alatsata and Christos will decide for himself once he is old enough.’

Con shook his head. He knew that Eugenia would never leave Alatsata as he had asked her before and she was adamant she would stay; but he would try one more time.

‘Do you know why the land here is so fertile Eugenia? Why the trees in your orchard are laden with fruit? It is because the soil is soaked with the blood of generations of people, soldiers and innocent children. Trojans, Lydians, Persians, Greeks, Mongolians, Turks, Armenians, Christians and Moslems alike and countless others who have lived, fought and died and are still dying here today. My brother Anthony is on the front line and my father is sick with worry; this is no way to live. There is no end to the violence that lives here Eugenia, no solution for us except to leave. Australia offers a life of peace and freedom without the fear of persecution or violence. It’s a land where I can build a home that I know I can hand on to my own children.’

‘That is your opinion Con, but I have another. We have an army to protect us here now and I can’t leave our home, our friends and our church to travel to a foreign land thousands of miles away where no-one even speaks Greek. Your father also feels like we do, but I know you have made your decision and must go, just like my brothers. So go with our love and prayers.’

‘It’s true that my father will never leave. He says his soul is part of this land and feels the life draining from his veins even when he takes the short boat trip to Chios. Your father was the same, that’s why he died in Athens; he died of a broken heart from leaving here. But we are different Eugenia, we can break the chains that hold us and escape.’

‘You are a lot like your father Con, sensible and good. You will be successful in Australia, just like my brothers.’ She leaned across and kissed him on the cheek. Con looked back at her and looked into her eyes but she looked away. ‘And you will find yourself a lovely Australian wife.’

Just as he was about to answer, they heard shouting from the front of the house. It was Christos calling out Anthony’s name. Eugenia turned and walked back into the house and Con followed a little later.

Anthony and Pavlos rode up the esplanade at Chesme, and tied their horses to the gate. The two soldiers walked into the house and threw their

hats on the sideboard.

‘Good to see you boys,’ John Caristinos bellowed.

‘I had to wish my brother the best for his big trip,’ Anthony replied.

Con walked up to Anthony and put his hand around his brother’s neck.

‘Little brother, I wish you were coming to Australia with me.’

‘Nothing would make me happier,’ John Caristinos said.

‘And who would look after our father and our sisters? I will be fine Con; Pavlos and I are invincible, but have a good life in Australia. It sounds like there is enough room there for all the members of both the Girdis and Caristinos clans.’ Anthony laughed and winked at Eugenia and Arête.

The two girls kissed Anthony on the cheek. Eugenia thought that Pavlos looked even taller and a little more suntanned than she remembered. He cast her a broad smile and she felt herself blushing as he walked out the back door into the garden.

Arête motioned with her head and eyes for Eugenia to follow him, but she shook her head. Arête came up to her. ‘You must go to him. He is waiting for you.’ Slowly, Eugenia turned to the door and opened it. Pavlos was standing under a myrtle tree and turned as she came out. His blue eyes seemed to pierce her heart and he smiled as he spoke to her. ‘It is nice to see you again Miss Girdis.’

Her voice came in a faltering whisper. ‘My name is Eugenia, Sir.’

‘I know it is, Eugenia. I could never forget your name. Do you remember mine?’

She felt herself blushing again. ‘Yes of course, Pavlos,’ she replied lowering her eyes. ‘We were very worried on the quay when you had to ride off to that terrible battle. We learnt later that many people were killed.’

‘It was a cowardly surprise attack on our Evzone troops, but once we got into position it was quickly over, Eugenia. They were no match for us.’

‘I was worried that I would never see you again,’ Eugenia whispered.

He walked closer to her. ‘I would never let myself get injured and risk not meeting you again Eugenia. I hoped that you would be here today.’ She looked into his eyes once again, and she felt the strength coming back to her voice.

‘And I hoped that I would see you and Anthony again. We’ve heard you’ve been under fire whilst you’ve been defending us.’

‘It’s for people like you and your family, that we are fighting here, Eugenia. I knew when I saw you on the quay at Smyrna that I would meet you

again.'

'We all pray for you both every night and know that without you there would be no one to protect us, but we know it is very dangerous and we are frightened for you,' she spoke clearly.

'We will protect you Eugenia. I pledge my life on it. The Greek army is strong and we have artillery and fresh recruits arriving every month. The British have also promised to support us, so you and your family can live here without fear now.'

'If only it were true Pavlos. We are glad the army is here but I know that you are in danger. So it's wonderful to see you here today, safe and well.'

'May I write to you Eugenia? It would lift my spirits to keep in contact.'

'That would be wonderful Pavlos. I will like that very much.'

Con and Anthony walked out the door, towards them. 'Aha Pavlos. I should have known you would have been talking to the prettiest girl in Asia Minor,' Anthony teased.

'Well someone has to entertain your guests, and it is my duty as a soldier and a gentleman, to help,' Pavlos replied.

'I don't need help thank you. You boys are just being silly,' Eugenia smiled.

Con said, 'I'm almost sorry I'm leaving you all, but just promise me this. When this war is over, and you all come to your senses, I want you all to come to Australia and we will all be reunited again. I feel that our destinies lie there.'

Eugenia replied, 'Con, let's map out a simpler plan. Firstly, have a safe voyage to Australia and tell my brothers that we are well and happy in our lovely home in Alatsata. Secondly, Anthony and Pavlos, stay safe and let peace descend upon Asia Minor. After that, let destiny take us where it wishes but pray that we will all meet again.'

'A good plan Eugenia, so come inside and we will drink a toast to the day when we will all meet again,' Anthony responded, leading them towards the door.

East of Smyrna - February 1920

For our country, it is a bliss to die.

Homer, *The Iliad*

‘Keep your head down Pavlos,’ Anthony warned. ‘Turkish snipers like to shoot Greek cavalry officers you know, and you’ll have no place to put your fine hat.’ There was open hostility in the mountains east of Smyrna, with shots fired daily across a narrow no-man’s land.

‘It’s a pity we can’t chase these cowards Anthony. They shoot and kill and fade back into the countryside and use us like target practice. We have lost too many sentries here these last weeks. When will we be given the freedom to attack and capture *Constantinople*?’

‘Be careful what you wish for Pavlos; what you are asking for is total war. We were sent here to uphold the Treaty of Sevres and defend the coast around Smyrna but I agree we need to do something to keep up our men’s morale.’

‘We are soldiers not ducks in a pond. Our men want to fight, Anthony, and so do I.’

‘Don’t be fooled that we could win a quick victory over the Turks. We haven’t faced their real army or General Kemal and you can be sure there will be hell to pay if we attack them. And even if we defeated the Turks, the British would never let us take *Constantinople*; since the end of the Great War, they have guarded the Bosphorus with their warships and they’ll never give it to us,’ Anthony replied.

‘The King says we have national pride to restore and we have God on our side,’ Pavlos said.

‘The King is a fool Pavlos, the Turks also think they have God on their side. Our job here is to protect the peace.’

‘You are wrong Anthony, our job is to destroy the Turkish army and restore *Constantinople* as the Greek capital and Hagia Sophia as our

cathedral.' There was fire in Pavlos's eyes and Anthony knew that most of his army felt the same way.

Dear Eugenia,

I am frustrated waiting here only a hundred miles away from you.

We are shot at by invisible snipers and have no enemy to attack.

We clean our rifles and patrol the local villages but every week someone in our division is killed or wounded. It is a perpetual undeclared war of attrition and this cannot continue.

The politicians need to sort out this mess; we must declare war and fight a decisive battle or make a lasting peace. I personally want to strike at the heart of Turkey so that we can have a Christmas mass in Hagia Sophia but Anthony thinks this is foolish.

Meanwhile I keep my head down, and I dream of the time when I can see you again.

The memory of your brown eyes and beautiful smile give me hope.

Please look after yourself and don't venture near the treaty boundary.

Yours,

Pavlos.

Behind them came the sound of a galloping horse and a staff sergeant shouted to them. 'I have a message for you. All troops are to return to camp and prepare for immediate departure. We are moving to attack the Turkish army. We are at war. Signed General Frankos.'

'Yes, now we have our chance Anthony! Finally we can attack. This is what we've been waiting for. Let's go.' Pavlos hurried towards his horse.

Anthony moved slowly, shaking his head. 'This is a momentous decision Pavlos. I only hope our Government knows what it is doing.'

Daily incursions by Turks across the treaty boundary had frustrated the Greek high command. The government, on the insistence of their King and with the idea they had the support of the British, decided to launch an attack north and inland, to destroy the Turkish army. The war had begun.

Initially, the Turks were in disarray and their morale was low after their defeat in the Great War. The leadership of the army was also split between

the old Ottoman command, loyal to the Sultan and the Young Turks which were now forming under Kemal. The Sultan's unpopular support of the Treaty of Sevres which ceded the Asia Minor coast to Greece was harming his position and many thought he had little time left in power, whereas the young Turks under Kemal had rejected the Treaty. The wind was changing.

Dear Pavlos,

I have been very worried about you. We have heard you are at war, so may God be with you. Please stay safe and don't do anything silly.

I've written to Anthony Caristinos and asked him to look after you, so listen to what he says. Mr Caristinos seems calm, but I can see he is very worried for Anthony, so look after him as well.

The interior of Turkey is hot and dry and you must be suffering greatly. I can't bear to think how you could fight an enemy in the mountains and desert.

We've heard nonetheless that the war is going well but that is no consolation to me and I don't believe the King's newspaper propaganda.

The churches here are filled every day with our Priest asking for your success and deliverance and I pray to the Holy Mother every night for your safe return.

*You are always in my heart,
Eugenia.*

Central Anatolia - May 1920

Who dies in youth and vigour, dies the best.

Homer, *The Iliad*

Initially, there was no united Turkish resistance and the Greek army made steady progress, advancing through Asia Minor. The successful battles were reported daily in the Greek press, who anticipated complete victory over the Turkish forces within months. No other outcome seemed possible as all of central Anatolia fell quickly with the capture of thousands of square miles of territory and hundreds of towns. But the Turks burnt the fields and crops and there were thousands of prisoners to feed; the inland was dry and hostile, the Greek supply lines lengthened and still the Turks avoided a major confrontation.

Dear Eugenia,

We are invincible.

The Turkish forces are no match for us and continually retreat, I doubt they will ever stand and fight. We have had no trouble in taking almost the whole of Eastern Asia Minor.

Spirits are high, although the food is lousy. Salted meat and black bread are the best the army can supply. Sometimes we get some vegetables from the local villages, but only a little as most of them are also starving.

Anthony is a wonderful soldier and companion. He looks after our men like they are his own children and they would do anything for him. He is forever joking about how wonderful the food is even when it is almost impossible to eat. He is incorrigible.

I dream about your peach and fig trees and I'd love to take up your offer of a home cooked meal as soon as we are victorious and return.

Are your family in good health? Give them all my best wishes.

Your beautiful face and innocent laughter are always in my thoughts.

I hope that I will be seeing you soon.

Stay well and happy,

Yours,

Pavlos.

Kemal had waited and bided his time. In the end he overthrew the Ottoman Sultan and formed a new government in Angora. He unified the Turkish warlords, steadily strengthened his army and received a considerable amount of artillery and ammunition from the Russian communists, as well as from the Italians and the French who were opposed to the British supported Greek incursion. Now only the Sakarya River was left between the Greek army and his capital Angora. The Turks were well armed and led by a seasoned military leader. Kemal knew he had one chance to save his new nation. He had known a moment like this before in 1915 in Gallipoli, when everything rested on his command. If he had lost the Gallipoli peninsula, *Constantinople* and Turkey would have fallen to the forces of the British Empire. The same were at stake now and he knew he could not fail.

Dear Pavlos,

It's wonderful to hear your good news.

Greeks everywhere are amazed at your success.

I am very proud of you, but be careful my brave man.

In the daily mass in our church Tis Panayias, we always ask for the protection of both you and Anthony.

Mr Caristinos says that Kemal is clever and now that he is in charge, the Turkish army will be much harder to defeat. We hope he is wrong.

Arête and I are helping to tend the orchard. The peaches are very juicy this year and I wish I could feed you one now.

I can't wait to see you again, hear your warm voice and feel your strong arms around me.

Always thinking of you,

Eugenia.

Chesme, Asia Minor - June 1920

The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance.

Socrates

Caristinos was drinking Greek coffee and eating unleavened bread in the waterside *taverna*. He liked his coffee with one sugar, which was called balanced or *metrio cafe*, whereas most Turks favoured it sweeter. It was a warm day, and as he looked at the aqua sea he threw small pieces of bread into the clear waters which drew teams of small fish to the surface.

‘*Kalimera John*. Have you heard the news?’ He looked up to see Ahmet arrive. Caristinos had introduced Ahmet to his overseas agents and taught him all he knew about successful trading and Ahmet had developed excellent relations with his providers and had become widely known as an honest and reliable merchant. He removed his fez and sat down at the table.

‘Mustapha Kemal has been declared president of the new Grand Assembly in Angora.’

‘So the hero of Gallipoli is now a politician; the Ottomans are finished Ahmet.’

‘You are right John. The Sultan’s days are numbered.’

‘I fear Kemal, Ahmet. He is a great General and a leader of men and with him in charge, there will be great changes.’

The waiter brought the coffee and Ahmet put in three teaspoons of sugar. ‘Yes, and the Turkish people love him. Without a doubt, life will be different with him in control.’

John nodded. ‘What worries me is that Kemal has publicly proclaimed that he rejects the Treaty of Sevres and our lives here now depend on it.’

‘He can’t break that Treaty, John. Even if the Greeks lost the war, Sevres was instituted by the great allied powers, so surely they would defend the treaty boundary east of Smyrna?’

Caristinos finished his coffee, and looked out over the water towards Chios.

‘The war has put an end to the Treaty of Sevres, Ahmet. It is now meaningless and the European powers would never defend us here; they are only concerned with their own self interests. Christian Greeks and Armenians have lived in Asia Minor for millennia and although we have not had democracy, and for centuries our sons were taken from us to serve the Sultans, we were still allowed to build churches and worship as we pleased. Provided we paid our taxes, we were allowed to prosper and enjoy life in the land we love. The end of the Ottoman Empire, the growth of Turkish nationalism and now the Greco-Turkish war heralds the end of protection for the Christian minorities in Asia Minor. We Greeks are alone here Ahmet, as we always have been. All our hopes now depend on the outcome of the war, a war I objected to. Our wagon is hitched to the Greek army and if the war is lost, so are we.’

Ahmet’s brow became furrowed. ‘My father would have been horrified at all this violence John. You knew him well. I thank Allah that he did not live to witness this latest war between the Turks and the Greeks. His heart would have been broken.’

‘Your father was one of the wisest men I ever met. Praise the day I met him, *ulama** Atacan ibn Halsal. He imparted knowledge and despised ignorance but he was humble and a man of peace Ahmet. He taught me the meaning of generosity and tolerance. Before I met him, I was a one-eyed Greek patriot and a fool but with his gentle persuasion, I was reminded that both Christians and Moslems believed in the same God and valued the same virtues. He knew that both communities had much to teach each other and by his own example showed that by living together peacefully, we could enrich each other’s lives. I miss him greatly Ahmet. Pity that there are none like him left today, instead we are plagued by hot-heads and fanatics.’

Caristinos looked on as Ahmet added more sugar to his next cup of coffee. ‘How can you drink that sweet treacle?’ he asked.

Ahmet replied, ‘There is an old Turkish saying - “Coffee should be as black as hell, strong as death, and sweet as love” ’.

Caristinos shook his head and sipped the last of his *metrio cafe*.

‘And what of the future?’ he asked himself. He tipped the remnants into the saucer and looked at the dregs in the bottom of the cup which the old women would use for fortune telling.

But there was no smiling face of Jesus, no silhouette of the Virgin, no crucifix or baptismal font.

There were no answers there. Only unfathomable darkness.

Chesme, Asia Minor - June 1872 (Fifty years earlier)

*Few things are brought to a successful issue by impetuous
desire,
but most by calm and prudent forethought.*

Thucydides

The young fellow always enjoyed hunting in the hills between Chesme and Alatsata with his friend Nikos Girdis. The two had met there, in the brown hills amongst the Junipers and the Pines, three years earlier and they had become best friends. John usually hunted for birds with his slingshot and was very accurate but usually he couldn't get close enough to stand a chance. He had been jealous of Nikos who had been given a rifle by his father, and today John had been allowed to use it for the first time. He had shot his first bird with a gun from over forty yards and Nikos had said he was a good shot.

It had been a great day and walking home, young John Caristinos was beaming with confidence as he turned into the long street in the centre of Chesme.

Then he saw them. 'Not again', he thought. Three armed Ottoman soldiers were walking next to a cart with a large strong box which was being pulled by a mule. In front of the cart was a man wearing a suit and fez accompanied by two policemen. He had seen this procession before, it was the tax collector and his guards and they had just stopped at a Christian household. The *bedel askeri* was the annual levy imposed upon non-Muslims so that they may avoid military service. Everyone knew that the Ottomans had refused to include Christians in their armies since the abolition of the Janissaries in 1826 so the levy now was purely revenue raising, but failure to comply with the taxation would lead to imprisonment.

John was worried for his father as the tax had been a huge burden as he struggled to make a profit from his fruit and vegetable business. Now that John had turned sixteen, and was himself eligible for the army, his family

would have to pay much more, another fifty gold Lira every year and his father had not been well, so the increased cost would be very difficult for him.

A ridiculous thought came into John's head but it was not an idea which any sensible person would have seriously entertained if they had thought about it for any time. Although it would only be a token gesture, the protest might send the authorities the message that the tax was unfair and the collector was not welcome in this town. He decided to act.

John raced forward ahead of the group and took up a waiting position behind a tree next to the empty, Turkish religious school, the *madraseh*, which was very close to the street. As the mule and cart moved slowly past, he raised his sling shot and let fly with a small stone directly into the mule's hind quarter. The sharp pain caused the animal to bray, turn and jump forward, the cart falling onto its side and the strong box crashing onto the street, spilling gold coins all over the road.

Holding his hand over his mouth to stifle a laugh, John ran back behind the school. The two policemen heard a noise from his direction and ran towards the school but seeing no-one, they circled around the building, one on each side.

John stood behind the school in a small courtyard, with a high wall blocking any escape. He knew he was in trouble, but then, as if by a miracle, the locked back door of the school opened and a tall man motioned for him to come in. The fellow spoke in Turkish and told him to be quiet, as he closed the door behind him. The two policemen met in the courtyard, looked around and one of them tested the door which was locked. They then walked around to the front of the school and knocked on the door.

The Turkish teacher appeared in the doorway. 'Yes, what can I do for you?' he asked.

'We were just attacked, right here, in front of your *madraseh*. Did you see or hear anyone?'

'As you can see, I am here alone Sir, arranging the books in my library for the beginning of Ramadan.'

The officer brushed past him and into the school house. He looked in each room and found no one else. The culprit was not hiding here. The policemen returned to the cart and slowly began collecting the coins from the road.

The teacher closed the front door and returned to the library where John emerged from behind a desk. 'Who are you?' John asked.

'I am Atacan, the *mufti*, and you are the Caristinos boy, I have seen you in your father's shop. I was reading in the library when I saw you through the window. You have a good aim and caused quite a commotion. Fortunately the mule was not injured as mistreating animals is very improper. Why did you do such a foolish thing?'

'The tax they collect is unfair and many good people suffer because of it, including my father. I'm not sure if it was courage or stupidity, but we Greeks are not all willing to be treated like cattle going to the slaughter house, but many thanks for helping me.'

'You are single minded and will walk your own path in life and I admire your spirit, but your actions could have had serious consequences. Hopefully you will not fight armed soldiers with a slingshot again and also remember, violence is never the way to fight injustice.'

'We Greeks are fighters, sons of Achilles and Odysseus. I was born to fight.'

'No, you were born to become a good member of the community like your father, not to maim or kill. It is not too late to change your ways and forsake violence, like the old Turkish saying - "No matter how far you have gone down a wrong road, you can still turn back" '.

John smiled at him. 'Well, it's rare in Chesme to meet a wise man such as you, Atacan. Like you, I love to read, mainly about the Ancient Greek Heroes, so we can learn much from each other,' John winked, 'and I would wager that you play a good game of backgammon?'

Atacan smiled. 'Backgammon is a mathematical game, good for the growing mind, a battle that harms no one and one day we will play together, but today I have something special for you to take home.'

Atacan went to the library and took out a book which he handed to John.

The book was entitled the *Apology of Socrates*, written by Plato. 'I have a small collection of books of the ancient Greek philosophers. If you understand Socrates, you will begin thinking more clearly and making correct choices in life.'

John Caristinos looked at the book and at Atacan the *mufti* - a book about philosophy and an educated Turk - two new concepts for him.

He knew he had much to learn.

Chesme Wharf - February 1921

Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies.

Aristotle

The Girdis family were excited as the ferry boat arrived from Athens. While most of the family waited at the waterfront, Eugenia and Arête stood under a tree in front of the old Ottoman fort. Arête was dressed in a flowing beige dress, white blouse and a bright blue bonnet and Eugenia thought she looked like a porcelain doll.

‘I know he will be handsome Arête, his mother said he was the best looking of her three boys,’ Eugenia said. She seemed more nervous than her sister.

‘You are only saying that to make me feel better Eugenia. He’ll probably be fat, ugly and rude.’

Eugenia looked serious. ‘You saw his photograph; he’s a strong, slim, wonderful looking man and even if he is horrid, you will still marry him, you have to, he has come four thousand miles to meet you.’

Arête shook her head. ‘If he’s terrible I will send him packing back to Boston, I don’t care; I told Mama that I would never marry someone whom I couldn’t love.’

Arête was anxious. She was about to meet a stranger who had travelled all the way from Boston in America to meet her and become her husband. There were few Greek men of Arête’s age in Alatsata, as like her four brothers, most had migrated to America or Australia to avoid forced conscription into labour gangs, but with the Turkish army in retreat marriageable Greek men could now return to Asia Minor.

‘Well if you won’t marry him, I might,’ Eugenia teased. ‘We can’t send the man back to America alone, and look at his poor little mother, she would be devastated.’ Mrs Roumanos was a tiny widow in a black dress who was standing on the stone fence next to the harbour trying to get a better view of

the incoming boat. Eugenia was worried that she would overbalance and fall in the water.

Arête shook her head. 'I won't do it. I won't marry someone I can't love.'

The gangplank was lowered and people streamed forward onto the wharf. The throng included soldiers and sailors, Ottoman men wearing fezzes, Greek and Armenian businessmen and women with young children but Arête couldn't see any other men of her age. Finally, as the crowd thinned, she saw a tall swarthy fellow, standing alone behind the others, carrying a bag in one hand and a photograph in the other. He had a handsome face, a large black moustache and a broad chest and Arête felt her heart begin to race.

'Could that be Georgios?' Eugenia asked, 'it might be him?'

His mother shouted 'Georgios,' and ran out to him, and they knew.

Arête smiled as Maria and Christos approached and spoke to him first. Maria shook his hand and pointed at Arête. He raised his head and slowly walked towards them, smiling as he saw her.

'It is him. And you were right Eugenia. He is wonderful.'

Chesme, Asia Minor - 1921

*Let no man be called happy before his death.
Till then, he is not happy, only lucky.*

Solon

John Caristinos and Christos liked to walk along the waterfront at Chesme and past the battlements of the old Ottoman castle. The old man would compare the ships moored at the wharf, and could describe the rigging, cargo, origin, and captain of each one. Crew members often acknowledged him, and he would frequently stop, shake hands and talk with them as they unloaded their cargo.

‘How do you know all these men Mr Caristinos?’ Christos asked.

‘I’m a trader Christos. It’s my job to know them. These ships are my lifeblood, the more that come here, the more things I can buy and the happier my customers become.’

The old man reminded Christos of a popular ruler who was comfortable amongst his people. He wore a broad brimmed, black hat which he lifted when he recognised an old acquaintance and always walked slowly along the wharf because of his painful knee. As well as Greek and Turkish, he spoke Italian, French and English fluently and smiled easily as he talked with the sailors.

‘You are the king of the wharf here Mr Caristinos, I hope I am able to be as happy as you are one day,’ Christos said.

‘Happiness is something the ancient Greeks thought deeply about Christos. The wise Athenian statesman and a father of democracy, Solon, visited King Croesus who lived near here and Croesus posed a question. He asked Solon, “Who did he think was the most fortunate man in the world?” The King expected that Solon would say that he Croesus, who was fabulously rich, was the answer to his question, but Solon instead replied that “a fellow called Tellus the Athenian was the happiest and most fortunate of

men". Do you think that King Croesus was pleased with this answer, Christos?’

‘I don’t think he would have been,’ Christos replied.

‘You are right, he wasn’t happy at all. Solon explained that Tellus came from a great and wealthy city, had raised fine sons and witnessed his grandchildren thrive. He died heroically in battle during a major Athenian victory and after the battle he was given a public funeral on the very place he was killed. You see, although Croesus was very wealthy and powerful, these were not qualities that Solon considered important; instead he thought that spiritual wealth, a good life, worthy accomplishments and strength of character were the greatest reasons for happiness.’

‘But Tellus was killed Mr Caristinos. How can that be fortunate?’ Christos asked.

‘We all die, as did Croesus later in disgrace, but a fine heroic death, successfully defending your city or family, is far better than a painful lingering departure. So you see Christos, always be brave and true to yourself, because a fine man guarantees his own happiness.’

Christos raised his eyebrows. He had never thought that a dead man could be fortunate or happy. Mr Caristinos always made him think differently about life. Shortly after, the two arrived back at the house and as he opened the door, Mr Caristinos looked strangely excited.

‘I want to show you something Christos. Of all young people in Asia Minor, you will appreciate this the most.’

There was a box sitting on the dining room table. ‘This is for you from the Caristinos family.’

Christos opened the box and inside was a black violin case. Slowly, he unclipped and opened the case, and the deep brown colour, exquisite shape and light balanced weight distinguished it as an old Italian instrument. His hands trembled as he lifted it up. ‘Why would you give me such a wonderful gift?’ he asked.

‘Your father was my best friend Christos. He would be very proud of you, as you are honest, smart and talented just like him. He played the violin very well you know and he always said that he would buy himself an old master one day but he never had the chance, and to be a virtuoso, you need a good violin.’

Christos saw the inscription *Petrus Guanerius Cremonensis fecit Mantua*. ‘It’s wonderful. What does it mean?’

‘The dealer said it was made by a great Italian violin maker, around 1710. It’s not a Stradivarius, but nonetheless it’s a very good instrument.’

Christos reverently put it under his chin, and tuned each string in turn. By this time, the resonant sounds of the instrument had lured John’s wife and daughters Marianne and Kyriake into the room.

‘Play something nice for us,’ Kyriake begged.

‘I’m not sure I can play this violin, but I will do my best.’

Christos started on his favourite piece - Paganini’s *Caprice in A minor*. He struck out strongly with the well known melody and then slowed into the haunting melodrama. The notes seemed to echo in John Caristinos’s chest. As he listened, Caristinos closed his eyes and was transported into the Opera House in Smyrna. When Christos played the complex finale, the violin seemed to have a voice of its own, the vibrant sounds reverberating through the wooden house and onto the street. When it was over the family had tears in their eyes.

‘*Bravo Leventis!* – Bravo gallant youth!’ With a wide smile on his weather worn face, the old man walked over and patted Christos on the back.

Christos was shaking with excitement; he had never heard an instrument like this, much less played one himself. He imagined being the lead violinist in a grand orchestra in Vienna or Milan, the theatre erupting in applause after his premiere performance. He kissed Mr Caristinos and his family. This truly was happiness, he thought. His head was spinning and he couldn’t wait to get home to play for his mother and sisters.

As he walked the few miles back to Alatsata, clutching the violin case, he felt guilty that he had received this wonderful gift that his father would never hear. But he was happy, and what perhaps was most rewarding was the unrestrained joy he saw in Mr Caristinos’s eyes which had twinkled when he played, like that of a seven year old child on Christmas morning.

He wondered whether he could ever have a better day than this, or would this be the happiest moment of his life? He shook his head in irritation. ‘Foolish thoughts. There will be great successes ahead, each day will be better than the next and in the end, you will die a happy old man like Tellus the Athenian!’

‘Eugenia will never believe this.’ He hurried to get home to show her.

Central Anatolia - 1921

Fate stands now upon the razor's edge.

Homer, *The Iliad*

Anthony's battalion had been riding through the central Anatolian desert and fighting the Turkish army for more than a year and were now exhausted and starving. He looked back at his men as they trailed behind him, covered in dirt, painfully thin with drawn gaunt faces; those who were sick or injured had been left behind and less than half of the original Greek army remained. Riding next to him was his friend Pavlos, who always had words to cheer him up. 'Anthony, can you remember sitting together in a club in Omonia Square, drinking champagne and talking to beautiful women?'

'Now I know you are dreaming Pavlos, because they would never talk with you; you'd never agree to buy those sort of women a drink.'

'I've changed Anthony. I have become a very generous man now. When I get home, I will be kind to all elderly women and children, put money in every beggar's cup, and buy everyone free drinks at the bar.'

'This is the biggest change since Saint Matthew changed from a taxman to apostle. Will you buy me a drink in this club too?'

Pavlos laughed. 'For you, only the best French champagne will do Anthony. I promise you we will have a merry evening together. And gone are the days of me talking to barmaids, I now know the girl I'm going to marry.'

'And who may that be?'

'Eugenia Girdis of course, the rose of Asia Minor.'

'Ha-ha. Of course. You lucky devil.'

Dear Eugenia,

I pray that you are well.

We are tired of fighting but the end of the war is in sight.

By the time you get this letter, we should have taken Angora and there will be a total surrender of Turkish forces. Our generals

say that after that we can march into Constantinople and the British will leave. The Patriarch will perform the celebratory mass in Hagia Sophia, and we will witness the first Christian service there in over four hundred years. We can't wait.

Anthony keeps my spirits up and always has a joke or an Ancient Greek parable that his father taught him. I'm not sure if they're all true or if he is making them up but he is a wonderful story teller and a brave soldier. Tell Mr Caristinos that I am looking after him.

Anthony has also told me a lot about you and what a help you have been for your mother. I knew when I first met you that you were extraordinary and now I know it is true.

I can no longer hide my feelings from you.

Although we have only spent a short time together, I know that you are the most important person in my life.

Se agapo ... I love you.

I pray you feel the same way about me and that we can always be together.

Yours forever,

Pavlos.

Anthony, Pavlos and the tired Greek cavalry slowly edged eastward, until at last they reached the crest of a hill where they could see the banks of a wide river and the tents of the Greek infantry. They looked down at the cool green waters, imagining the comfort they would provide from the desert conditions. The Sakarya River however, would not provide comfort for the invading Greek army.

Chesme, Asia Minor - 1921

At the touch of love, everyone becomes a poet.

Plato

During the school year Christos stayed at the Aronis School in Smyrna, about a day's ride from Alatsata. The school was established in the 1820s by two brothers from the Greek island of Kythera and had developed the strongest academic and music departments of any Greek school in Asia Minor. Rich people like the Onassis family sent their sons there and Maria's oldest boys in Australia regularly wired money home to their mother to assist in paying Christos's school fees. Of the older brothers, only Steven had been formally educated at high school and like him Christos had excelled in every subject.

After their studies and music lessons, the boys played backgammon and a card game called Preference but Christos enjoyed the dice game the best. He had a mathematical mind so that he could quickly determine probabilities and complex positions and rarely lost. At home on holidays, he liked to play against the wily Mr Caristinos when he visited his house at Chesme.

'Two sixes Christos, may you have as good luck in life as you have in backgammon,' Caristinos joked after Christos threw the dice, but the old man had played the game for sixty years and before long had won the game.

'Let's play again. I like this game, even when you beat me, but I'm winning more often now don't you think Mr Caristinos?' Christos gently probed, hoping for a positive response.

'The more you play, the better you become Christos and by the time you get to my age you will have become a good player,' Caristinos teased him, 'but remember, there is much luck in this game, and you can play well and still lose. It is more honourable to fight well and lose, than to fight poorly and win.'

'Did you fight the Turks in 1914 when you stayed behind and all the others left Mr Caristinos?'

‘I stayed to fight for my property but with God’s help I didn’t need to use my gun. I felt it was right to stay and defend my home and if you stare adversity in the face, Christos and if your fight is just, you can accomplish anything.’

‘Is that why all the Greek people here love you so much?’ Christos asked.

‘They have respect Christos, not love; that is too strong a word.’

Christos paused before making his next move and asked ‘What is love Mr Caristinos? Every day I see this pretty girl who works in a shop near my school. I’ve never spoken to her but I have strong feelings whenever I see her. Is that love?’

Caristinos put down the dice and sat back in his chair, smiling and stroking his chin. ‘We Greeks know three types of love Christos. The first is *Phileo*, brotherly love, the duty you have to your friends or brothers and is true friendship and loyalty without question. The second is *Eros*, which is the feeling that young lovers first have for each other; it is physical, fleeting, superficial but often powerful. Some people only ever seek *Eros* and when it disappears, look elsewhere for it, but true love eludes them. You see, *Eros* cannot sustain you in times of distress; it lasts only a moment and does not bring lasting happiness. You would not lay down your life for *Eros*. Then there is the other type of love Christos, *Agape*. *Agape* is all powerful, spiritual and is the love a man has for his children and for his wife when she is old and haggard. It is total dedication and the love that believers have for their God; we and the Turks have that in common. *Agape* brings true happiness and it is the lifeblood of faith, hope and life. You already experience *Agape* with your mother and sisters Christos, and one day, if you are lucky, you may find *Agape* with a woman. This is a great treasure and the secret to a good life.’

Caristinos paused. ‘I think you understand now, which sort of love you feel for the pretty shop girl, don’t you?’

Christos nodded. He liked this old man. He was wise and he had more knowledge than any of his teachers at school.

He was like the father Christos had lost.

Sakarya River, Central Anatolia - 1921

Zeus does not bring all men's plans to fulfilment.

Homer, *The Iliad*

For the first time, the Greeks found themselves confronting a united Turkish army holding the last defensible position before Angora. Like the Medieval crusaders in Palestine, the Greek forces seeking to restore Christianity to *Constantinople* faced an implacable enemy in a hostile land. The Turks had chosen a line of hills next to the Sakarya River where they were dug in on the high ground, with machine guns, just as they were in Gallipoli, six years before. Behind the hills were their formidable artillery, and like Gallipoli, they were led by Kemal, who was now Commander in chief of the new Turkish army. The Greeks knew that capturing the hills, particularly the largest central hill was essential and they assembled next to the river and planned their attack.

Kemal had picked the defensible position of his choice and behind his forward brigades his heavy artillery was trained on the advancing Greek troops. The Turkish guns, supplied by the Russian communists, had a longer range than the light Greek artillery. Kemal had also positioned huge mounds of barbed wire in front of the entrenched Turkish positions, so no cavalry attack was possible. Worst of all, the Greek army was weakened, poorly provisioned and a long way from home, whilst the Turks were fresh and well fed. They also knew that the fate of their new nation was at stake.

The fighting began and the Greek forces making slow progress finally got within striking distance of the key strategic position at Sakarya, the central Yellow Hill. The Generals had met with their battalion commanders that morning and insisted that the hill must be taken, whatever the cost. A Greek infantry colonel spoke to Anthony and Pavlos. 'This is our moment men; get your troops ready for an assault on the hill. Capture that and we control the way to Angora.' The two officers returned to their battalion in position for the final assault and walked amongst their soldiers, encouraging

them to one final effort. They were told to gather branches or pieces of timber to lie on the barbed wire ahead of them. Anthony knew many would die in this attack, but his orders were clear and there was no turning back. As he jumped forward out of the trench, he turned to his men and shouted, 'When we take this hill, we will defeat the Turks. Forward for Hellas!'

The cavalry men ran forward into the gunfire, troops falling every few paces and after fifty yards the front runners reached the barbed wire where they placed the timber and managed to flatten out a path for the rest to run through. Even then, some were caught on the wire. The machine gun fire was deadly accurate and Anthony's regiment took scores of casualties but ignoring the rain of bullets they charged forward to the base of the hill, crying out 'Aera, aera!' (wind, wind!), the rally call of the Greek revolutionaries who had thrown off the Ottoman yoke in mainland Greece 100 years before. The soldiers paused for breath at the base of the steep slope leading to their objective, the summit of the hill, whilst behind them the bodies of their men were lying in the dust or hanging on the savage barbed wire. They knew that their comrades' heroism must not be futile after this sacrifice.

They turned and started up the steep slope, crawling forward while the bullets flew overhead. Under constant fire, Anthony and Pavlos led the first platoon to just below the crest of the hill where they stopped. With machine guns firing over their heads, Anthony signalled to Pavlos, and they threw their hand grenades towards the sound of the guns, then launched themselves over the crest of the hill and into the burning machine gun nest. Several platoons followed, firing and throwing grenades at the other Turkish positions and after a furious hand to hand battle, the Turkish defenders on the hill top were overwhelmed. The Greek soldiers, realising their success, cheered with delight and organised their defences in the four destroyed Turkish machine gun nests.

Anthony turned to his friend. 'We have done well this day Pavlos, but now we have to hold this miserable hill top.'

Pavlos pumped his arm holding his rifle in the air. 'We will my friend. This is a great day, a great victory!'

Just as he finished speaking an artillery shell landed about a hundred yards away, exploding harmlessly into the side of the hill below them. The soldiers lowered their heads but seconds later, a second shell exploded further up the slope closer to the hilltop. Anthony now realised the exposed nature of their position, the Turkish artillery was very close and had

previously been firing over the hill into the Greek positions but now the Turks were shortening their range to target the hill controlled by their enemy. The Greek success and the importance of the position would now draw every Turkish artillery piece to fire upon that small hill top and Anthony quickly realised that things were about to change for the worse.

A few minutes later the first artillery shell landed amongst a squad of his soldiers, blowing them apart. All the other men could do was lower their heads and hope that the shells would not fall on them but the artillery was relentless and within the hour almost every part of the hill top was blasted into a mess of burning embers and bloodied bodies. Shell shocked and shaking, the remaining few Greek defenders knew that reinforcements were not rushing to climb up to almost certain death. At the same time, a Turkish counter-attack had managed to virtually encircle the hill, leaving only a small western corridor through which a few Greek soldiers were bringing ammunition. The defenders understood that their position was hopeless and isolated.

Anthony and Pavlos had avoided disaster for over an hour when all hell broke loose. The last thing Anthony remembered was aiming his rifle at a Turkish officer, leading his men towards them when an artillery shell, exploding nearby, knocked him into the sand. Pavlos, seeing his friend unconscious and knowing their position was indefensible, pulled Anthony's body over his shoulders and headed back towards the Greek lines. Stumbling down the hill with bullets flying past, Pavlos talked to the unconscious Anthony. 'How many times have I told you to keep your head down? You need to live to get back to your family in Chesme. They will never forgive me if you die in this miserable place.' As Pavlos approached the Greek line he shouted out in Greek so they wouldn't be fired upon. '*Patriotis! Patriotis!*'

Finally, Pavlos managed to stumble into the Greek trenches where he put Anthony on the ground and checked that no bullets had struck his body in the headlong run to safety, but there were no obvious wounds. When Anthony awoke in a medical tent a few hours later, Pavlos was at his bedside. 'What has happened Pavlos? Where are we?'

'You are healthy I see, your father will see you again one day.'

'Do we still hold the hill?' Anthony asked.

'The hill fell just after we left it. The artillery wiped us out and almost took off your head. You have severe concussion but no other injuries and now

you must rest.'

'How did I get here?'

'I carried you out my friend, your bones don't weigh much. Now that you are in hospital, you can eat well and get some flesh on you so that your pants will stay on,' he said grinning.

Soon after the battle on the Yellow Hill, Anthony was promoted to the rank of Major and Pavlos to Captain, but after three weeks of repeated attacks the Greek army never regained the hill where they had lost many of their best officers and men. Finally, as his enemy's line weakened, Kemal launched his own attack on the Greek right wing, encircling and destroying it. Demoralised and exhausted and with little food or ammunition, the Greeks retreated several hundred miles to the west, to their own defensive position at Dumlupinar.

My darling Pavlos,

Se agapo, se agapo. Se agapo - (I love you, I love you, I love you).

It was so wonderful for you to write those words. I feel the same way as you my darling, and can't wait for us to be together.

I will hold you so tight you will be unable to breathe and I will never let you go away again.

We are amazed at your stunning victories with so little food or ammunition. Your bravery is amazing.

It sounds like you will be victorious soon and will be back before Christmas.

I will have roast lamb and vegetables for your empty stomach, and will lie you back and feed you peaches and grapes for dessert.

I am so happy to know that your feelings are strong and true. Give our regards to our friend Anthony. I pray every day to the Holy Mother to bring you home safely to me.

Please be careful my darling,

Your love,

Eugenia.

Chesme - 1921

The virtue of justice consists in moderation, regulated by wisdom.
Aristotle

John Caristinos was sitting under a fig tree in the waterside *taverna* enjoying the last mouthful of pudding flavoured with Masticha, which was made from the sap of a plant found nearby on the island of Chios.

‘You love that Masticha pudding don’t you Mr Caristinos?’ He looked up to see Christos Girdis smiling at him. Christos had bicycled the three miles from Alatsata to the warm bay of Chesme. He had just been swimming, and his hair was wet and uncombed.

‘So you are on holiday Christos? Is that why you are at home?’ the old man asked.

‘Yes, Mr Caristinos, but I’m going back to Smyrna and school tomorrow. I have come to defeat you at backgammon,’ Christos asserted. ‘How can you eat that Masticha? It’s the worst thing ever,’ Christos continued. ‘I hate its bitter taste!’

‘Hate is a harsh word for a food, Christos. Masticha adds life to sweet food, but only a small amount is needed. The ancient Greeks had a saying: *pan metron ariston* or all things in moderation and Aristotle taught that a person had to first have temperance before they could become the best they can be or *ethike arête*. He said that it is only then, when you have become truly virtuous, that you have the chance to find true happiness. So don’t hate so much Christos and strive to be moderate and not hot-headed; there is too much hatred in this land of ours.’

‘But the Greek army and your son will destroy the Turkish army soon, Mr Caristinos.’

Caristinos shook his head. ‘The concept of moderation and tolerance are struggling in Asia Minor Christos. Kemal wants Turkey for the Turks and King Constantine wants *Constantinople* for the Greeks. There have been

many atrocities on both sides, so many, that we two peoples may never be able to live together again, but I love this land Christos. My father and my grandfather are buried in this earth, and so will I be, I will not leave here. '

'Neither will I Mr Caristinos. I will defend my family and my land with my life!' Christos said firmly.

'Let's battle at backgammon instead Christos.' Caristinos asked the waiter to bring the playing board and dice and the old man and the boy began their game. They played the three different types of backgammon in rotation, *Portes*, *Fevga* and *Plakoto*. In their final game, Christos had got the upper hand early and had sent four of Caristinos's pieces to the backboard. Caristinos had however, positioned his pieces well and built his own home board strongly. Christos was nervous as he brought in his final pieces and only had to avoid being hit on the takeoff and he would win easily, possibly even scoring a double game. Luck was not with him however as he threw a double and unavoidably one of his discs was exposed and then Christos grimaced and rolled his eyes as his disc was hit. Christos knew that he had lost the game but said nothing as Caristinos without expression slowly moved all his back pieces to safety and won.

'Bravo! Mr Caristinos,' Christos said. 'You were lucky, but you set your board well.'

'Yes I was very lucky, Christos, but you played very well and more importantly accepted your defeat like a man.'

Christos laughed. 'I would prefer to win than be a good loser.'

'Winning isn't everything, and you did nothing wrong Christos. Sometimes we play well, but still we lose; luck and fate, we have no control over these things but when we challenge ourselves to do better, we become better people. So in the end, it doesn't matter who wins the game, what is important is to do your very best.'

'So it's not important to win? Didn't the ancient Greeks worship the winners at the Olympic Games? And what if the Greeks had lost to the Persians at the battle of Marathon?'

'You can't always be a winner, it is like life Christos, everyone meets death, but it is the manner and dignity of how we treat others that sets one man apart from another. Always think the best of people and do not let prejudice and hatred rule your soul.'

Christos lowered his eyes. 'I sometimes have bad thoughts about people, Mr Caristinos.'

John looked up. 'What thoughts Christos?'

'I have had thoughts that I was a cavalryman and I was killing Turkish soldiers. And sometimes, when I have seen your Turkish friend Ahmet whom I know is a good man, I felt resentment that he was here and my father was driven out of Asia Minor and is dead. I know that these are evil thoughts.'

'Your feelings are natural and instinctive, like an animal that is trapped or injured, you want to fight back, but you do not fight back and you are always courteous to my friend Ahmet. These are the acts of a civilised man; someone who believes in life and humanity. Your actions are more important than your thoughts Christos; all people have bad thoughts, but only fanatics or weak minded people let these thoughts rule their world.'

Behind him, John heard a voice he knew very well. 'You are good at beating children Mister Caristinos, why don't you pick on someone your own age?' Ahmet walked up to the table, smiling. He was wearing his usual suit and fez. Christos looked down, embarrassed.

Caristinos replied, 'Christos is a better player than you Ahmet, but I will be happy to defeat you also, after Christos leaves'.

'How are you young Master Girdis?' Ahmet asked.

'I am losing, but am very well Ahmet,' Christos replied, looking up at the smiling Turk.

Ahmet sat down at the table and ordered coffee for the three of them but as the Greek waiter walked away, a young man at another table slammed his glass of *ouzo* on the table. The fellow glared at Ahmet and swore loudly enough for them all to hear, '*Malaka Turkos*'. He had crazed eyes and had clearly been drinking heavily and it was only then that Caristinos looked towards him. He put his hand on Ahmet's shoulder, stood up slowly and walked over to the drunken youth.

Caristinos spoke slowly. 'You offended my friend. Apologise to him, then go home and sober up.'

The man stood up, swaying. 'You are a Turk lover old man. This land is Greek now, there is no room for Turks, see the flag.' He pointed at a Greek flag painted on the large fig tree which stood amongst the tables.

'This is a peaceful community. The Greeks and Ottomans like my friend here live happily together. He is not a Turkish bandit and your painted flag is only causing trouble.' The drunken fellow took a large swing at the old man's jaw but as he lunged at him, Caristinos swayed to the side and pushed him forward, the drunk overbalancing and falling onto his face. Lying on the

ground he turned over, his nose bleeding and his eyes glazed. Caristinos stepped back from the man and walked back to the table and sat down. 'I am sorry for this interruption to our game Christos. Ahmet, could you please find our police constable and ask him to take away this drunkard.'

As Ahmet left, Christos stood up shaking. 'You were very brave Mr Caristinos.'

'He was very drunk Christos, and alcohol can bring out the evil in people's souls. I was just fortunate he couldn't even stand up properly. He hadn't heard of the great axiom, we spoke of before, everything in moderation. On the other hand, a small amount of alcohol can soothe the soul and I think I deserve a small glass of *ouzo* before I leave.' He called for the waiter.

Alatsata - February 1922

Silence is an ornament for women.

Sophocles

Although Arête was older than her sisters, she was very petite, but what she lacked in size she made up in temperament and energy. In contrast, Georgios Roumanos was tall and well proportioned but quiet, thoughtful and less excitable than his wife. Arête had been very happy since her wedding as Georgios was a caring husband. He was also an expert carpenter and had built them a beautiful house with a view down into the bay. Since his return, he had been offered lots of work and was now well settled back in his childhood town. Recently Arête had discovered she was pregnant and although they were both concerned about the war, they were looking forward to having a large family together.

Georgios was pleased that the Greek army had been fortifying their position for a year and hoped that a truce might be signed and the war might end soon, but Arête had other ideas.

She had heard rumours in the market. 'Chrisanthe said that our army will launch a counterattack against the Turks soon. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Greek army broke out and captured *Constantinople*, Georgios? Our great city restored to us and Hagia Sophia ringing to the sounds of a Christian Orthodox liturgy for the first time in four centuries. Could you believe it?' Arete spoke joyfully.

Georgios shook his head. 'It will never happen Arête! We lost at Sakarya and there is no chance for another attack. Do you honestly think hundreds of thousands of Turkish soldiers will stand aside and let our small Greek army walk into the capital of the Ottoman Empire? We lost *Constantinople* in 1453 and we can never get it back.'

Arête smiled and shook her head. 'It's our dream Georgios, *O Megali Idea*; it's what all Greeks live for.'

Georgios walked up to her and placed his hands on her belly. 'Forget about these crazy dreams of yours; we have real miracles happening right here.'

She looked up and ran her fingers through his hair. 'Will you mind if it's a boy or a girl? Or care if it's smart like its mother or strong like its father?' she asked him.

Georgios raised his eyebrows. 'Lord, just give me a child who is well behaved. Girl or boy, I don't care, just make it sensible like its grandmother, not argumentative like its mother.' He smiled back at his wife, expecting a firm rebuttal and sat down to begin his breakfast of bread and goat cheese.

'Hmmm, you are very boring Georgios. I want my child to have passion, to be a great painter or poet or a violinist like Christos. If it's a girl, someone like Sappho; if it's a boy another Lord Byron. We are good stock Georgios; we are capable of producing outstanding children!' Arête responded, puffing out her chest.

'And where are your poems and your canvasses Arête? If we are so outstanding, then why are we living in this small village instead of a grand mansion in Smyrna or Paris? Just be content that we are safe, live in a good house and have a steady income. But most importantly, be happy that we are free, our Turkish oppressors are gone; and if the Turks defeat us and throw us out, we can always go back to Boston.' Georgios smirked back at his wife.

'From what you told me, Boston is far too cold for me. My brothers want us to go to them in Australia, but I love warm Alatsata. Nothing can beat this wonderful climate and we have all our friends here. This is our home Georgios, and our child will grow up with its heritage and its own people. What more could we ask for?' Arête didn't expect an answer and walked out the door, not waiting for a reply.

Georgios was satisfied as he finished his cheese. He felt fortunate that he had married a woman of strong character and now she would bear him a child who would have similar strength.

He stretched back in his chair feeling contented with himself, and looked forward to many more children and a long life together.

He was home.

Alatsata - March 1922

There is nothing nobler or more admirable than when two people who see eye to eye, keep house as man and wife, confounding their enemies and delighting their friends.

Homer

Georgios and Arête seemed more cheerful than usual as they walked into Maria's home that Sunday morning. Maria could see the happiness in their faces; it was a union blessed by the Holy Mother.

Maria Girdis was still an elegant but greying woman who held herself perfectly straight and, as did all widows in Asia Minor, wore a black dress over which she had hung a clean white apron. She was a determined person, who single-handedly had re-established her family back in Alatsata. The family's orchard, which was overrun with weeds and had needed pruning, was now productive and they had enjoyed their first harvest since the homecoming.

'*Kalimera* children,' Maria's voice rang out. 'I'm cooking your favourite, Georgios, *Dolmades*.'

'Wonderful, you knew I had a good appetite today *Mitera*.'

'You always have a good appetite Georgios, perhaps because you are the hardest worker and best builder in the village.'

'Ah, as well as being a good cook, you have a wonderful way with words.'

Maria walked in, taking off her apron. 'Lovely to see you both.' She kissed Arête and Georgios. 'Eugenia is in the market and she'll be back soon. Are you eating well Arête? You have two to feed now, so eat a little more.' Maria rubbed her daughter's soon-to-be bulging tummy.

'I am fine Mama. You worry too much. Your *mitera* was the same, a family of worriers.'

‘Yes thank you. You make fun of me, but we are what we are, and I worry. The Greek army’s defeat at Sakarya; doubts about whether the British navy will support us as they have promised? I have every right to worry Arête,’ Maria replied.

‘We will be safe, and even if we lose, the Turks need us,’ Arete said. ‘Who are the builders, traders, doctors and teachers in this town? The Greeks. All the Turkish men are in the army. First they were in the Ottoman armies in Arabia, Palestine and Egypt and now they are in the new Turkish army. Very few Turkish men have trades or are educated. Without us in Asia Minor their economy would collapse.’

‘That is logical Arête, but war is not logical,’ Georgios interrupted her. ‘Generals and their soldiers are not thinking of the future when they are fighting and killing and reason doesn’t come into the equation, only victory is important.’

‘Stop worrying, both of you. You will upset my baby,’ she said, glaring back at both her husband and mother. ‘Our army will win anyway so forget about it, and let’s have lunch and enjoy the afternoon.’

Maria shook her head and raised her eyebrows at Georgios, who smiled back at her. ‘It is true’, Maria thought, ‘worrying would not solve any problems’, and she walked back into the kitchen.

Soon the wonderful smells of her *pasticcio* and *dolmades* and the glasses of *retsina* filled their senses and washed away all thoughts of war.

Budweis, Czechoslovak Republic - July 1922

*Every gift which is given, even though it be small,
Is in reality great, if it is given with affection.*

Pindar

Amy Jennings had just got home with the children from the American school in Budweis. The family had lived for two years in a small apartment in the new Czechoslovak republic on a budget which was barely able to provide them with enough for food and heating. During the day, after her home duties were completed she would often help Asa at the YMCA building.

Jennings' relief centre had made a huge difference to Budweis. Things were very different now, the long lines of people had disappeared, the hospitals were in good condition, orphanages were funded by benefactors from Britain and the US and a food depot was available for the poor. Jennings had been instrumental in providing these services to the city and could well have been very satisfied with his accomplishments but continued to strive to do better. He always left for work before six in the morning when he would supervise calisthenics with the schoolboys before they started studies. In the afternoons, he and the boys would distribute food to the shelter and orphanages and he never failed to arrive home till after nightfall. Amy was always amazed that his frail body could constantly sustain this level of energy.

That evening, she was pleased that she had been able to purchase some fish to go along with the usual cabbage and potatoes, because it was Friday and Asa and the children deserved a treat.

'It's time for your bath children. Papa will be home soon and we need to get you cleaned up before he comes.'

Amy was grateful that the three children were doing well at school and were happy and healthy despite living in such Spartan conditions; but she was most proud of their kind natures and good manners. She was boiling the

cabbage when she heard the front door closing and Asa's familiar footsteps. He removed his Panama hat, kissed his wife on the cheek and gave her a mischievous smile. 'I have exciting news for us Amy.'

'What is it this time Asa? Do we have to move apartments again?' she asked.

'Much further than that, we are leaving Budweis. I received a directive from Y headquarters in Geneva that we are needed elsewhere. Our work in Bohemia is completed and we are to travel to *Constantinople* in Turkey. I have been asked to hand over the office to my staff, arrange our transport and leave in the next two weeks.'

He shouted towards the living room. 'Children, we are leaving Budweis. Come here, and Wilbur bring in your atlas.' The children gathered around the table. 'Our work here is over and we will be travelling down the Danube River to the Black Sea.' Jennings opened the atlas at the page of Eastern Europe and pointed at the great river. 'From there we will catch another boat across the Black Sea to *Constantinople*, a city with an incredible history.' He turned to the pages on the Ottoman Empire and there, between Europe and Asia, pointed at the city.

'Why are we going there Papa? Has something happened there, that they need you to help?' Asa Junior asked.

'Yes. The YMCA in *Constantinople* will explain what I am required to do when we arrive.'

Young Bertha put her arms around her father. 'The schoolboys in *Constantinople* will love you too Papa, and you will show them how to help the poor people. When they send you to help, it is like Santa Claus coming. You bring presents and make them smile.'

Jennings chuckled. 'We will do our best Bertha, but as far as Santa is concerned, we will be going to the country where the real Santa lived. His name was Saint Nicholas and he was a Greek bishop who lived in Turkey in the fourth century. He gave gifts to the poor, sometimes by throwing money down their chimneys. We may even have a chance to visit his town.'

'What will you do and will we get gifts when we go there?' Wilbur asked.

'I will be giving guidance to schoolboys just as I have been doing here, but remember, our gift is the privilege of helping others Wilbur. Now after dinner, we have to think about packing our belongings. We are leaving for a

great voyage, to cities you have never even dreamed about before and we are blessed that the Lord has another important task for us.'

As Amy put the children to bed that night, they were excited about the voyage ahead, but when she returned to her husband, she raised her concerns. 'Asa, we have heard terrible things from the Armenian refugees, about the cruelty of the Turks and the villages that were destroyed. There is blind hatred where we are going.'

'Amy, I have a vocation to help our fellow man wherever he lives. Saint Paul came from Tarsus, a town in southern Turkey and faced terrible persecution, but went on to establish the Christian church when it was in its infancy and struggling. The part of the world we are going to is a crucible of the world's religions and we will be tested, but the Y has asked me to go and it's a call I cannot refuse.'

Alatsata, Asia Minor - July, 1922

*Imagine for yourself a character, a model personality,
Whose example you determine to follow, in private as well as in
public.*
Epictetus

The long oak table was loaded with platters of *dolmades*, bright red tomatoes, *spanokopita* and *tiropita*, mounds of dark green *vlita* and even a large roast chicken. There were flowers on the sideboard and all the windows were opened wide to welcome the warmth of the midday sun.

This was a special occasion as Elisaveth Girdis had come back from the abbey for the first time since she took her vows. As the front door opened her figure was silhouetted in the sunlight and behind her, across the cobbled street was their church, Tis Panayias, that she had admired every day of her childhood. Her hair was covered in a veil which hung to her shoulders and a long elegant black habit swept along the floor as she walked through the entrance. Her most imposing physical trait were her large eyes, which were abnormally protuberant from a thyroid condition that she had experienced in her teenage years, but this didn't detract from their beauty. Although she was physically striking, it was her inner strength which set her apart from others; she radiated serenity and confidence, and people gravitated to her. All the family in Alatsata were there to welcome her.

Eugenia, her youngest sister, had been waiting near the door and rushed forward to throw her arms around her. To Eugenia, Elisaveth was the model of Greek womanhood, graceful, kind, devoted to God and she loved her even more strongly than her own mother.

'I have missed you so much Eugenia. When I'm alone in the abbey, I think of your laughter and I feel better straight away,' Elisaveth said.

Eugenia seemed to laugh and cry at the same time. She hadn't seen her sister for over a year and tears welled up and rolled down her face.

Elisaveth wiped them away with her sleeve. Their mother hearing the commotion, came out of the kitchen and saw her daughter dressed in her holy vestments. She bowed her head in respect, crossed herself and then walked forward, leaned down and kissed her hand. Elisaveth put her arms around her and pulled her up.

‘Welcome Elisaveth, you come to our home like the Holy Mother, bringing God with you. How have you been? You look so thin; have they been feeding you enough?’

‘Yes, of course mother. I am in very good health.’

Soon after Arête arrived with her husband Georgios and embraced her warmly. Elisaveth had only seen them a couple of times since the wedding and after all the concerns about an arranged marriage and their widely different personalities, she felt that they seemed very happy together.

Finally, Christos who had been playing in the fields ran into the house breathlessly. He had grown six inches since she had last seen him, his face was tanned and his rich brown eyes melted Elisaveth’s heart. ‘Elisaveth!’ he shouted, and put his arms around her waist. She kissed his forehead.

‘It is wonderful to be home,’ she said. Her large eyes glistened with emotion as she looked from face to face, but she was not a woman to cry. She was the calm strength of the Girdis family.

Eugenia spoke excitedly. ‘We have missed you so much Elisaveth. You must come back more often. Now that both my sisters have left home I only have Christos to talk to.’ She cheekily winked at Christos.

‘Eugenia, you look so beautiful, why aren’t you married yet?’ Elisaveth asked.

‘Like our brothers, all the Greek men over seventeen left Asia Minor and only a few like Georgios have returned, so I’ll have to find a soldier or go to Australia to find a husband,’ Eugenia replied, and smiled as she looked at Arête.

‘Have you heard from our brothers Mother? How are they?’ Elisaveth asked.

‘John and Steven and their wives are in good health and Mark and George are betrothed, both to lovely Greek girls. They are all doing well in business in Australia.’

‘Praise the Lord, and Christos, it’s so wonderful that you are still here with us and you are so tall now. I know that you are home on holidays, so did you get accepted by that wonderful boarding school in Smyrna?’

‘Yes, I am at the Aronis School, one of the oldest in Asia Minor and it has a very good music department.’

‘Oh and how are your violin lessons going?’

‘Christos is in the first violin in the school orchestra and the Orpheus club. They travelled to Mytiline and Chios giving performances this year. He is also a good student in all his subjects,’ his mother proudly explained.

‘You must play for us after dinner Christos,’ Elisaveth insisted.

‘Well that depends if Mama keeps her promise, *galatabouriko* for dessert,’ Christos replied, smiling.

‘His appetite is never satisfied.’

They all sat at the table and their mother spoke. ‘Today we will have the honour of Elisaveth saying Grace.’

Elisaveth crossed herself and bowed her head in prayer. ‘We thank you for the many gifts you have given us Lord, and for the wonderful food on this table; bless this family, this house and this village and care and protect our four older brothers far away in Australia.’

Constantinople - August 1922

*This is the gift the saviours of far-flung Hellas upraised here,
Having delivered their states from loathsome slavery's bonds.*
Inscription of the Serpent's column on its original pedestal in Delphi, Greece

As he strode through the old city that morning, and saw the great church of the Hagia Sofia, Jennings felt himself transported back to the times of Emperor Justinian and the Eastern Roman Empire. He marvelled at the genius of the engineers who had constructed a dome which seemed to be supported by the air and would remain the largest in the world for a thousand years. Further along, he passed by the site of the ancient hippodrome and thought that the Egyptian obelisk was strangely out of place in the Byzantine city. Nearby he paused to look at a most unusual archaeological piece, the twisted bronze Serpent's column. It had been transported from Delphi in Greece by the founder of the city, Constantine the Great, as a memorial to the ancient Greek victory over the Persians at Plataea in 479 BC. Incredibly, the column was made from the molten shields and weapons from that battle and engraved on its coils were the names of the thirty-one Greek city states which joined together to defeat the Persians. It had survived two thousand five hundred years and it was a symbol of the unity of the Hellenes, celebrating their victory over the invaders from the east, but today, it sat almost apologetically in a pit, exposed to the elements, forgotten or unrecognised by most who passed.

He knew it represented the ideal of a united Greece, of Hellenism. Maybe that was the reason it was ignored in this now Ottoman Turkish city.

Forgotten it stood here, forsaken and ignored but thankfully, he thought, it had not been made of gold or it would have been stolen or melted down and destroyed, like most other great treasures of the ancient city. Its bronze modesty had saved it for posterity. He thought about the many famous people of antiquity who had looked upon this monument when it was in Delphi or here ... Pericles, Aristotle, Alexander, Constantine, Justinian, even Mehmed

He who captured the city in 1453 and is said to have used his battle axe to strike and break one of the serpent's heads. Tarnished by the sun and rain, Jennings thought this column should be in a museum, the centre of attention.

But it was time to move on, or he would be late for his meeting. Jennings was unsure why he had been summoned to *Constantinople*. He only knew that he had been urgently required to leave Budweis and that he should bring his family and assumed they needed a new Boys' secretary in the city, but he also understood that there was an ongoing war between Greece and Turkey. The voyage down the Danube, into the Black Sea and the ferry to *Constantinople* had been a special interlude for the Jennings family, who were not used to exotic holidays. They had been stimulated by the vibrant city which was very different from the quiet and prudish Budweis, but now there was business to attend to. That morning he was to meet the head of the YMCA in *Constantinople* for information about his new appointment.

This was given by a bespectacled, officious looking man, in a black coat.

'Mr Jennings, welcome to *Constantinople*. I hope you had a pleasant voyage from Budweis.'

'Thank you Sir. We had a most satisfactory journey and I am looking forward to my new posting here.'

'Oh no Mr Jennings, your posting is not in *Constantinople*. We need you to go to Smyrna about three hundred miles south of here. The local YMCA secretary, Jacobs, hasn't had a holiday for several years and we have sent him stateside to Chicago for three months, so you are to cover for him whilst he is away. It will be a temporary posting but in one of the most pleasant of cities which has a strong American community, including many schools and colleges. You have done wonders in Budweis, and I'm sure the boys of Smyrna will benefit from your guidance.'

'Certainly, I'm pleased to be of service. What about the Greco-Turkish war Sir. Is it safe for my family to go there?'

'The Greek and Turkish armies have been at a stalemate in the centre of the country for almost a year and there seems little chance that this will change in the near future. I will arrange passage for you on a freighter in a few days and have arranged for our local youth workers to meet you when the ship docks.'

'I'm sure you will enjoy Smyrna as I've travelled there often myself. The opera house is magnificent and the musicians first rate. The Y Building

is on an esplanade on a magnificent mile-wide quay overlooking the harbour. There is a regular tramcar service around the city and the YMCA owns a Chevy, so transportation won't be a problem. Any other questions?'

‘No Sir. I am pleased to be of assistance.’

Jennings had never had a posting like this.

A magnificent city and a short stay with no long-term planning to arrange. It just didn't seem right but it was not his place to question the decision.

Chesme - August 1922

*You will come first to the sirens, who are enchanters of all
mankind,
And whoever comes their way and listens to the sirens singing,
Has no prospect of coming home.*
Homer, *The Odyssey*

Caristinos and Ahmet walked slowly along the wharf at Chesme. That morning a shipment of bananas, mangoes, dried figs and apricots was arriving from Alexandria in Egypt and they were meeting the captain at the wharf.

‘*Yasou Capitanos Dmitry,*’ Caristinos bellowed out as the Egyptian Greek ship’s master walked off the freighter.

‘*Yasou John, Yasou Ahmet,*’ he responded, and shook hands firmly with both men.

‘How was your crossing from Alexandria?’ Caristinos asked.

‘We had smooth seas all the way and I have the finest fruit in all of Egypt for you, your customers will be very happy.’

‘Your produce is always fresh Dmitry and you are a sailor in the mould of Odysseus. You sail the Mediterranean every week, but unlike him you always arrive on time!’ Caristinos laughed.

‘You are right John, and like him, I may need to buy a bow and arrow to kill my wife’s suitors when I return to Alexandria. She is very beautiful you know.’ Dmitry showed them her photograph.

Ahmet slapped him on the back. ‘You are a fortunate man Dmitry; you must hurry and unload your ship so you can get back to her.’

‘And how are you my old friends?’ Dmitry asked.

‘I am very well Dmitry, but I fear for my son Anthony who is with the Greek army fighting in central Turkey. I’m hoping this insanity will be over soon.’

‘Their army has been holding their defensive line for a year now. Surely the Turks will sue for peace soon,’ Dmitry replied.

Caristinos shook his head. ‘Kemal is a great General and has bided his time. I fear he is building up his forces for an attack on us. King Constantine’s invasion was doomed from the beginning. He heard the siren’s song, but unlike Odysseus, he failed to tie himself to the mast.’

Dmitry put his hand on Caristinos’s shoulder. ‘The army is strong and has the support of the British fleet. They will hold the line.’

‘I wish it were true but I don’t have your confidence Dmitry. Thank you for your kind words and now let us have a Turkish coffee and a drink of Masticha liqueur for good luck.’

The three men sat down together at the wharf side *taverna* while the ship was unloaded. While they drank coffee, the wind increased, the temperature dropped and the sun disappeared behind the clouds.

A storm was gathering from the east.

Dumlupinar, Asia Minor - August 30, 1922

*Sing, goddess, of Achilles ruinous anger
Which brought ten thousand pains to the Achaeans,
And cast the souls of many stalwart heroes
To Hades, and their bodies to the dogs
And birds of prey.*

Homer, *The Iliad*

Anthony and Pavlos knew that the signs were not good. Their division had become depleted and exhausted at Dumlupinar, where they had waited, hoping to regain strength, obtain reinforcements and defend against the inevitable attack by the Turkish army. In the end, few reinforcements were available, the only food was hard biscuit and dried beef or horsemeat and their drinking water had become putrid. Typhus and cholera were killing scores every day and the year in Dumlupinar had been a nightmare. Pavlos observed his once proud regiment and saw a group of thin, dirty, exhausted and sick men and realised that he looked no different from the rest. Unable to sleep because of the lice, racked with diarrhoea, the only fit people in the regiment were a dozen newly arrived reinforcements. The Turks had not attacked for months but that night the artillery began and all they could do was dig in as the shells struck around them. It reminded Anthony and Pavlos of the terrible day atop the Yellow Hill at Sakarya, but the artillery barrage was only the beginning of their nightmare.

My love Eugenia,

We have been holed up here all year, and are getting weaker and weaker. Half of the division have been ill and most spend weeks at a time in the hospital tents. We have lost more men through illness than battle.

The Turks seem to be building up their forces and there is talk that their trains are bringing in fresh troops and artillery.

Your letters keep me strong, and the knowledge that you are waiting for me gives me hope for the future.

Any chance for victory is lost and the only reason we fight is to protect you from the Turks.

Tell Mr Caristinos that Anthony is well and an inspiration to all of us.

There is a rumour we will be relieved soon after two years on the front. I pray that this is true and you may wake up one morning to find a thin bedraggled Pavlos on your doorstep. I wonder if you will still love me, when you see how poorly I look.

Even if I don't see you soon, always remember that I will always love you with all of my heart.

Yours forever,

Pavlos.

As the artillery shells exploded around them, Pavlos turned and spoke to Anthony. 'Keep your head down this time, they like to shoot Majors and I may be too weak to carry your body again.'

'We're in for it this time; they have been building up for this attack all year.' Anthony looked at his line of men in trenches on either side. The Turkish heavy artillery soon found their range and all along the Greek trenches, exploding shells were followed by calls of distress. The merciless bombardment continued all night and at dawn, and Anthony inspected their depleted defensive position. The shells had destroyed the command post and smoking craters punctuated the trench line as far as he could see. Burnt body parts were scattered in the sand and scores of injured men lay in the dirt or crawled backwards away from the front. As he watched, a large squad of Turkish soldiers appeared on the left flank, running and firing at his position and the Greek soldiers, unable to resist were retreating. He turned to Pavlos, standing next to him and their eyes met.

'This is it Pavlos,' Anthony said with a heavy tone. 'We have to hold, or all is lost.'

Pavlos nodded. 'You have been a good friend Anthony,' he said.

'So have you Pavlos, you have been my strength in this hell on earth,' Anthony replied.

They both took up firing positions behind an earth mound, using their rifles to pick off the leading attackers, but there was an endless stream of replacements and they soon realised that the attack would be impossible to resist. The enemy were only 200 yards away now and the two Greek officers were alone, their fellow soldiers on either side had either been killed or had run off. Pavlos was struck by a bullet and fell backwards, his eyes staring at the sky in disbelief. Anthony leaned over his friend and noticed the blood spreading out on his uniform from a shattered shoulder. He took a cotton bandage from his pack and put it inside the shirt onto the wound. 'It'll take more than a Turkish bullet to stop you Pavlos,' Anthony said reassuringly.

Pavlos realised their position was about to be overrun and looked at Anthony standing over him. 'Old friend, save yourself. Get away with the others.'

Anthony shook his head. 'You are coming with me Pavlos. I'm not leaving you here to fight the Turks alone and get all the glory.'

Lifting him on to his shoulders, Anthony rose to his feet and began carrying him toward the rear. Bullets flew past as he struggled back but he managed to get to the protection of a dried out river gully and joined the other soldiers moving west. After an hour struggling with Pavlos, he got to the horses in a fenced off enclosure and hauled his friend onto one and got on the saddle behind him. Together the two men joined a long line of retreating Greek soldiers, slowly moving west towards the coast.

The Dardanelle Strait - August 1922

Those who held the strong city of Mycenae... sent a hundred ships under the command of King Agamemnon, son of Atreus. In their midst was the king himself, all glorious in his armour of gleaming bronze, foremost among the heroes, for he was the greatest king.

Homer, the ships departing for Troy from *The Iliad*

Jennings and his wife had enjoyed the view of the Sea of Marmara for hours as they walked on the deck that afternoon. It was so different from the chaos of war-ravaged Bohemia or the hectic pace of their brief visit to *Constantinople*. They revelled in the serenity of the calm waters and the warm ambience of their fellow passengers, but Jennings was worried and his mind spiralled forward to Smyrna.

He knew from his biblical readings that Smyrna was the last surviving city of the seven churches of the Book of Revelation and was a significant Christian religious site. Before he left *Constantinople*, he had made sure to also read the history of the city and discovered that it had been an important ancient Greek port until it was destroyed by the Lydians and later restored by Alexander the Great. Later, it was home to a famous early Christian Bishop, Polycarp, who was killed by the Romans. The coastline for hundreds of miles north and south was home to a mainly Greek population since that time, but had been controlled by the Ottoman Turks since the fall of *Constantinople*, almost four hundred years earlier.

His reading had revealed that in 1922 Smyrna was a rich cosmopolitan city, twice the population of Athens and a cultural and trading centre of the eastern Mediterranean. Nowhere else did East meet West more comfortably; ruled by the Turks till recently, financially dominated by the Greeks and Levantine Europeans; it also included smaller numbers of Armenians, Jews and Syrians. There were 391 factories in Smyrna, and only 14 were Turkish. A melting pot of cultures and religions, all these populations had lived relatively harmoniously for centuries, until recently.

Politically, he had learnt that the region had been very stable until 1914 when the events of the Great War, the decline of the Ottomans and the

emergence of the Young Turks led to a reign of terror promulgated on the Greek and Armenian populations. Smyrna itself, with its large European population, powerful Greek businessmen and strong local administration was somewhat insulated from the atrocities, but north and south of the city in the unprotected villages the Christian populations were decimated. The best documented was in Phocaea, a village on the coast near Smyrna, whose colonists had founded Marseille two thousand years before. Eight thousand Greek residents of the village were attacked and massacred in sight of French eye witnesses on board steamers in its harbour. Many other villages suffered the same fate.

The treaty of Sevres after the end of the Great War, which ceded Smyrna and its environs to Greece, led to the arrival of the Greek army in 1919 and the end of the attacks on the Christians. Rumours of the Greek army taking retribution on nearby Turkish villages began to circulate and inevitably war broke out. For three years, a Greco-Turkish war raged in Asia Minor, first the Greeks had the ascendancy and then the Turks and now the YMCA had posted him to Smyrna, a unique place, and a Greek city in Asia which had been cocooned from tragedy. At present, the war was at a stalemate several hundred miles away from Smyrna and he had been assured his family would be safe.

Slowly, Jennings became aware that the freighter had entered a narrow strait, with green hills to the west and flat plains on the eastern side. The sun was getting lower in the sky and it was then he first heard the sound of an English voice.

‘I’ll have a cognac and a cigar, the best Turkish cigar you have.’ He was a huge man in a khaki military uniform with a large handle-bar moustache. The waiter looked puzzled, and walked away scratching his head.

‘You may be lucky to get a cup of tea,’ Jennings remarked to him.

‘I’ll need something stronger than that, but any spirit will do. It’s nice to find someone who speaks English on this damn Italian ship. Let me introduce myself. I am Colonel George Massing of the Royal Hampshire Regiment.’

‘Pleased to meet you, Sir. I am Asa Jennings from New York, and this is my wife Amy.’

‘The pleasure is mine. And what will you be doing in Smyrna Mr Jennings?’

‘I am being sent on a temporary assignment for the YMCA, Colonel. The usual Boys’ secretary is taking a holiday and I’ll be taking his place.’

‘Have you worked in a war zone before Mr Jennings?’ the Colonel asked. Amy looked at her husband, who suddenly looked very concerned.

‘I was told that the war was a long way from Smyrna, Colonel, but I have worked in a war zone. I was posted to a hospital in Le Mans, France during the Great War, where I helped to rehabilitate many shell shocked and injured soldiers, and witnessed destitute civilian populations ravaged by war. What is your job in Smyrna Colonel?’ Jennings asked.

The waiter arrived with a glass of brandy.

‘Brandy it is then!’ The colonel put his hand on the waiter’s shoulder.

‘And a cigar my man. SI GAR.’ He held an imaginary tube between his fingers and pretended to smoke it. The waiter raised his eyebrows in recognition and walked away.

‘By Jove, he’s going to get one. Well Mr Jennings, I will be assisting with the possible evacuation of British nationals, in the event of a Turkish attack on the city. It may be an unsavoury affair, but not likely to be as bad as what happened here seven years ago. Did you know this strait was a war zone in the Great War, Mr Jennings?’

‘No I didn’t Colonel.’

‘Yes indeed. This strait is called the Dardanelles and in 1915 it was full of mines,’ the Colonel replied.

‘Oh dear. Are we are safe here?’ Amy asked.

‘Perfectly safe, madam. The mines have been cleared, but in 1915 this was the scene of a great misadventure. That peninsula to the west is known as Gallipoli, a place of lost hopes and great tragedy. I served there with the British army.’

‘I have heard of it, but didn’t exactly know its location. It was a battle wasn’t it Colonel?’ Jennings asked.

‘More like a bloodbath, a six month debacle and sacrifice of thousands of lives, not the sort of thing your wife would care to hear about, Jennings.’

‘Amy has endured it all with me Colonel. She has helped me tend to the injured and sick and is accustomed to hardship. Tell us about Gallipoli.’

‘If you insist,’ he replied. His cigar had arrived and after it was lit, he rolled it between his fingers and drew a deep breath.

‘In 1915, during the Great War, Mr Winston Churchill, the British Lord of the Admiralty, had the bright idea of using his warships to attack and capture *Constantinople* through this very strait. That was his vision, but the Turks had other ideas and they mined these waters and fortified the strait

with artillery on both sides. One merry morning our warships struck the mines and were then decimated by the cannon. The naval attack failed and the Turks had a great victory and that should have been the end of it, but Churchill was not one to be easily put off and he and the brilliant military strategists in London hatched a plan to invade and capture the Gallipoli peninsula in order to secure the strait. I'm sad to say that my regiment and the other British forces attacked the tip of the peninsula at Cape Helles, whilst the Australians and New Zealanders attacked the Aegean side at what is now called Anzac Cove. Unfortunately, Johnny Turk was waiting for us with machine guns and artillery and the Germans had trained them well. They were also led by a certain General Mustapha Kemal.'

The Colonel paused, and sipped his brandy, before recommencing. 'Half of my regiment was killed on the first morning of the attack. Bodies of men were piled up on the beach. I can still hear the artillery shells exploding in the sand dunes and a sniper's bullet killing my commanding officer, as he stood next to me.'

He took a long breath from the cigar. 'It was a bad business Jennings. We dug into the beach and stayed there for months. I will never forget the smell of rotting bodies lying in shallow graves or exposed in no man's land. We were slaughtered on that beach.' The morose Colonel looked towards the peninsula.

'Terrible Colonel. And Kemal?' Jennings enquired, 'was it the same Kemal who is now the revolutionary leader of the Young Turks and whose reformed army is fighting the Greeks?'

'Yes, the same, a brilliant general, but ruthless; that man has ice in his veins Jennings. To hold a critical position, he said to his men at Gallipoli, "I order you not to attack ... but to die".'

'And they did willingly, tens of thousands of them, but they also held their position. After six months our massive British and ANZAC expeditionary force was defeated and driven off the Gallipoli peninsula.

'As we come to the end of the strait, we will see Cape Hellas, where my regiment fought. It is coming up shortly.'

The three stood on the starboard side of the deck, and leaned on the rail, looking at the peninsula to the west. 'There is the cape.' The colonel pointed at the end of the promontory, where low hills led down to a small beach. As the ship glided past, the Colonel strained his eyes, as if looking for a sign of his fallen comrades. 'It looks so peaceful now, deathly silent.' His eyes

glistened as tears welled up and clouded his vision and then ran down his face. He made no attempt to wipe them off. 'It's much smaller than I remember it. It looks like a small unimportant place.' The Colonel's head shook slightly from side to side, his voice thick with emotion.

Jennings strained to see the innocent looking green hills of Gallipoli in the failing light. He and Amy watched in silence as they passed the cape, and steamed into the open sea to the south. They knew they couldn't begin to comprehend the scene of carnage which the Colonel had described.

'And over there, close to the coast on the mainland, opposite the Cape are the remains of the city of Troy, excavated by Schliemann fifty years ago.' The Colonel pointed towards the east. 'Two massive invasion forces a few miles apart, but separated by three thousand years of history. Irony isn't it?'

'Indeed it is Sir.'

The three walked slowly inside to the lounge. 'I'm going to have another brandy Mr Jennings. May I get you and your wife a drink?'

'No thank you Colonel. We don't drink, but we will have coffee.' They sat down together and the colonel ordered the drinks and another cigar.

'What have we learnt from Gallipoli Colonel? Is there a lesson from this terrible waste of human life?' Jennings asked. The Colonel took a sip of brandy.

'Those lives were lost for nothing Jennings; there were no winners in the Great War. After the war, the British sailed their warships through the strait and past Gallipoli without a shot being fired. They are now in the Bosphorus and control the sea lanes around *Constantinople*, but they have gained no major advantage, as most of the trade goes through Smyrna anyway. This is the futility of it all. I can never forgive the politicians who sent us into that killing beach, for the lost lives of my friends, the broken dreams of so many brilliant young men and their families. Brits, Aussies, New Zealanders - the cream of our nations lie buried on those beaches.'

Jennings could hear the sadness in the Colonel's breaking voice. 'I can see you have suffered greatly Colonel. You are brave to return here and face these demon memories.' The Colonel didn't reply but gazed into his glass of brandy. 'That was seven years ago Colonel and now the Greek and Turkish armies are at war again. Do you know much about this war Colonel?'

'Like all war Jennings, it was inspired by greed and stupidity. The Greek King and his Prime Minister had a dream, *O Megali Idea*, the great idea of a unified Greek state encompassing those areas on the Turkish coast

inhabited by Greeks, but they ultimately hoped to recapture Constantinople, seat of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch which would become the new Greek capital. With British support they thought they could do the impossible. Their army fought halfway across Asia Minor, across the salt desert, without water and riddled with disease, and reached the Sakarya River just west of Angora where last year, Kemal sprung his trap, defeated the Greeks and captured thousands of troops.'

'I have heard that the British encouraged the Greeks to attack inland, so that they would gain access to the Persian Oilfields. Is that true?' Jennings asked.

'That may have been true two years ago when the war began, but now Britain has more direct access to the oil through Arabia and more importantly, the French, Italians and even the Russian communists have rearmed the Turks so as to reduce British and Greek influence. All the major powers have major business interests in Smyrna, with its deep harbour and rail connections to the Middle East and Arabia and they all have their warships in the harbour. The Greeks are facing the resurgent Turks under Kemal and no-one likes a loser Mr Jennings. I'm not sure that my government will support the Greek army in any way,' the Colonel responded.

'There has been a stalemate for a year now in central Turkey, Colonel. Smyrna is hardly a war zone.'

'Not true, sir. The Greek army were holding a defensive line at a place called Dumlupinar, but faced another battle just a few days ago. You haven't heard about that?' the Colonel asked. Jennings shook his head.

'It's very confusing. Greek broadcasts said that their army was holding but as we left *Constantinople* this morning, the Turkish newspapers reported that Kemal has broken through and was driving the Greeks towards the sea. If they are right, we may arrive in Smyrna to the sight of Kemal's cavalry on the quay,' the Colonel said.

Jennings looked at Amy and then at his children playing on the deck and replied in a soft voice. 'Well Colonel, we are American citizens and after all, the USA isn't at war with Turkey. I am also a YMCA worker and with the grace of God and the protection of our US flag, we will prevail.' Jennings pulled out the American flag which he carried inside his coat, and showed it to the Colonel.

The Colonel raised a toast to the couple. 'Good luck in Smyrna, Mr Jennings, and pray that Kemal is not as ruthless in Smyrna as he was at

Gallipoli. And pray that you and your family don't need to use that flag for protection.'

Amy could see the troubled expression on her husband's face and knew he was upset. He had travelled to a war zone in France and then taken his family half way around the world into a ravaged town in Bohemia. Now they were sailing to Smyrna, a city under imminent attack by a ruthless enemy bent on revenge. But she knew her husband had a sixth sense about safety and had got them through difficult situations in the past. Above all she knew he was guided by God. She believed in him.

Smyrna - The Curse - September 2, 1922

Fear is pain arising from the anticipation of evil.

Aristotle

It was the highlight of the year for Eugenia, the annual weekend in Smyrna. On this occasion, Mr and Mrs Caristinos had invited the Girdis family to join them for the opera, and it would also give them a chance to visit Christos at his school. Eugenia had never been to the opera, but had often wondered what it would be like inside Smyrna's largest building. The trunk with her evening dress and best shoes was loaded and she climbed into the buggy, along with her mother, Arête and Georgios. Eugenia was very excited at seeing the great city again and in the open carriage the wind caressed her face and hair and although the ride took several hours, the time passed quickly.

As they moved eastward along the peninsula, the sprawling city came into view, its thousands of smoke stacks spread around the harbour and up the neighbouring hills. Across the bay in the suburb of Cordelio, she could see the huge white mansions of the Greek merchants and the wealthy 'Levantine', the descendants of European maritime traders, who had benefitted from the city's unique access to the profitable Middle Eastern trade routes. It was from this maritime trade that Smyrna derived its immense wealth which supported the most opulent gentlemen's clubs, restaurants, art galleries and schools. Finally, the entire harbour of Smyrna came into view, but this was a very different sight from what Eugenia remembered. There were more than a dozen grey warships in the bay, battleships and cruisers in the centre of the harbour and troop carriers tied up at the wharf. They looked dark and menacing.

'Why are all these ships here? Where are they from?' she asked.

'The shopkeepers of Smyrna arranged them for their protection. They heard that the Girdis ladies were coming shopping, and they know how much you like to haggle for a bargain,' Georgios replied.

‘You’re not funny Georgios,’ Arête reprimanded him. ‘Tell us the real reason.’

‘They belong to the great powers, and you see the Greek flag on the largest ship, that’s the Greek battleship the *Kilkis*, pride of the Greek navy. They are here to protect us, along with our allies, the British and American ships which are offering support to Smyrna and to the Greek army’s occupation guaranteed by the Treaty of Sevres.’

‘Oh, thank goodness. I feel much safer now and we can have a happy weekend,’ Eugenia replied.

Soon after, the excited family arrived at the Hotel Bristol where their room had a view of the water and the mile long expanse of the beautiful quay. After they bathed and dressed, the ladies took their umbrellas and began their exploration of the shopping district. They began with Smyrna’s most famous street, the Rue Franque, resplendent with open cafes, clubs, exclusive shops and fashion boutiques. This part of the city was essentially European, with neo-classical architecture, wide boulevards and a streetcar system. The men they passed wore either bowler hats or Turkish fezzes, while the women promenaded in long dresses, stylish wide brimmed hats and colourful umbrellas. Georgios liked to stop at the pastry and chocolate shops, but Arête pulled him away. ‘Don’t eat those sweets Georgios or you will get fat like your uncle,’ she roused on him, and Georgios reluctantly walked past, his eyes devouring the cakes as he went. Arête and Eugenia stopped at almost every dress shop whilst poor Georgios wandered around aimlessly outside.

If they had visited the Turkish part of the city, they would have passed bazaars with exotic food and spices, coffee and smoking houses, but they didn’t; it wasn’t usual for Greek women to venture there. That night the ladies dressed in their long flowing dresses; Arête had bought a dress that afternoon, which she had altered to accommodate her swollen belly and Georgios wore a smart grey suit and top hat. The Caristinos family were waiting for them at the Ionian Sportsman’s Club and as they walked through the entrance they noticed the two incredible stone antiquities flanking the grand staircase, a small Egyptian sphinx on the right and an Assyrian winged bull on the left. John Caristinos and his wife Nene were sitting in the foyer with their eldest daughter Marianthe and her husband Gus. The men wore tuxedos and top hats and smoked cigars while the women were wearing evening gowns. Caristinos rose from his seat when the Girdis family arrived, doffed his hat and bowed.

‘Ah, you are the best looking family in all of Smyrna. I wish my two boys were here to see you.’

‘Always the gentleman John. It’s wonderful to see you all,’ Maria responded.

‘We are going to have a wonderful evening,’ Caristinos promised. ‘We will start with an early supper in the dining room here. The chef makes the most wonderful moussaka and after dinner we will walk to the Opera House.’

‘What is playing John?’ Maria asked.

‘Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. I’ve never seen it before but I believe it is a story in best tradition of the ancient Greek tragedies.’

‘That’s wonderful John. It will be a very memorable night. Thank you for arranging this for us.’

After dinner, it was a short walk to the Opera House which had four circular tiers of seating and was no less magnificent than any grand house in Vienna, Prague or Milan. The two families were in awe of the towering soprano and tenor songs, the splendid orchestra and the beautiful costumes. Caristinos was able to interpret the Italian lyrics. The second act concluded when *Rigoletto* demanded terrible vengeance against the Duke after his daughter was abducted. As the audience rose for intermission a strange thing happened, a soldier suddenly walked onto the stage and asked for everyone’s attention. A hush came over the audience.

‘The Greek army is making a strategic retreat from central Anatolia and as I speak is forming a stronger position east of Smyrna. Our position at Dumlupinar held up for over a year and General Frankos has asked you not to panic because we will be falling back to our previous defensive perimeter which we held three years ago. Please stay calm and enjoy the rest of the opera.’

A palpable sense of fear descended into the theatre and as the crowd filtered out into the foyer they became involved in anxious discussions and a great deal of alcohol was sold. Mr Caristinos spoke with a slight waver in his voice. ‘The Greek Army is strong and hopefully will stop the Turks from coming near the coast. Our villages of Alatsata and Chesme are west of Smyrna and will be protected by the army.’

‘We pray that you are right John and that Anthony is safe,’ Maria spoke softly.

Quite a number of the audience left after the news but Caristinos was calm. 'Nothing is to be gained by leaving. Let us enjoy the rest of the opera and try and put this news out of our minds this evening.' The Girdis family agreed to remain and see the rest of the performance, but the last act of *Rigoletto* was dark and foreboding and the story reflected the emotions of the audience that night. Gilda in an effort to save her love, the Duke, was mortally wounded and *Rigoletto* discovered that it was his own paid assassin who had mistakenly killed her, his own daughter. As the opera concluded he cried out 'The Curse'. As the families left the theatre that night, they wondered if their city would be saved or would a curse also fall upon them. Eugenia and her sister trembled as they walked out into the brisk air. It was not the night they had hoped it would be.

'We will soon know whether our troops can defend us. Have a safe trip home to Alatsata tomorrow,' Caristinos said. The Girdis family bade them goodbye and the women crossed themselves before walking back to the hotel with Georgios.

'We will all go to the Cathedral tomorrow morning and pray for the success of our army and then we will visit Christos,' Maria said, but her words were not very comforting for her daughters. Eugenia tried to believe that the army would succeed and put other thoughts out of her head. Failure to defend the city was unthinkable.

The next morning they woke early and set off, walking past the site of the planned Ionian University of Smyrna, where they hoped that Christos would study one day. They arrived at the magnificent Cathedral of St Fotini, with its tall belfry tower and there they each paid for candles at the entrance, which they lit and placed in the sand at the base of the beautiful icon to Mary, Mother of God. In whispering voices, Eugenia and Arête prayed to Mary to keep their family and the city safe.

Smyrna - Paradise - September 2, 1922

*All religions must be tolerated ...
for every man must reach paradise in his own way.*

Epictetus

Everyone was on deck as the ship entered Smyrna Harbour. The Jennings family was packed and dressed in their Sunday best clothes as they entered the wide bay. The twin mountain peaks, 'the two brothers', came into view first, with Mount Pagus dominating the southern half of the city. The long wide semi-circular bay gradually rose out of the aquiline waters and slowly the mile wide quay came into view. To the north was a point with a railway pier to which several freighters were tied and stretching to the south were rows of stone buildings lining the esplanade. In front of them dotting all parts of the bay were dozens of warships and Jennings counted three US destroyers, as well as British, French, Italian and Greek battleships, each with their own flotilla of smaller ships. As they came closer, Jennings could see a dozen troop ships moored to the quay, each flying the Greek flag and loading long lines of soldiers, horses and artillery pieces, while nearby were several ferries taking on passengers.

Just beyond the waterfront, they saw the tower with a huge ornate clock, which was a gift from the German Kaiser to the Ottoman Sultan in 1901.

The large army barracks, formerly built for Turkish soldiers but more recently occupied by Greek troops dominated the southern end of the quay and Greek soldiers, in line, were marching out its doors towards the troop ships on the wharf. He could now make out the large hotels and banks which lined the quay, but more important to Jennings was the sight of the dozens of families camped on the footpath, sleeping in their carriages or on the pavement. Just like Budweis, there were refugees here too, he thought.

The Italian steamer moved towards the dock and was tied up by the longshoremen. The Jennings family with three very excited children gathered their belongings and waited to disembark, whilst most of the tourists

remained on the upper deck, laughing and drinking. As the family walked onto the wharf, they were met by a young man. 'You must be Mr Jennings. I am Dimi, from the YMCA office.' He leaned forward shaking Jennings's hand.

'Good to meet you, Dimi. Are our lodgings nearby?'

'No, about five miles away. You will be staying in Paradise, Mr Jennings. Next to the American International College campus,' he replied.

'Paradise indeed. Do you hear that Mrs Jennings? This may be more pleasant than we anticipated,' Jennings said smiling.

'Paradise is a village in the hills east of the city and many Americans live there. There is also a college for girls, the Collegiate Institute. I have arranged for the Y car to take you and your family there.'

Dimi helped Jennings load their belongings in the trunk and they set off through the city on the way to the college. They were enthralled by the colourful shops, clubs and restaurants of the European quarter and after passing through the Greek and Armenian sectors, Jennings was surprised to count no less than twelve churches.

'How many people live in Smyrna, Dimi?' Jennings asked.

'About half a million. There are over 300,000 Greeks, 140,000 Turks and 20,000 Armenians, with smaller numbers of Jews and Syrians. There are also over 20,000 Europeans and Levantines who own the largest marble houses with beautiful gardens and vineyards. Many of them live in Coeur de Lyon or Cordelio, on the northern shore of the bay or in the hamlets of Boudja and Bournabat nearby.'

'Ah, I see, and where are the Turkish bazaars and mosques? I don't see any here,' Amy asked.

'They are in the Turkish quarter, in the southern part of the city which we are approaching now. There are good bargains of rugs and leather goods to be made there. If you're lucky we might see camel caravans arriving from Baghdad or Damascus,' he replied.

'It's hard to believe that there are so many churches in a city ruled for centuries by the Ottomans,' Jennings remarked.

'Yes Mr Jennings, churches of all denominations and there are also many mosques and synagogues. What we Smyrniots are most proud of, is that we have been a city of tolerance. The Ottomans did not prevent us from building our churches here and all religions have lived peacefully together for centuries till the recent trouble.'

Jennings nodded. 'This wonderful peaceful coexistence makes this a uniquely cosmopolitan city, Dimi, but I have heard this is in great contrast to villages nearby like Phocaea, which suffered great violence.'

'Yes, a great massacre; those events during the Great Persecution were terrible. Let us pray that those days do not return,' Dimi replied.

Finally, they arrived at the College, and the dormitory manager, Yannis, met them at the door. 'You come at a difficult time for our city and our school and there is a chance the Turks may come this way Mr Jennings. The Greek army is forming a defensive perimeter to protect the city, just in case.' He pointed at the formations, artillery and tents of the army, not more than a mile away.

Jennings asked, 'Why are the ships on the quay loading so many men for evacuation, if the army plans to defend the city?'

'There are very many soldiers here, returning from the front, too many to feed. They will be needed to defend Greece in Thrace when the Turks attack there, which seems more likely,' Yannis replied.

Jennings was not impressed with this logic. If anything was worth defending, it was this magnificent city. Was this a token defence? Was the city indefensible?

'Even if the Turks take back control of the city, things will not change. The Turks did not attack Smyrna's population during the Great War and they won't hurt us now, Mr Jennings. This is a very rich city, with twice the trade of *Constantinople* and great wealth created by the Greek and Levantine companies and merchants. We have lived happily with the Ottomans for hundreds of years and they trust us. But if the worst comes to pass, the Greek government will evacuate us with the help of our British allies.'

Jennings again was uncertain of this confidence. Could the Christian population really trust a marauding Turkish army? Would the Greek government really care what happened to these people? After all, the locals were not Greek citizens, but Ionians or Levantines and people who had been under Ottoman rule for almost 400 years, till three years before. But if the Greek government did not care about them, who would?

'We also trust in God, Mr Jennings. The Bishop of Smyrna, Chrysostomos, has told us to pray for our deliverance. I've never seen the churches so full. God will hear us.'

'We will pray for you also Yannis. People are what make a city important, and I can see from what has been created here, this city has

remarkably tolerant people, Greek, Armenian and Turk alike.'

Smyrna - September 2, 1922

*As a vessel is known by the sound, whether it be cracked or not;
so men are proved, by their speeches, whether they be wise or
foolish.*

Demosthenes

After settling his children in at the College, Jennings caught the car to the Y building on the quay, and noticed many people walking or riding towards the waterfront. It was quite an exodus, he thought. There were three workers behind the desk; two were Greek, Alexandros and also Dimi who had met them on the wharf. The third was an Armenian youth, Vasken, whose family had been killed by the Turks the year before. They had been marched south into Der Zor, in the Syrian desert, where the survivors, four hundred thousand of them, had died of starvation. Vasken had managed to escape from the forced march in central Turkey and came to Smyrna after being discovered by Greek soldiers. Jennings was well aware of the Armenian massacres during and after the Great War, but thought it had finished. Will this land never tire of violence, he thought.

‘So what activities are arranged for the boys in the Colleges today?’ he asked Dimi.

‘Mr Jennings, there is a football match in the College playing field planned for this afternoon, but it will be difficult to get enough boys to make up the teams. At least half the American boys have left with their families and many others will be going soon. The Turkish army is approaching the city.’

Jennings spent the afternoon with the remaining boys and learnt that some were leaving on the American destroyers the following day. The boys were not very interested in the game, but with the large Greek encampment nearby, they were talking about the prospect of a battle right here at Paradise,

which was positioned on the eastern approach to the city. This was not good news, he thought.

That evening there was to be a major address at the city hall from one of the most important community leaders, the Greek Bishop Chrysostomos. As a representative of the Y, Jennings and his wife were invited and although he wasn't one for social occasions, the unstable political situation was reason enough to attend. The address was held in the city hall which was overflowing with members of the many Christian denominations, including the Armenian, Anglican and Catholic bishops and American clergy. There were also Greek and Armenian civic leaders, consuls and the deans of the schools and colleges, as well as military personnel from the European powers.

Jennings and his wife were introduced to the American consul George Horton and noticed that he had a nervous disposition. 'You and your family have arrived at a difficult time Mr Jennings,' said Horton, who looked around anxiously. 'The future of this city and the American community here are in the balance and I am responsible for the evacuation of thousands of Americans from Smyrna if the situation deteriorates. At present, I have very few resources to accomplish this and you and your family have been added to my responsibilities. I honestly don't know why the YMCA sent you here at a time like this, but tonight we will see what the Bishop thinks of the situation.'

'I'm sorry for our added burden Mr Horton, but tell me, why is the Bishop so highly regarded here? I would have thought that the Mayor or military governor would be the principal decision makers,' Jennings asked.

'Chrysostomos is the figurehead of all Christian people here Jennings. He represents everything that the Turks resent, the repossession of Smyrna and Asia Minor by the Greek Christians and the unity of Christian churches against the Moslem Turks. He is the real leader of the Christian community in Smyrna and is very sympathetic to organisations such as the YMCA. I will introduce you to him later.'

A tall American military officer approached Horton. 'Ah, Admiral. Good to see you. We have much to discuss,' Horton said.

'Certainly Consul. I am at your service. This is turning into a bad business. I'm told the Turks are nearby.'

'I hope the Greeks can hold them. By the way, this is Mr Jennings, the new secretary of the YMCA in Smyrna. Mr and Mrs Jennings may I introduce

Admiral Mark Bristol, who is in command of all American ships in the Aegean and is also the US High Commissioner to Turkey,' Horton said.

'I'm pleased to meet you Admiral. I heard that one of your ships was evacuating six of our students tomorrow. Will you be assisting with the other refugees on the quay?' Jennings asked.

'My ships will only be assisting the Americans, Mr Jennings. We are strictly neutral in the Greco-Turkish war and like all the other foreign ships in the harbour we cannot give assistance which will help either side.'

'The YMCA is only interested in humanitarian and not national interests Admiral, but we may meet again if more of our students need to leave.'

The crowd was ushered inside the auditorium where the Greek Mayor of Smyrna introduced the Bishop to the audience. He was an imposing figure with a long white beard and red robes and his head was adorned with a large black mitre. Chrysostomos was an eloquent and measured speaker who spoke for forty minutes in both Greek and English, during which the audience listened in total silence and he finished with a rising cadence in his voice.

'Christianity was established when Saint Paul preached here almost two thousand years ago. *Constantinople* was the site where our faith became the official religion of the Roman Empire and in Nicaea the official doctrine of Christianity was established. Asia Minor is the historical birthplace of our religion and Smyrna is its last surviving bastion.

'The greatest strength we Christians have here is the unity of our belief in Christ's message and along with our friends of the Holy Apostolic Orthodox Armenian Church, and our brethren from the American, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, we must remain strong. Our Christian communities look toward us for leadership and strength.

'Whatever happens to this city, I pledge to you that I will remain here with my flock. If we face our enemies with belief and unity, our Christian faith will prevail over the Turkish turban.'

It seemed that every person in the hall rose and cheered the Bishop but Jennings felt uneasy. Could peace be restored in the face of intransigence? Was this a time for bravado or would conciliation and diplomacy be more appropriate? After the address, the audience assembled in the foyer to meet Chrysostomos. The Greeks bowed and kissed his hand and the other bishops and clerics embraced him. Later, Horton introduced him to Jennings and his wife. In contrast to his speech, Chrysostomos spoke to them in a gentle voice.

‘It is wonderful you have come here to help us Mr Jennings. Your organisation is a wonderful example of Christian charity and the youth of our city need support. I hope that you will continue this great work for as long as possible.’

‘With God’s help, I will do my best. Do you think this great city is under threat Bishop? The Greek army are defending the city and everyone seems very calm.’

‘Never underestimate the power of evil Mr Jennings. The city has been peaceful and prosperous for centuries but outside influences can change all that in a moment. The Turks have been at war almost continuously since 1914, and now the Ottoman Empire has been lost and their Generals are hungry for blood. I fear that Smyrna may become their sacrificial lamb.’

‘I see that you are greatly loved and have wonderful support here from so many Christian faiths. You are brave to remain here your Grace and we will pray that you will be safe.’

‘It is true that I have many friends here tonight Mr Jennings, but I wonder how many will renounce me before the cock crows. Do you think anyone will openly support me if the Turkish army marches into Smyrna?’

‘I’m not sure, your Grace, but the Great Powers may be happy to take you on board one of their ships until relations stabilise.’

Chrysostomos shook his head. ‘I will not leave Mr Jennings. If the Lord decrees it, this is will be my Golgotha.’

Jennings nodded. ‘Do you think Kemal and the Turks will be prepared to treat the civilian population of Smyrna kindly?’

‘I fear they will not, unfortunately the Christian people of Smyrna have much to fear. Do you know what the name Smyrna means, Mr Jennings?’

Jennings shook his head. ‘It is the Greek word for myrrh, as you know this was one of the gifts the Magi gave our Lord and it comes from the resin of a thorny tree which grows here. But perhaps you did not know that myrrh was used as an oil to anoint the dead, including our saviour when he was taken from the cross. A curious gift for a child, don’t you think? So you see Mr Jennings, with this name our city was destined to be a salve for death and sorrow, just as suffering children here will be in great need of your help and comfort.’

‘Smyrna, the city of myrrh. Fascinating. Then I have much to plan and you will be in my prayers. God bless you, your Grace.’ Jennings shook his

hand and he and Amy walked out into the cool evening air. As they rode home he wondered about the future of the forceful and charismatic Bishop.

‘Asa, what did he mean by “this will be my Golgotha?” ’ Amy asked.

‘Golgotha is the Hebrew and Greek name for Calvary, Amy, the hill where Christ was crucified.’ Amy reached across to squeeze his hand.

‘I will not forget him Amy. He is a brave man, someone who had pinned all his hopes on the triumph of his church and of Christianity in Asia Minor. Those hopes may be lost.’

‘If he refuses to leave Asa, what will the Turks do to him?’ Amy asked.

‘He is a very determined man who now faces a test of his will and his church may be destroyed around him. I saw it in his eyes, Amy. I felt his faith. He would fight and die for Christ.’

‘God help him,’ Amy whispered.

‘Have you heard of Polycarp, the Patron Saint of Smyrna?’ he asked her.

‘No, tell me Asa.’

‘He was also a Bishop of Smyrna and in the second century he was burned at the stake by the Romans for refusing to burn incense to their Emperor. Today, we may have met another martyr Bishop from Smyrna.’

Western Anatolia - The nurse - September 4, 1922

*The difficulty is not so great to die for a friend,
as to find a friend worth dying for.*

Homer

As Anthony rode slowly towards the coast with one arm holding Pavlos in front of him, he could feel the blood seeping through his uniform covering his hand and knew he would need to get first aid for him soon or it would be too late. He talked to his friend about their good times together but Pavlos could only reply in short sentences and sweat dripped from his forehead.

‘Remember that club we went to in Omonia, Pavlos? After that bottle of *ouzo*, you jumped onto the table and danced to the music and everyone was clapping as your kicks got higher and higher. Then you slipped on a napkin and fell off. I’ve never laughed so much in all my life.’

Pavlos sniggered before breaking into a small coughing fit.

‘We will get you to Alatsata soon. Remember Mrs Girdis and her daughters? They liked you and Mrs Girdis is a wonderful cook. She will have some hot *keftethes* for us to eat and we will eat peaches straight off the trees in her orchard. It will be wonderful Pavlos.’

‘I will meet the beautiful Eugenia again, Anthony. And she will nurse me back to health.’

‘Now I know that you are delirious Pavlos, next thing you will be saying that she loves you.’

Pavlos looked seriously at his friend and spoke in a hushed voice. ‘She does and she is the only woman I have ever loved Anthony.’

Anthony bowed his head. ‘I promise I will take you back to her, Pavlos. You must tell her this yourself.’

After several hours they arrived at a large tent with a red cross drawn on its side.

‘Thank God. Now we will get you a doctor Pavlos, you will be fine my friend.’

Anthony got down from his horse and carefully pulled Pavlos down into his arms. Injured soldiers were lying unattended around the entrance and several had blankets pulled over their heads. Anthony walked past them into the tent, carrying his friend. It was filled with soldiers on stretchers or on the ground and the smell of death and gangrene was in the air. A single Greek nurse stood amongst the dying men, giving water to one whose head was covered in bandages. She was thin and had pale skin and sad eyes.

Anthony spoke to her. ‘I have a man who needs urgent surgery Nurse.’

She replied, speaking slowly, as she refilled the glass with water. ‘The Turks will be here soon they say. The doctors and the patients who weren’t badly hurt all left hours ago. Dozens of injured have arrived since then and there is no one here to operate on your friend.’

‘Why are you still here?’ Anthony asked her.

Her face was tired, but she spoke with a clear voice. ‘I cannot leave them, they will have no one. You can leave him with me.’

Anthony looked around at the terrible scene and shook his head.

‘No. I will take him. We will find the doctors, they can’t be far ahead.’ He turned and walked away, talking to his friend. ‘I’m not leaving you here. We will find a surgeon or we will ride on to the coast.’

He draped Pavlos’s body over the front of the horse and climbed on behind him.

Slowly they set off again, westward, towards Alatsata and salvation.

Chesme - September 5, 1922

*I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing,
and that is that I know nothing.*

Socrates

John Caristinos and his friend Ahmet sat in the *taverna*, looking out over the harbour of Chesme. Caristinos drank *ouzo* mixed with water, while Ahmet, who had removed his fez, puffed on his water pipe and paused only to drink raki which he also mixed with water. The two drinks were very similar, one Greek, the other Turkish; they had a similar taste and both turned milky with water, a similar brew, but a culture apart. In front of the *taverna*, the sun reflected in the harbour as it began to set over the island of Chios.

‘Do you realize that Greece first became a nation here in Asia Minor, Ahmet?’

‘How is that so John?’

‘The first time that the Greek city states fought together was more than three thousand years ago at Troy, north of here. Before this, they were Spartans or Myceneans or Corinthians but during the Trojan War they were united for the first time, they were Hellenes.’

‘Ah yes John. That is true, but as you told me they didn’t fight together again till the Persians invaded seven hundred years later and after that Sparta destroyed Athens. You Greeks seemed to enjoy killing each other.’

‘Not as much as we enjoy killing foreigners Ahmet,’ Caristinos winked.

Ahmet waved his finger. ‘You are a peaceful man John. I think you have been drinking too much of that *ouzo*.’

‘One day you will learn that Mytilene *ouzo* is the nectar of the gods Ahmet and you will give up your Anatolian raki forever,’ Caristinos murmured as he relaxed and savoured the *ouzo* in his mouth.

‘I won’t argue with you over that, John. We are friends, we disagree about what we drink and smoke, but we don’t kill each other over these differences, but why then are our countrymen at war with each other? We are

not so different, we worship the same God, we eat the same *baklava*, we like the same music, we even ogle at the same women.’ Ahmet drew in the smoke from the water pipe.

‘The philosopher Socrates had an answer to your question Ahmet. Socrates liked to say - “I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance, and for this I am the wisest man alive”. There are no good reasons for this war Ahmet, only poor reasons such as greed and jealousy. Greek passions run strong. In ancient times, their actions mirrored the pride and jealousy of their Gods but it took an outside threat to unite them, Troy or Persia and it took a great leader, Alexander, to give them an empire. Today the modern Greeks are seeking their identity again and to find it, they need an enemy, Turkey. It’s an ancient dream of empire and greatness, but we have no Alexander, and the great powers have forsaken us, so it’s an impossible quest.’ Ahmet nodded his head and took a puff from his *shisha* pipe.

‘Our peoples have been fighting over these lands for thousands of years John, so is there any chance we can ever peacefully live with each other?’

‘Always believe Ahmet. The mainland Greeks lived under the Ottomans for four hundred years, but we Ionians have lived under the Persians and Ottomans for much longer. We know how to coexist and like an old married couple, we may not have the passion we once had, but we live comfortably together because we know each other so well.’

‘This political marriage has not been so comfortable recently John.’

Caristinos smiled. ‘A marriage has its ups and downs but there is much to recommend it. Will you ever marry Ahmet?’

‘Possibly one day, but she will need to bring me raki every evening and make rice pudding every night.’

Caristinos smiled and replied, ‘Then you should know one of Socrates’ other sayings Ahmet - “By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you’ll become happy; if you get a bad one, you’ll become a philosopher” ’.

Ahmet laughed. He knew he was blessed to have John as a friend; he was a rare character, a man of knowledge and a man who would defend his principles.

He felt it was a great pity that the Greek and Turkish politicians, who had started the war, did not share his wisdom.

Western Anatolia - September 5, 1922

Only the dead have seen the end of war.

Plato

It was getting dark and more than eight hours since Anthony had left the nurse in the medical tent. He wondered what would become of her, alone except for those dying men. War was brutality, stench and death. Pavlos was coughing softly, his breath was shallow and he could no longer talk. He lay face down on the front of Anthony's horse as they rode slowly along the dusty road towards the coast. Anthony talked to him, though his friend hadn't responded for several hours. 'We have achieved nothing Pavlos. We have killed the Turks and they have killed and defeated us. How did we allow ourselves to be led into this disaster? We have been fools.' He knew now that his father had been right. His enlistment had achieved nothing and he had not protected his family. Even worse, the invasion would bring a terrible retribution to the shores of Asia Minor and he felt he was as much at fault as the Generals and the King.

Shelter had to be found for Pavlos for the night. They arrived at a small Turkish village that they had passed through over two years earlier. He had remembered it as a picturesque street with white and red painted cottages nestled amongst the trees while children looked at them from behind their mothers' skirts. But it had changed. The trees and buildings were burnt and fallen walls and ashes spilled onto the road. Wisps of smoke came up from the larger heaps of burned timbers and rubble, and there were no sign of life.

He turned to Pavlos who was now making choking noises and knew he needed to get him down from the horse. As he got to the edge of the burnt out village he saw a house which had escaped the flames. Dragging Pavlos from his horse he carried him to the front door, which was partly open and he pushed it aside and lay him down on the wooden floor. He opened the front of his shirt and put his ear to his chest. His heart beat was rapid and his breaths were short and noisy.

‘Rest here old friend and I will find you a bed.’

Anthony stood up and walked into the next room but there was a stench in that house which was overpowering. He suddenly felt sick at the sight. An elderly Turkish man, his wife and a young girl all lay dead in a pool of dried blood, and each body had many bullet wounds. Anthony cradled his head in his hands, because he realised who had done this, his own retreating army. How could this atrocity be committed by his own forces, possibly men whom he knew? Whatever the Turks had done to Greek civilians, there was no excuse for revenge killing. Where was the discipline? Where was the humanity? He was sick and ashamed of his fellow Greeks. Slowly he shook his head and walked back to his friend.

Pavlos was still, and very quiet.

Pavlos, my dearest love,

I pray that you are well. We have heard terrible news from the war. I am prepared to accept our defeat, but I cannot bear the thought of you sick or injured.

Just keep you head down and don't try to be brave.

Anthony has written and told us how courageous you were in saving him at Sakarya, but please, please my darling, don't risk your life again. Some people here are leaving for the islands, but most are hoping that an armistice will be made soon and the war will end.

I long to feel your arms around me, your warm breath on my face, your lips kissing me.

Please come back to me soon my heart, my life.

Your eternal love,

Eugenia.

Alatsata - September 6, 1922

What I want and all my days ... is to go back to my house and see my day of homecoming. And if some God batters me far out on the wine-blue water, I will endure it, keeping a stubborn spirit inside me. For already I have suffered much and done much hard work on the waves and in the fighting.

Homer, *The Odyssey*

Eugenia could hear the horse as it came at a slow walk up the cobblestone street outside her house. She ran outside and saw a pitiful soldier on his horse.

‘It is me Eugenia,’ he cried out in a hoarse voice. ‘It is Anthony.’

She hadn’t seen Anthony Caristinos for over two years. She had been on the quay in 1919 with many others to welcome him and Pavlos and she remembered the handsome Captain at the head of a magnificent cavalry brigade. Then, he was a young strong soldier who had beamed at them with a wide infectious smile. But this was a different man.

She knew he had been fighting with Pavlos and had heard about their victories and defeats, but Anthony was completely changed. He had the look of someone who had been starved for many months, and he had aged, he looked more like 66 than 26. His face was gaunt, his eyes tearful, blood shot and sunken and the bones of his face seemed to protrude through his cheeks. He had the haunted expression of someone who had seen terrible things with a pained downturned mouth that spoke of loss and disaster.

His horse was also in terrible condition, so thin that each rib could be seen, its head hung very low and its mouth dripping with foam. There seemed to be a sack draped over it. Where was Pavlos? Anthony almost fell to the ground as he got out of the saddle and Eugenia and her mother rushed to help him. ‘Come inside the house,’ Maria pleaded with him.

‘I can’t stay, I must get home. We are totally defeated and the army is heading for evacuation, only a token force will stay to defend Smyrna. Those of us with families nearby have been allowed to warn them and I must ride on to Chesme straight away.’

‘But we were told the army would defend Smyrna, that we were safe,’ Maria replied.

‘Not true Mrs Girdis. Only a small force has been allocated to Paradise to delay the Turks from capturing our main army which is being evacuated through Smyrna. They will be no match for Kemal.’

‘Where is Pavlos?’ Eugenia asked.

Anthony turned to Eugenia; he had tears in his eyes. ‘He was shot Eugenia. He died on the way here.’ Eugenia slumped forward, crying. Her hands went up to her face. ‘I couldn’t save him, I tried but he was too badly injured. I’m so sorry. He was a hero and he saved my life and I couldn’t save him. And Eugenia, he loved you, he told me.’

‘I know,’ she sobbed, ‘and I loved him’.

‘It was the last words he spoke Eugenia. He said you were the only woman he ever loved. I promised I would bring him home to you.’ Anthony turned and pulled down the body of Pavlos, wrapped in a blanket. He laid it at the door of their house and pulled the blanket from his head. Eugenia peered at his face which seemed calm, her tears falling onto his cheeks and she leaned forward and kissed his lips. Maria put her arms around her daughter. ‘Oh no Eugenia. My poor daughter.’

Anthony spoke. ‘You must all leave Alatsata now. The Turks are not far behind me.’

‘But surely they will leave us alone. We are not soldiers,’ Maria replied.

‘You have to go. There were terrible atrocities committed by both sides and I saw unthinkable things that our own men had done and after all that has happened, there is no mercy left in this land, Mrs Girdis. Your family must escape from Asia Minor. Follow after me and you can escape from Chesme with my family.’

Maria looked confused. ‘We can’t go to Chesme with you Anthony. Christos is still in school in Smyrna and Elisaveth is in the abbey to the south.’

Anthony shook his head. ‘They will find a way to escape, they may already have gone. You can’t go there, I just rode through the village of Vourla nearby and the Turks killed everyone, women and children. You must escape now.’

Maria had an idea. ‘We will travel to get them both and escape from Smyrna. There are many ships there and we will get a berth.’

Anthony shook his head. 'This is a crazy plan, just leave now. I must ride on to Chesme to warn my family. Good luck and with God's help we will all meet in Chios soon.'

Anthony painfully climbed back onto his horse and set off. Maria and Eugenia held each other and cried at the death of Pavlos, the loss of their army and the dream of a greater Greece. They wept for the loss of their life here, their beautiful village and the home they had re-established.

'We must take his body to the priest,' Maria said. 'Then we must leave here.' The two women carried Pavlos across the square to the front of the church and went to the priest's house next door, and knocked on the door.

Maria spoke to him. 'Father, our dear friend Pavlos has been killed and we have brought him here for burial, but we have to hurry as we have terrible news. All is lost, the army is defeated and the Turks are coming. All Greeks in the village must leave Alatsata tonight.'

'This is terrible news. I will ring the Church Bell to warn the parishioners and then I will arrange the funeral of your friend. We have much to do.'

Maria dried her face with her apron and spoke purposefully to Eugenia. 'You must go now and tell your sister Arête and her husband of what has happened. Tell them to pack and come here with the carriage. After we bury Pavlos we will go south to the abbey to get your sister and then to Smyrna for your brother. Go quickly. I will go to our neighbours and warn them.'

Eugenia set off to Arête and Georgios's house in the lower part of the village. She was crying and shaking but was also concerned for Arête who was about eight weeks from giving birth. Arête was furious at the news. 'It is what I expected. The stupid Greek King had no right attacking the Turks and he has ruined our future here. We must leave Alatsata again but we will return after the war is over. This is our home Eugenia, but yes, we will leave now.'

Georgios hurriedly packed the carriage with some clothes and valuables, but there was little room for more than a small bag each. He turned to look at the house he had built and paused to think of the life that they had there. Arête could see her husband's distress at leaving their home and she put her head on his shoulder. 'We will be back here soon Georgios, and our child will grow up in the beautiful house you built for us.'

'We have to think of our baby now. It needs to be born in a safe place and you need to be healthy to look after it. So let's leave now and not look

back,' Georgios replied.

As Eugenia walked slowly back to the family home, she thought of the soldier who had loved her but who was now gone forever, even before they had the opportunity to hold each other. He had died before she had the chance to look into his eyes and tell him she loved him. She would never laugh with him again, never caress his face or make love to him. How could life be this cruel?

She had tears in her eyes as she walked up the stairs to her bedroom and took out the letters he had sent her. Her mother came into the room and found her sitting on her bed, head bowed forward with her hands holding the letters to her cheek. She looked up crying. 'I loved Pavlos, Mama.' Maria held her and wiped the tears from her face.

'I'm so sorry Eugenia. We all lose the people we love, but you have lost love almost before it began. Remember he will always be in your heart.' They sat together as the church bells rang throughout the village and the two women walked to the balcony and looked down at the village square, filling quickly with frightened and angry people.

'Must we really leave here Mama?' Eugenia asked. 'I love this house and I can't bear the thought of living in Athens again. Those five years were the worst of our lives.' She looked into her mother's anxious eyes. The reality of the approaching Turkish army and their terrible reputation of revenge became clear.

'We must go tonight Eugenia, but we will return. I pray we will not be away for long this time.'

After they arrived with the carriage, Maria took Georgios aside for a few minutes to speak to him alone and she then asked her two daughters to join them. 'We have decided, Georgios will take both of you girls to Chesme to Mr Caristinos's boat and you will go with him to Chios. Georgios will return here with the carriage and he and I will go to the abbey to get Elisaveth and from there we will go on to Smyrna to pick up Christos. We will get a boat from Smyrna to Chios where we will be reunited.'

Eugenia and Arête looked at each other and both shook their heads. 'I will never leave my husband or you mother, I am going with you.' Arête took Georgios by the arm.

'And I refuse to leave you all, we will be safer together anyway and Elisaveth and Christos will need me.' Eugenia and Arête would not change their minds. They would go together to the abbey and then to Smyrna.

There was only room in the carriage for Eugenia to put a small bag of belongings which included her beloved letters from Pavlos, whilst Maria carried a handbag with her money and jewellery. They would be leaving with barely the clothes on their backs. But there was one last task; the family walked across the square to Tis Panayias church. The young priest was standing in front of the vestry, with Pavlos's body lying on a bench in front of him and, surprisingly, many parishioners were present. After they arrived, the priest began the funeral liturgy and concluded with a service to pray for the safety of the village and parishioners. Finally, he blessed all who were leaving the village.

Eugenia and the others came to the priest to receive communion and she spoke to him after she sipped the holy wine. 'Father, you must leave too. It will not be safe here.'

He smiled at her and shook his head. 'Some of our older townsfolk have decided to stay. They wish to be in the church when the Turks come and I will remain with them.' He pointed to about a dozen white haired people kneeling and praying. Eugenia looked into his calm brave eyes.

'God Bless you Father,' she said and kissed his hand. Maria and the others lit candles to the Holy Mother and Eugenia lit another for the soul of Pavlos and finally they prayed that their family might be safely reunited. His body was carried out to the graveyard and placed in an empty crypt where the priest said a prayer and tossed holy water over the grave site. Eugenia kissed the crypt and Maria and the others led her back to their house.

Most people left on the road west, for Chesme, but the Girdis family boarded their carriage and headed in the other direction, to the east. And towards the advancing Turkish troops.

Chesme - September 6, 1922

*I am he, father, about whom you are asking,
I have returned after having been away for twenty years.*

Homer, *The Odyssey*

On the way to Chesme, his horse had fallen and died on the roadside. Anthony had walked the rest of the way, finally limping up to the house in the darkness. When he stumbled through the front door of his family home, his father didn't recognise the thin bearded figure dressed in rags and John Caristinos was startled and jumped out of his chair.

'Patera, it is me, your son.'

Caristinos rushed towards Anthony and took him in his arms. He called his wife and daughter. *'Nene! Kyriake! Come here! Anthony is here.'*

They helped him to a chair. Caristinos was shocked at his condition. His body was like a skeleton, his clothes were blood-stained and full of lice and beads of sweat fell from his forehead. He spoke in a whisper between coughs. *'Pavlos is dead. The army has been destroyed and all is lost. The Turks are nearby and they will show you no mercy. I just passed through the town of Vourla, the women had been raped and then butchered, all the Greeks were killed, even the children. I saw hundreds of bodies. All the family must escape tonight,'* Anthony said firmly.

Caristinos could hear the desperation in Anthony's voice and understood that the fires of Hades had come to Asia Minor.

'Alright, but first come into the bathroom and we will clean you.'

They took off his clothes, shaved his face and bathed him till the water turned dark with grime.

His father noticed the major's epaulettes on his uniform. *'You were promoted?'*

'It's not important Patera. You were right, the war was pointless and we have destroyed your life here. I fear that many more will die before this is ended,' Anthony said.

Caristinos acknowledged that his family was in grave danger and realised that they had to leave Asia Minor immediately. Acting quickly, he hurried to his daughter Marianthe's house to tell them the news and with his son-in-law Gus went down to the wharf to ready his boat to take the family to Chios and to safety. On the way he warned his fellow villagers of the coming danger and within hours all the Greeks and Armenians of Chesme who had boats were mobilising for escape. Fishing and rowing boats, anything that floated, were gotten ready for the trip. The majority of the population without a means of escape wandered around in panic. They would have to wait and pray.

As the family helped Anthony down to the pier, he was relieved that they were leaving Chesme. The boat was large enough for the Caristinos family and another four friends, but they could only take their jewellery, there was no room for anything else. Caristinos asked Gus to take the wheel of the boat, kissed Nene, his children and young Tony, his first grandson and then he spoke to them.

'I will not be going with you. Just as I remained behind during the Great Persecution, I will stay here again.'

The girls burst into tears and let out cries of anguish '*Patera*, no, no, no, you must come with us!' He kissed Anthony on the forehead. 'This is where I stay. Kemal would not harm an old man like me and I will be safe with my Turkish friends. Anthony, you will be the head of the house in Chios. I will look after our home and properties here, so that you will have an inheritance to be proud of when you return. God be with you all.' Marianthe and Kyriake tried to hold him on board, but he gently pulled their arms away and climbed off the boat. 'Don't forget our dowry boxes *Patera* and bring them when you come to visit us,' Kyriake pleaded.

The boat glided out of the harbour, and headed towards Chios, a few miles away. His children cried out '*Adios patera, Se agapo* - Goodbye father, I love you.' Every person on that boat waved goodbye and most were crying as they watched Caristinos's lone figure on the wharf.

It was not respect that they all felt for him that evening.

It was *agape*.

Smyrna - September 7, 1922

The test of any man lies in action.

Pindar

Jennings had seen many refugees before, but this was different. This was a crisis. As he was driven to the YMCA Building that morning at 408 Quay St, there were lines of people streaming through the city. Massacres of Greeks in the villages north and east of Smyrna had prompted entire communities to pack their belongings and flee to the safety of the great city. Some walked, others rode but all carried their belongings with them. They were young and old, pregnant women, some were filthy from days of travel and many were ill or injured.

At the quay a great drama was unfolding. Thousands were camped around the Y and along the length of the waterfront and the sick and weary were already lying down under any available trees. The only people leaving on ships seemed to be Greek soldiers; the passenger ferries had left. When he entered the building, Dimi was anxiously waiting for him.

‘Mr Jennings, people think we are here to help them. I tell them that we are YMCA workers and we can only help the boys, but hundreds keep coming through the doors asking for food or shelter.’

Jennings looked around at the people, sitting on the floor; hungry children and crying babies in their mother’s arms. He knew it was time for a change of plan. Thousands of lives were at stake and he needed to help them. The Y would be his instrument. It always upset him to see people in distress and he felt their pain, but his anguish was quickly replaced by practical thoughts. These people must be fed and housed and medical care had to be arranged. This was his new vocation and out of this chaos he had to bring hope.

‘The YMCA in Smyrna is now an emergency relief organisation, Dimi. If we see an open mouth we will feed it. We don’t count numbers because we cannot afford to despair or panic; we must remain calm, do our best and

never give up. Now, come with me, you will be my interpreter.' He spent the morning organising the YMCA and the few American Red Cross personnel, and formed an emergency committee - the American Relief League. He opened the top three storeys of the Y Building for accommodating the weakest refugees and he began arranging the provision of clean water and food.

He obtained several fire trucks to provide water for the thirsty refugees, many of whom had no protection from the heat and the sun. Alexandros was sent to several bakeries nearby and using the Y's limited funds, negotiated with them to supply bread for as long as flour was available. When the first food and water were delivered that evening, it was clear that many refugees had not eaten for many days and the crowds were becoming difficult to control.

Vasken was invaluable in trying to calm the Armenian refugees who had gathered in a large group near the railway pier. They had every reason to be worried as they had been subjected to executions, death marches and concentration camps resulting in the deaths of countless thousands.

'My people are beside themselves. If the city falls, I'm sure that many would prefer to commit suicide rather than face the Turks,' Vasken said.

'Your people have suffered greatly and we have to do what we can to support them. Hopefully the warships of the Great Powers in the harbour will help us get them to safety,' Jennings replied.

'Your President Wilson pushed for an Armenian state protected by the Treaty of Sevres, but the Turks ignored it the day after it was signed and it only served to incite them; since then thousands more were marched to their deaths and some were even deported from Smyrna. Politics has failed us Mr Jennings, I will stay and help of course, but if my people are not evacuated they will die.'

Jennings held his shoulders. 'You're a brave man Vasken and I know you have suffered yourself. I will do my best for you and your people, you have seen enough tragedy.'

It was dark when Jennings finally went home to his family at the College in Paradise. He was exhausted and when he arrived his two sons ran up to him. 'Dad, you should have seen them. We saw the soldiers shooting and falling down. They ran past here, and some of them asked us for something to drink. Mum was taking them water all afternoon.' Nearby, Jennings could see a large Turkish flag flying over the tents on the nearby hill, which indicated

that the Greek position had been overrun and replaced by a massive Turkish encampment.

He looked at Amy. 'I thought that I had a busy day Amy, but I see that you had an even more eventful afternoon.'

She held him tightly, whilst looking at the hills nearby. 'Many men died out there today Asa.'

Jennings frowned. 'It's time that you and the children left Amy, I'm sorry I brought you into this danger.'

Amy nodded. 'You are right Asa, we will leave but you must come with us.'

'Yes father,' Asa Junior joined in. 'It's too dangerous to stay here. Leave with us.'

Wilbur put his arms around his father's leg, tears running down his face. 'We can't go without you father.'

Jennings picked up his two sons in his arms. 'The people here need me more than you do, my brave sons. You have to look after your mother and sister while I stay here.'

Putting his sons down, he looked into Amy's eyes. 'I have much work here, the suffering has just begun. You know I can't leave.'

Amy knew that arguing was futile. She walked towards him and wrapped her arms around his back. Feeling his bent spine through his shirt, she asked herself whether he was strong enough to withstand the demands of the task ahead, but then she put her head against his chest, and heard his strong regular heart beat.

He looked into her eyes. 'This is why the Lord spared me Amy. I am here for a reason.'

North of Ephesus - September 7, 1922

A good man cannot be harmed, either in life or death.

Socrates, from Plato's Apology

The abbey was built in the middle ages and was home to Elisaveth and fifteen Greek orthodox nuns who lived a quiet spiritual existence amongst the hills and olive trees. Instead of going directly to Smyrna, the Girdis family had travelled south for a full day to reach the abbey and when they arrived at the stone wall surrounding the buildings, Georgios rang the bell at the entrance. A young nun opened the iron gate. 'We are the family of Elisaveth of Alatsata and we need to talk to her please,' Georgios said.

'Just wait and I will find her,' the nun replied. She walked back into the convent and a few minutes later Elisaveth came out. She was startled when she saw Georgios and the family in the carriage and she opened the gate and came out. 'What has happened? Where is Christos, is he ill?' she asked in a trembling voice.

'We are all well, but have come to take you to safety. The Turks are nearby and the war is coming here Elisaveth. All Christian people are in danger, so we are leaving Asia Minor and you must come with us.' Her mother and sisters embraced her and finally Elisaveth pulled away. 'I will speak to the Abbess. Wait here and I will come back soon.'

Sometime later, Elisaveth returned with an elderly nun. 'I am the Abbess, Mother Paraskevi. Is it true? Are the Turks coming back?'

'Yes Holy Mother,' Georgios replied, 'the Greek army is defeated and the Turks are north of here, not only soldiers, but the ruthless Chete militia who care for nothing. They are intent on destroying everything Greek in Asia Minor and you are in great danger. You must all leave as soon as possible.'

The old nun spoke gravely. 'All the young nuns will leave as you say and Elisaveth you must go now with your family. I and a few older nuns will remain. Our order has prayed here for centuries and we will continue to do so. The Turks will not harm old women.'

Elisaveth knelt before the older woman and kissed her hands. ‘May Mary protect you from harm Holy Mother.’

‘Go with peace Elisaveth. May the Lord be with you and your family.’ Elisaveth walked to the carriage and into her sister’s arms. Maria kissed the old nun’s hand and bade her goodbye. ‘God bless and care for you, Holy Mother.’

Georgios took the horse’s reins and the carriage moved off slowly, northwards towards Smyrna.

South of Smyrna - September 7, 1922

But learn that to die is a debt we must all pay.

Euripides

Georgios and Arête were in the front seat of the carriage with the other women sitting behind them. Eugenia and Maria sat on either side of Elisaveth, who had her arms around them. As the carriage made its way closer to Smyrna, the sound of artillery fire grew stronger and stronger, and Eugenia became frightened.

‘Everything will be fine,’ Elisaveth spoke, trying to calm her. ‘We will get Christos from school, and catch a boat to Chios. After the soldiers leave, you will go back to Alatsata and I will return to the abbey.’ Elisaveth felt her voice shaking slightly but knew she had to calm her voice. Maria trembled and quietly crossed herself each time she heard the guns fire.

‘They will be the Greek guns, defending the city from the Turks,’ Eugenia spoke to the others.

‘How can you tell whose guns they are? Just be hopeful that this road does not lead directly towards them.’ Arête turned around, looking crossly at her sister.

‘We are a long way from the artillery fire ladies, relax and we will soon be in downtown Smyrna, and you will be able to go shopping in the Rue Franque again,’ Georgios reassured them, and put an arm around Arête whom he pulled close to him. She kissed his cheek and put her head on his shoulder.

As the carriage turned a corner, they saw a group of Turkish soldiers sitting on the roadside. Georgios couldn’t turn the carriage around so he decided to continue forward at a steady pace. As the carriage came level with the soldiers, their squad leader stood up and brandished his rifle. ‘Stop, who are you?’ he demanded.

Georgios replied ‘We are peaceful people from Alatsata. We are travelling to Smyrna to leave Asia Minor.’

The Turkish soldier raised his gun and shot Georgios Roumanos through the chest and he fell backwards, his body falling between Elisaveth and Eugenia. The four women screamed out in horror and Arête threw herself over her husband's body and cradled his head to her chest. Georgios's blood flowed over his wife's dress as she cried and rocked him in the back of the carriage. The soldiers rushed forward and grasped the reigns of the startled horse.

'You will not be leaving, Greek,' the Turkish soldier joked to his men. 'We have a nice carriage to take us to Smyrna boys.' The soldiers cheered, and threw the family and Georgios's body off the carriage. They climbed into the seats, opening the women's bags and laughing as they headed off towards Smyrna.

The three women knelt on the road around Arête as she sat on the ground, cradling Georgios's head. She spoke to his lifeless face. 'Wake up Georgios. Open your eyes my darling. Come back to us Georgios.'

After a time Arête stopped talking and began crying inconsolably and Elisaveth held her sister in her arms. They were alone with no water, under a scorching sun and a clear blue sky about seven miles from Smyrna. Elisaveth knew they couldn't stay there and rose and wiped her eyes. 'We can't carry him, he must be buried here Arête.'

Arête slowly rose up and nodded. They found softer soil under a nearby olive tree, where the women dug a shallow grave with their hands, and gently placed his body to rest. Arête spoke to her older sister. 'Elisaveth, bless this wonderful and gentle man for his journey to heaven. Bless this gracious father who will never lay eyes on his unborn child.'

Elisaveth knelt and prayed for the soul of Georgios Roumanos. They covered his body with earth and fashioned a cross with stones. After a time, the four women, their dresses covered in earth and Georgios's blood, stood up and crossed themselves. They had lost everything including Maria's money and Eugenia's precious letters.

Slowly they turned and holding each other, began walking to Smyrna and to Christos.

The Aronis School, Smyrna - September 8, 1922

*Music is a moral law.
It gives soul to the universe,
wings to the mind, flight to the imagination,
and charm and gaiety to life.*
Plato

Orchestra practice was usually exciting for Christos, who was the first violin in the Aronis School orchestra. The sounds of all the instruments around him, the directions of the conductor, the soaring harmony of the violins and the melody of the clarinets, Christos loved it all. It took some of his thoughts away from the terrible news of the Greek army retreat and evacuation of the city. No one knew what the Turks would do when they entered Smyrna and whether the Christian population would be spared.

His teachers said that Smyrna and its population were so valuable to an emerging Turkish nation, rising from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, that it would be saved and prosper. Although the remaining students wanted to believe this, they were nervous. Would an invading army leave them alone? They had heard stories of massacres in the villages and the large numbers of Greeks and Armenians streaming into the city in the last few days had done nothing to allay their fears. The streets had filled with refugees and many students had already left with their families for Athens or the nearby islands. The shopkeeper across the road from the school had sent his wife and daughter to Samos; he said until things had settled down.

Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* was reaching its crescendo and Christos knew he would need to concentrate, but his mind turned to his mother and sisters. He was looking forward to seeing them on the weekend when Georgios was due to come and take him home and he would try to convince them to leave for Chios as there was no sense in taking any chances. They

could leave in Mr Caristinos's boat and he looked forward to seeing the old man who had been so kind to him.

The symphony concluded with a flourish, but the conductor and music teacher, Mr Adrianus, was not happy. 'That was terrible. I have never heard so many mistakes in all my years at the school. The violin section in particular was out of rhythm. You are going to have to work much harder.'

Christos winked at Antonios Cocolas; the two had played violin together for the past year and had become good friends. Antonios made a gesture with his bow towards the teacher and Christos laughed. Mr Adrianus turned towards them. 'Why do you think that is so funny Mr Girdis? And why are you smiling so much Mr Cocolas? Both of you can spend an hour here practising when we leave and next time bring your manners with you.'

The boys dropped their heads as Mr Adrianus and the rest of the orchestra left the room. They didn't mind the extra work and loved their music especially when they played in perfect unison, but another hour would be tiresome.

'Mr Adrianus is an amateur Christos. One day you will play for the finest conductors in Europe, and he will be nothing but a bad memory.'

'And you will be by my side Antonios, and my girlfriend will be the most beautiful Italian soprano you have ever seen!'

'Ha-ha, what a dreamer you are. You have never met a soprano and only have eyes for the shopgirl across the street,' Antonios replied.

'Oh, and you don't dream about sopranos Antonios? Do you dream about flute players then?'

Just as Antonios was about to reply, the door opened and an ashen faced Mr Adrianus came through the door. 'Christos your family are here to see you. Come with me.'

Holding his violin, Christos walked with him to the school foyer, the teacher's hand resting on his shoulder. 'What does this mean? Mr Adrianus comforting me?' A coldness came over him.

The women were sitting on the bench outside the principal's office. His mother and sisters had dirt on their hands and faces and their clothes were torn, but worse, Arête's dress was covered in blood. His mother leapt up and took him in her arms and his sisters came to his side and kissed him.

'Where is Georgios?' he asked, fearing the answer.

'Our beautiful Georgios is in heaven, Christos. He has been killed,' Elisaveth said.

Christos sobbed, 'Who killed him?'

'The Turks shot him. We don't know why,' Elisaveth answered. 'We have come to take you away, Christos. We are leaving Asia Minor and will catch a boat from the quay.'

The women went with Christos to his dormitory to get his belongings and they left the school; Elisaveth carried his bag, while Christos held his violin case.

The family walked arm-in-arm, out into the crowded street and into chaos.

Smyrna - September 8, 1922

*One who is injured ought not to return the injury,
For on no account can it be right to return an injury,
However much we have suffered from him.*

Socrates

The streets leading to the quay were filled with thousands of people and every form of transportation; donkeys laden with packs, camels from the interior, carts filled to overflowing with people and belongings, European touring cars and elegant carriages. The defeat of the Greek resistance in Paradise had sent the people of Smyrna into panic. Greek and Armenian refugees, most walking with suitcases, slowly made their way to the quay and the hope of a boat to any safe haven. The Girdis family joined the surging throng of humanity, borne along with the hopes of thousands of others.

Their faces looked towards the sea for their salvation as they trudged together through the Greek and European quarters and past the shops and clubs they once enjoyed, but now ignored. At the end of the road the dark blue waters of the harbour came into sight, raising their hopes, but the beautiful Smyrna waterfront had been transformed. By now, more than two hundred thousand people had gathered on the broad esplanade, surging up to the seawall with nowhere to go and the walkers slowed as they merged with those waiting.

Hundreds of horses, donkeys, dogs and chickens added to the congestion and the noise. Tied to the quay, a few small sailing boats were loading people and a Greek troop ship was taking on a line of soldiers while armed troops prevented anyone else boarding. In the middle of the harbour, well off shore and at anchor, were about a dozen warships and several freighters. The family stopped in a side street, which wasn't as crowded.

'Mama, can we pay the sailing boat captains to take us from the wharf?' Christos asked.

‘The Turks took all our money and we have nothing to pay them,’ Maria replied. Christos shook his head sullenly. They learnt that the few people who had boarded the small boats to escape had paid huge sums of money to the captains. It was evident that the family and the majority of the refugees would have to wait for evacuation.

‘The Greek navy will come back for us, once they have taken off their soldiers,’ Eugenia reassured her family and herself. ‘They can’t leave us here.’

On the quay nearby, Christos noticed people standing in front of a fire truck, where they were filling cups and bottles with water, while other people were going to a tent in front of the YMCA building and returning with food. Eugenia and Christos slowly made their way to the tent, where a small bent man in a white suit and hat was handing out loaves of bread.

He smiled and handed them a small loaf.

She thanked him ‘*Efcharisto Kyrios*’ and smiled back at him and he replied ‘You are welcome’.

She wondered what sort of man was this, giving without asking anything in return and showing strength in the face of calamity. Though he seemed small and frail, his kind face and firm voice gave her hope and they took the bread to the others and ate together.

‘A small man in a white suit gave us this bread Mama,’ Eugenia said as she tore off a piece from the loaf.

Elisaveth replied, ‘This bread is holy bread and the man in the suit is an angel. The Lord sent him to look after us, and we should ask for his continued help’. The praying on the quay had begun.

Smyrna - 'Fear not!' - September 9, 1922

Time brings all things to pass.

Aeschylus

News that the Turks had entered the city reached the waterfront and a strange silence descended over the crowd. Several people panicked and, using makeshift rafts, tried to paddle out to reach the warships in the harbour, but most waited quietly, resigned to their fate. The Greek naval transports had loaded the last of their soldiers and were steaming out of the bay and the people of Smyrna were now defenceless.

At 11 am the first of Kemal's Turkish horseman trotted past the closed shops and onto the quay. They wore black fezzes with a red crescent and star and carried threatening long curved swords, and to the refugees the fearsome cavalry seemed like apparitions of death.

As they rode past, they held up a hand to the crowds and shouted 'Fear not! Fear not!' and the miserable refugees cowered away in fear and disbelief. Soon after, repeated cracks of gunfire and screams echoed from the streets behind the quay. People were running through the streets, screaming and falling as they were shot, whilst others were cut to pieces on the street or in their houses. The looting of the shops, clubs and houses had begun and the booty was carted off to the Turkish quarter for safe storage.

Unaware of the carnage in the city, Jennings was returning with provisions from a bakery in the Turkish quarter when he heard angry shouts and gunfire. 'This may be a risky situation', he thought. He was suddenly confronted by a mob of panicked men running towards him with a squad of Turkish militia in pursuit firing their guns and he could tell from their shouts that they were Armenians. Jennings carried his American flag for just this reason and pulled it around himself like a cape. He backed onto a wall and watched as the Turkish soldiers ran past and then walked sideways along the building, towards the quay, making sure to keep the flag in full view. He

finally arrived at the Y and walked through the door with the flag still draped around his shoulders.

‘I didn’t think you were such a patriot, Mr Jennings,’ Vasken joked as he saw him.

‘The star spangled banner has many uses. Not the least being its ability to provide refuge in times of danger,’ Jennings replied, his body still shaking.

‘It’s my turn to man the water truck. Vasken, you stay here in the building, it’s too dangerous for you to be on the streets.’

Jennings spent the morning distributing water from the fire truck, and at noon he noticed Vasken running towards him.

‘What has happened now?’ he asked.

‘The Armenian quarter has been isolated by the Turks. Soldiers guard the entrance to all the streets, people are being systematically robbed and killed and the Turks are throwing petroleum on the houses and burning them down. They also exploded a bomb near the Armenian Girls’ school and many were killed,’ he spoke breathlessly.

Jennings shook his head. ‘We are powerless to help them.’

‘It is worse, there are about five thousand people taking refuge from the Turks in the Armenian seminary. They have armed themselves with whatever guns they have and the Turkish army have set up machine gun squads to surround the buildings so that no one can escape. A grenade was thrown through a window and dozens were killed. We must try and help them!’

‘I will speak to US Consul Horton today,’ replied Jennings. ‘Possibly he could mediate with the Turks.’

By that afternoon, tens of thousands more refugees from outer Smyrna and surrounding countryside had arrived on the quay and Jennings realised that his aid program had been overwhelmed. His reaction was to remain calm and redouble his efforts. Flour and bread were in short supply and he wired Admiral Bristol in *Constantinople* and convinced him of the rapidly developing humanitarian crisis. Bristol agreed to have his destroyers transport flour to Smyrna and to give permission for American sailors to guard the local bakeries, but did not agree to his ships evacuating the refugees. Once the flour arrived the following morning, Jennings’ bread supply would be greatly enhanced. He was buoyed that his fire trucks had been replenished with water by mid-afternoon. Dimi and Alexandros drove the trucks through the crowds, parked on the quay and recommenced supplying water to the thirsty refugees.

The Y building was overflowing with sick and injured people and Jennings and his YMCA staff worked tirelessly to help them. He witnessed the entrance of the Turkish troops onto the quay and was horrified as they herded the refugees closer to the waterfront. Soon after he watched as an American motor launch was tied to the wharf in an effort to rescue US nationals and within minutes it was swarmed by frantic refugees and sank in the harbour.

Jennings decided to walk to the US consulate and again wrapped the US flag around his shoulders for protection. Fortunately, the Turks let him pass and he arrived at the consulate which was now guarded by a dozen US troops. Meeting with Horton were several senior American businessmen and their families, the French consul and Bishop Chrysostomos. The cleric was quiet and seemed occupied with his own thoughts.

Jennings spoke to Horton. 'Sir, you need to apply pressure on Bristol to commence evacuations of the refugees using the American destroyer fleet. We also need to assist thousands of Armenians trapped in their houses and in their seminary who are being killed as we speak.'

Horton ignored Jennings and spoke to the group. 'Our current efforts centre on the evacuation of all US nationals. There are still many in the city and it is becoming increasingly difficult to rescue them. This morning, one of our boats was boarded by refugees and sunk on the waterfront, so in future, all boats coming to the quay will be protected by an armed guard. We only have capabilities to assist American citizens, and can't help anyone else, but I understand the French have sent soldiers to help the Armenians. I am leaving for *Constantinople* in a few days and you should leave the city as soon as possible.'

Jennings spoke up. 'Sir, the refugees on the quay only reacted that way because they were desperate. People are being shot down in the street and we must help them. Our navy needs to launch a concerted relief effort; there are hundreds of thousands of people on the waterfront and unless something is done immediately, there will be a humanitarian disaster of epic proportions. We can't stand by and let this happen, that would be unconscionable.'

'You must consider all options, Mr Jennings. That is your job. But we aren't responsible for them and in any case, we don't have the manpower or facilities to help all these people. You will need to look elsewhere for assistance.'

He turned to the Bishop. 'Your Grace, however, is welcome to stay under our protection and to be evacuated. I understand the French consul has also volunteered to protect you.'

Bishop Chrysostomos had already refused to leave with the Greek High Commissioner and did not accept sanctuary from the Roman Catholic bishops; he rose up and spoke to Horton. 'I am a Shepherd, and must stay with my flock. Many thanks for your kind offer, but I only came to seek help for my people and as you are unable to assist I must return to the Cathedral. I bid you all goodbye and God's blessings upon you.'

Horton nodded towards him. 'Goodbye your Grace, the soldiers will escort you back to your cathedral.' The others bowed to him as he left and Jennings sensed the gravity of the Bishop's decision and admired his calm resolve.

Consider all options ... he couldn't believe Horton's response. Currently his only option was his small American Relief Committee. Frustrated at his inability to sway the consul, he returned to his workers on the quay. His battle to save the lives of the refugees would continue without the consul's assistance.

Smyrna - The martyr - September 9, 1922

*There is nothing more foolish,
Nothing more given to outrage,
Than a useless mob.*

Herodotus

Later that afternoon, a squad of Turkish soldiers armed with swords and Mausers entered the Cathedral of St Fotini. The Bishop stood at the altar in front of the beautiful wooden sculptured screen and several hundred people were hearing his mass. The soldiers dragged Chrysostomos from the altar and down the aisle of the cathedral as many in the congregation cried out for them to let him go but the Turks took no notice. Whilst he was being carried away, women reached out to touch his robes.

He was taken to the Turkish general in charge of the troops in Smyrna, Nureddin Pasha, who had set up his headquarters in the Konak, the former Ottoman Governor's residence. Pasha spoke angrily at the cleric, 'You have incited the Christians here against us and you urged the Greek government to launch its attack. What do you have to say for yourself?'

'I never asked for war and only reacted to the many persecutions against my people and now again your violence towards the people in this city is outrageous and is a crime against humanity,' Chrysostomos replied.

'I have nothing more to say to you,' Pasha replied. 'Take him outside and give him to the mob,' he ordered his soldiers. Pasha then walked onto the steps to address the Turkish crowd that had assembled in front of his headquarters. He shouted to them, 'If this man has done good to you, do good to him. If he has done harm to you, do harm to him'.

The mob surrounded the old man. At first they merely looked at him but then a few stepped forward to lift and carry him away. He was taken inside a nearby barber's shop, sat in the chair and wrapped in a white drape. They began by cutting off his beard and blood ran from his face as his nose was

cut. Then an ear was removed and the drape was covered in blood as he was dragged outside. The bloody sight seemed to spur the crowd on and in a scene of utter depravity, the priest was beaten with fists and clubs and knocked to the ground and kicked repeatedly. He neither begged nor screamed whilst he was attacked, and blessed his persecutors with his right hand till it was struck off with a sword. Trying to rise to his feet, he was set on repeatedly until he was stabbed in the chest and Chrysostomos, broken and bloodied, died in the street.

Picking up his body, the mob then ran screaming, parading him through the streets, his arms and legs flailing.

For the second time in history, a bishop of Smyrna had been martyred.

Smyrna - September 11, 1922

You will never do anything in this world without courage.

Aristotle

Jennings and Amy rose early as Horton had made arrangements that the family would be evacuated that morning, along with the boys from the American school whom he had supervised as YMCA Boys' secretary. They packed their suit cases and boarded the car for the journey. Jennings instructed the driver to go to the Y building before travelling to the consulate. Evacuating American families were allowed to take one servant with them and he knew that Armenian men of Vasken's age would either be murdered or marched away to face certain death. He realised that he was unable to protect Vasken any longer and knew what he had to do. At the Y, he found him, packing loaves of bread into the truck for distribution.

'You will come with me now Vasken; you are leaving Smyrna with my family today.' Vasken's eyes brimmed with tears and he reached forward and clasped Jennings's hands. 'God bless you Mr Jennings,' he said.

Jennings spoke to Dimi and Alexandros. 'You will remain to help me with the relief work, and we will leave after it is completed.'

They set off in the car to the consulate where Horton was pleased that the family had arrived for evacuation. 'Jennings, all Americans, including you, should leave Smyrna as soon as possible. I can't protect you and there is little you will be able to do here anyway, now that the Turks have taken the city. It is too dangerous.'

'I won't be leaving Sir; there is much I can accomplish.'

'Well so be it, you are no longer my responsibility. I am evacuating the American School this morning to the USS *Edsall*. The schoolboys will arrive at 10 am and the sailors will escort them to the launches. Your family will go with them.'

'I have a servant, who also needs to go with them.' Jennings brought Vasken forward, who bowed his head to Horton.

‘Alright, but only one,’ Horton insisted.

Two large buses with the teachers and about sixty students from the school arrived outside the consulate. The armed US sailors dressed in spotless white uniforms formed a guard around the group and marched them to the harbour. The quay was busier than ever, as many more refugees had arrived overnight and during the morning. The sailors struggled to protect the motor launches from the surging crowds as the large party, including Jennings’s family, moved towards the boats. As they began to board, Jennings shook Vasken’s hand. ‘Look after my family for me.’ Vasken nodded. ‘I promise you I will, sir.’

Jennings kissed his three children in turn on the forehead, and Bertha and Wilbur began to cry when they knew he was staying behind.

‘I’ll be fine children; you look after your mother while I’m here. I’ll see you in a few weeks.’

Amy was shocked at the scene on the quay. She tried to remain calm so as not to frighten the children, but she was shaking as she embraced her husband and kissed him on both cheeks. ‘Now you stay out of trouble Mr Jennings. I know you need to save the world but your family needs you too.’

She then boarded the boat and reached out to him one last time whilst he stood on the wharf, and as the boat moved away, their hands were slowly pulled apart. Looking back, Amy observed how weak and vulnerable he looked as he stood on the pier, small, bent and alone in his white suit and hat, with thousands of refugees milling behind him. She noticed that his face wasn’t sad, but remained determined and calm as he waved goodbye.

Jennings was relieved that his family were now completely safe and watched intently as they were ferried towards the safety of the US destroyer. His responsibilities were simpler now, he could concentrate on the refugees who were rapidly losing hope. As he turned back to face them, he could see the resignation in their eyes; many now believed that they would die in the next week. For them it was just a matter of time.

But no, he thought, failure was unacceptable. His mind was racing ahead and he realised that supplying food and water was not enough; he needed to do much more because without rescue these people would die. He had to find a way to get them off the quay and transport them to Greece or the islands.

There had to be a way.

Smyrna - September 12, 1922

Often an entire city has suffered because of an evil man.

Hesiod

Eugenia noticed a motor launch arriving at the quay and sailors dressed in white uniforms filing off and unloading crates and barrels. It must be food, she thought and she and Christos walked closer to investigate. A dozen sailors with guns had formed a perimeter to guard the provisions. Soon after the boat returned to a destroyer in the harbour and came back with a second load. As she moved closer Eugenia noticed all the crates were marked with a red cross. The sailors then arranged a path for the refugees to pass through and they began distributing food. The two of them were caught in a massive crowd of people and were propelled towards the sailors. Holding each other, they were crushed tighter and tighter in the surge. Children were being trampled and some in the crowd began shouting. 'Stop pushing forward! You will kill us! Move back!' Mercifully, the movement stopped but Eugenia and Christos found themselves trapped and stationary for the next two hours. Frustrated, they watched as the sailors distributed all the food and then left on the launch. Slowly the crowd dispersed and they were able to make their way back to their family, where exhausted and crying, Eugenia fell into Elisaveth's arms.

The five thousand Armenians still trapped at the seminary that afternoon consisted of people of all ages and in many cases, three or four generations of the same family who had come together to be close to their bishops and the protection of their church. They had fled from their terrorised neighbourhood only to be trapped in the seminary from which escape seemed impossible with Turkish machine guns trained on every exit. They feared that the buildings would be torched and some had discussed suicide rather than dying in the flames. There was a knock on the door of the seminary and the frightened crowd were stunned to see a Catholic priest and a squad of French soldiers. The priest had negotiated with the Turks and told them that they

could leave under the protection of the French, provided that all guns were left behind. After heated discussions the Armenian council decided to leave and slowly the people filed out, leaving their shotguns and rifles behind. As they passed the menacing machine gun post, they were searched by the Turks, ostensibly on the pretext of finding arms, but instead they were robbed of their valuables and fighting broke out.

The small squad of French soldiers was unable to protect so many people and as soon as they were out of sight, escorting the first few hundred Armenians, the rest were set upon by the Turkish irregulars, the Chetes. Terrified and defenceless people began to run towards the quay or the nearby French or Italian consulates and those who moved slowly, the young and elderly, were easy targets. Scores were killed and defenceless girls were dragged off into deserted houses and raped. Blood literally flowed in the streets. The survivors of this traumatised group struggled to join the others on the waterfront, but even there, in full view, attacks by both the Chetes and uniformed Turkish soldiers continued during the afternoon. The screams and brazen attacks caused panic and some threw themselves into the water and were drowned. There was no safety in Smyrna that September.

Half a mile inland, the American Hospital in Smyrna had become a focus for Greek and Armenian refugees. As well as overflowing with the sick and injured, over fifteen hundred homeless people had sought refuge in the hospital corridors and grounds. That afternoon, a Turkish Captain and a squad of twenty soldiers marched into the hospital with a written order that it was to be taken over for the use of the Turkish military and all patients and refugees were to be escorted to the quay. Within an hour Jennings was confronted with the sight of doctors and nurses carrying patients on stretchers towards the Y Building and the waterfront.

Jennings was appalled. 'This is unbelievable. How could sick be thrown out of a hospital and the American hospital no less? What are we to do with them Dimi?'

'We can ask the homeless to leave to make way for the some of the sick,' Dimi replied.

'What a terrible predicament, alright, let's do our best, anyone who is not sick or injured will have to leave the Y. We will take whichever patients we can accommodate and I will ask the Captain of the USS *Litchfield* to provide us with more medical supplies.'

The emergency on the quay had just got much worse.

Smyrna - September 13, 1922

*He is a man of courage who does not run away,
but remains at his post and fights against the enemy.*

Socrates

C laflin Davis, a Red Cross worker who had been helping him, arrived breathless at the Y building. 'Turkish soldiers are pouring petroleum on the houses and burning them to flush out the Armenians and Greeks. I've seen it and I just saw them torch the American Consulate. Horton is gone of course. The wind is blowing in this direction and very soon this place is going to be hell on earth Jennings! You'd better get out.'

Jennings first saw plumes of smoke rising above the Armenian quarter, but as the wind increased that morning, a large dark black cloud began to form and rolled across the city, and he knew he didn't have much time to evacuate the sick and injured from the Y building.

He and his staff frantically began carrying people out of the building towards the water. Looking south, he watched as fire danced on the rooftops towards them, while in the streets hundreds of people, escaping from their burning homes, were running ahead of the billowing maelstrom. He had never seen terror like this before and in a few minutes this new throng merged with the sick and homeless on the quay. Now half a million desperate men, women and children crept closer to the water, looking back at the approaching smoke and flames. The fire roared through the city, burning down the Opera House and racing through the shops and cafes of the elegant Rue Franque, moving towards the water.

As Jennings battled on the quay, George Horton, the American consul, leaving on a destroyer steaming out of the harbour towards *Constantinople*, made the following observation:

The last view of the ill-fated town by daylight was one of vast enveloping clouds rolling up to heaven, a narrow water-front covered with a great throng of people - an ever-increasing throng, with the fire behind and

the sea before, and a powerful fleet of inter-allied battle-ships, among which were two American destroyers, moored a short distance from the quay and looking on.

And this, the presence of those battle-ships in Smyrna harbour, in the year of our Lord 1922, impotently watching the last great scene in the tragedy of the Christians of Turkey, was the saddest and most significant feature of the whole picture.

Jennings worked furiously to carry the sick towards the waterfront and was joined by a party of American sailors who had been sent to take him off the quay. With their help, he managed to evacuate the building before the fire came and convinced the sailors to take a few sick children onto the boat before smoke enveloped the waterfront. Despite his protestations, the sailors insisted he leave with them, and he was transferred to the *Litchfield*.

He climbed onto the ship and stood on the deck with tears in his eyes, turning back just as the fire reached the quay. With a deafening roar the banks, shops, hotels, and the Y Building itself, erupted in flames, their windows exploding. Burning trees lit up the esplanade, their branches falling like incendiaries among the people and animals.

As the heat on the quay increased, the bow lines on two destroyers, moored close to the wharf, caught alight and the sailors pulled up their anchors and the ships moved further out into the harbour. He saw scores of people jumping into the deep water to escape the heat, some trying to swim to the nearest ships, but most quickly disappeared from view. A horse, its mane bursting into flames and terrified, raced up the quay trampling those in its way. Soon the sun was blocked out and, mercifully, black smoke covered the entire waterfront, hiding most of the carnage from his eyes. Jennings collapsed onto his knees, clasping his hands. He had never felt so helpless. 'They will all die. I have failed them Lord,' he cried.

After a few hours, the smoke cleared slightly, and thankfully he could see lines of people crouching close to the waterfront. Hundreds were struggling in the water and he noticed some were holding onto the sea wall to stay afloat, but he watched in horror as a Turkish horseman galloped along the quay striking at the arms of the floating refugees with his sword. Their bodies sank into the darkness. At first, British Admiral Brock, who had promised the Turks strict neutrality, refused to take on refugees and his sailors used hoses to drive off the refugees who had swum out to the ship's anchor lines but finally, after hours of watching thousands dying on the quay,

Brock relented and refugees were allowed to board. The US destroyers began to do likewise.

Later, from the deck of the *Litchfield*, Jennings heard a shout coming from the sea nearby. The ship was over half a mile from land but someone was hanging onto the anchor rope shouting for help to those on deck. The sailors were pointing down but doing nothing to assist. 'What are you doing men? Get a boat down to that person now,' Jennings reprimanded them, jolting the sailors into action and soon after they brought a swimmer on board. The young fellow was coughing and shouting out, but no one knew enough Greek to understand what he was saying. He was shaking with cold and pointing towards the sea and it took a lot of persuasion before he could be led below deck for the ship's doctor to examine him.

Thirty minutes later there was another commotion in the water near the ship and this time the sailors acted quickly. They launched a boat and returned with a girl who was limp and had blue lips. She had just been rescued in time and Jennings put a blanket around her and took her down to the infirmary. When she was led inside, the first swimmer leapt to his feet and ran up to her, putting his arms around her, kissing her cheeks and crying with happiness. She was his sister.

By this time, American, British and Italian warships had all begun to take on women and children, but those rescued that day were only a tiny fraction of the half million on the quay. Jennings spent the afternoon furiously trying to convince the American naval captains to take on more refugees than the bursting ships could accommodate. The fire burnt all that afternoon and into the night, and the screams from the wharf were so loud that the captains had music played to drown out the terrible sound. Some of the destroyers and other warships that had taken on refugees set out for mainland Greece or the nearby island of Chios.

Horton was already halfway to *Constantinople*, but Jennings would not leave and his relief effort was run from the USS *Litchfield* in the harbour. During the afternoon he made multiple trips on the light boats to rescue refugees and help with the injured and sick, but quickly the destroyer's medical supplies became exhausted. On the deck of the ship, a woman was dying of peritonitis from a ruptured appendix, a young boy lay waiting for amputation of a crushed gangrenous leg and dozens with infected painful burns languished without dressings or pain relief. Jennings was exhausted and his white suit was now grey with soot.

Although the blaze on the waterfront finished later that night, the city itself would burn for three days and most of Smyrna except the southern Turkish quarter was destroyed. Jennings hardly slept for any of this time arranging relief from the American destroyers, but despite his non-stop efforts, he felt guilty of his own comfort while thousands suffered and died on shore. He knew that the fire had made survival much harder for the throng on the quay as most people had been injured and thousands had been killed. Admiral Bristow told him the relief effort was now impossible, but Jennings disagreed and told him that giving up was not an option. They just needed to try harder.

‘This fellow is incredibly pig-headed and refuses to take advice’, Bristol thought. Reluctantly he had begun to admire Jennings’ righteous determination.

Smyrna - September 13, 1922

*My heroes slain, my bridal bed o'erturn'd,
My daughters ravish'd, and my city burn'd,
My bleeding infants dash'd against the floor;
...The last sad relic of my ruin'd state*
Homer, *The Iliad*

The wind had been warm and comforting at first, but it was very unusual to have a southerly wind in Smyrna that time of year. Elisaveth was the first to smell it, the smell of ash and she realised what was coming. 'I can smell smoke, fire is coming. We must all get down close to the water.'

'I can smell it too,' Christos replied. Earlier, he had torn a wooden door off the hinges of a wharf side hotel for the pregnant Arête to lie on. Christos and Elisaveth picked up the door and the family tried to move down to the water's edge but were unable to get very close because of the crush of people. A few minutes later, smoke began blowing across the quay and the sky went dark and soon after the sun disappeared entirely. Flaming embers began flying through the air around them, burning anything they touched and the wind seemed to strengthen. People nearby cried out in pain as clothes and hair began to burn. Terrified screams came from a nearby street as a large group of Greeks running through the city ahead of the flames became trapped by a squad of Turkish cavalry. Blocked from getting to the sea they cried out as the fire approached. 'Save us. Help please.' Finally they ran into the buildings as the fire descended upon them and the horsemen charged off as the street was engulfed in smoke and fire.

'God rest their souls,' Elisaveth prayed. The people on the waterfront now began to scream, but that sound was drowned out by the roar of the fire as it came like a train rushing toward them. As the buildings on the quay burst into flames, the sound became a deafening scream railing over them, burning and killing. Those people close to the water, managed to dip their rugs and

clothes in the water, to use as protection from the flames, the others were not so fortunate.

The Girdis family were unable to get near the water and as the heat increased, Elisaveth was certain that the flames would end their suffering. Her body seemed to close in on itself. She tried to breathe, but no oxygen entered her lungs, only a burning vacuum. She looked around, but her eyes could see only darkness. She reached out to touch her sisters but her blistered fingers could feel nothing but the icy heat. She felt herself screaming but couldn't hear her own voice. Were these the flames of hell or the gates of heaven? But neither Elisaveth nor her family was fated to die that day. The stolen door now became their salvation as it would protect them from the worst of the heat and flames. Crouching behind it, they were almost overcome by the black smoke and they could feel the heat from the burning buildings, while others even only a few yards away, without protection, had their skin and hair scorched or the clothes burnt off their backs. Many people close to the seawall flung themselves into the water to escape the heat but most could not swim and thrashed about in the water, calling for help. All on the quay struggled to breathe in the acrid smoke and held their clothing over their mouths to try to filter out the suffocating fumes. Many were wheezing and coughing, and some collapsed and died where they stood. It was a hell on earth and for the half million souls on the quay and those who watched from the ships, it was the defining moment of their lives. Everything before and after would be compared to that moment in time.

Hours later, after the heavy smoke cleared, Christos saw a launch anchor fifty metres off the quay to take on a few refugees and thought he could see a small man in the white suit standing on the bow, looking for swimmers, but it was hard to be certain in the dark gloom and haze. He knew he could have easily swum the distance to be rescued, but his mother and sisters would never make it. All the family could do was wait and pray and hours later, after the worst of the danger had passed, Elisaveth gathered them around and spoke in a hoarse voice. 'Praise to you, Holy Mother for saving us from the flames. Praise to you, Christ the Redeemer for delivering us from evil.' They were coughing to clear the smoke from their lungs and rubbing the ash from their eyes. Christos went to the water and filled his violin case with seawater for the family to wash away the soot from their faces.

'Mr Caristinos was right after all,' Maria said.

'What do you mean mother?' Eugenia asked.

‘He said that Smyrna was a beautiful woman and she could not be taken by force, but only by love. The Greek King and his army didn’t love her, their real goal was *Constantinople*, and they were defeated. The Turks tried to take her by force, but they couldn’t have her either, and instead she chose to be destroyed.’

‘He is a wise man mother,’ Christos replied.

The family, exhausted and shaking, lay down together on the seared Smyrna quay.

They waited for the morning and for a miracle.

Smyrna - September 15, 1922

Sovereignty is not given, it is taken.

Mustapha Kemal

Jennings had made up his mind to try to reach the leader of the Turkish army, Mustapha Kemal, who was now in command in Smyrna and any evacuation would require his cooperation. Commander Powell had offered a small squad of sailors to escort Jennings to Kemal's headquarters in Bordova, on the southern part of the bay, which had escaped the fire. A motor launch landed the party at the pier, where they were confronted by a large group of Turkish soldiers.

A tall moustachioed officer shouted at the group of Americans that they had no authority to land, and for them to return to their ship. Jennings who had been surrounded by the sailors, walked forward, and although he was short with a deformed back, he looked authoritative and confident as he strode forward in his suit and Panama hat. 'I am Jennings, and represent the YMCA and American Relief committee of Smyrna. It is very important I speak to General Mustapha Kemal. I have very important information for him.' The officer looked quizzically at the frail American, but after a few moments, he indicated that the sailors would remain on the pier and for Jennings to come with him. He walked with the Turkish officer along the esplanade until they came to a magnificent mansion, facing the water, surrounded by huge oak trees. Guarding the gate was a platoon of soldiers and after some discussion, Jennings was searched. They found the American flag in his coat and draped it over his shoulder, then asked him to wait in the garden.

It was a large rose garden with a pergola and Jennings imagined that the house had been owned by a wealthy Levantine who had deserted it weeks before. He sat in a chair under a shady tree and couldn't believe he was in the same burned city that a few miles away across the harbour was teeming with desperate people. Jennings wondered what Kemal would be like. He

had heard much about the enigmatic figure, the great General who was feared and loathed by the Greeks and Armenians but worshipped by his own people. He knew that he was in control when Smyrna was burnt by his troops and wondered whether he had given the order, although he was sure Kemal would never admit to it. Despite this Jennings was feeling optimistic, he hoped that the rumours of his cruelty were exaggerated and that he could appeal to Kemal's humanitarian side, if he had one. After waiting for over an hour, however, his confidence began to wane.

Finally, the soldier returned and he was taken into the house. Kemal sat at a large dining table with a bottle of gin and several glasses in front of him. He smiled as Jennings entered the room and rose to shake his hand. 'Mr Jennings, it's nice of you to join me this afternoon. May I offer you a drink, the bar here is very well stocked.'

'No thank you General. It's very good of you to see me.'

'Ah well Mr Jennings – it appears we have a shared problem. Many people on the quay and nowhere to put them.'

'Yes General. It's a disaster on a grand scale and the world is looking on. They have no shelter, they are starving and hundreds die every day. They must be allowed to escape.'

'These people cannot go back to their homes Mr Jennings, I forbid it. The Greek navy will not be permitted to sail back to Smyrna and I cannot house or feed them. All men of fighting age are my prisoners and will be marched inland and the same will happen to all others who remain on the quay at the end of the month.'

'General, you know that evacuation of so many people is impossible without a fleet of passenger ships. Meanwhile, the Turkish militia and even some of your own men are attacking these defenceless people daily.'

'Jennings, many of my soldiers are enraged at the Greek army's atrocities and I can't take responsibility for what is happening. Have you heard of the Arabic word Mektoub, which means - It is written? The quay may be their destiny Mr Jennings.'

'I don't believe in that destiny. These innocent women and children don't deserve to die here and we must evacuate them to Greece. General, you have the power to arrange this, just give me the tools.'

'What do you propose Mr Jennings? We are not a naval power, we have no ships. The Greek navy has gone and won't return, we won't allow it. I

understand you have no money, few staff and no real authority. What exactly do you suggest can be done?’

Jennings tried to straighten his back to look taller as he talked. He became very animated and his determination and strength were evident in his voice. ‘General, you can give permission for Greek ships to enter the harbour for a peaceful evacuation. If I can arrange for the US Navy to escort them in and to guarantee that they will come in peace. Will you give permission?’

Kemal’s brow furrowed and he examined his glass of gin as if it was a battalion of enemy that he was facing on the battlefield. He then threw the spirit down his throat in a single action and turned to Jennings. ‘I don’t believe you can do it Mr Jennings, but if you get your ships here and provided they are not flying a Greek flag, I will allow you to evacuate the women, children and old men. All other men will remain our prisoners. And remember, the refugees will need to be removed from the waterfront by the end of the month or they will also become our prisoners and marched inland with the other prisoners.’

Jennings had his ray of hope. ‘If any people remain on the wharf by the end of the month they would likely be dead anyway General, but we have an agreement. I’m sure I can get the ships.’ He shook Kemal’s hand and left the room.

Smyrna - September 17, 1922

*No man, against my fate, sends me to Hades.
And as for fate, I'm sure no man escapes it,
Neither a good nor bad man, once he's born.*

Homer, *The Iliad*

Eugenia wasn't sure where she was as she woke that morning. Even before her eyes opened she could smell the smoke and the stench, feel the hard ground beneath her and hear the sounds of people coughing and moaning in pain. It certainly wasn't her soft bed in Alatsata and as she coughed up ash from her throat into her hands, she noticed that her face was burning and tender to touch.

She tried to open her eyes but she couldn't. Something had stuck the lids together and she needed to rub them with her hands to separate them. As her eyesight returned, she saw clouds of heavy black smoke moving slowly past and filtering the dark orange sun. Strange human figures lay or crouched all around her with black faces, grey clothing, all looking like the same, miserable, wretched souls, distant and alien. But peering closely at the people sitting next to her, she recognised, with a start, her own family. Elisaveth saw her frightened face and lovingly put her arms around her, cradled her head and kissed her eyes. Eugenia finally remembered where she was and began to cry and after a few minutes she wiped her face, stood up and stretched her cold stiff legs. She looked out at the thousands of pitiful people languishing along the length of the waterfront. What a God-forsaken place this is, she thought.

Eugenia and Christos had developed a morning routine on the burnt out quay. Firstly, they would go to the firetruck which arrived between six and seven and if they could get close enough, they would collect water to take back to the family. People went with whatever receptacle they could find; pans, cups or even a bag or hat, but they used Christos's violin case. Two

young Greek YMCA workers supervised the water drop, until it ran out a few hours later. The rest of the morning, they would begin a search for whatever food that could be found. Sometimes bread was distributed, but only a fraction of the crowd received any. This day, a horse had been shot by the refugees and was being butchered, and remarkably, Christos managed to get close enough to tear off a piece of leg muscle and brought it back to the others.

Arête looked at the meat. 'We cannot eat raw horse meat. We need to cook it.'

'We can use the burning timbers in there,' Elisaveth pointed at the still smouldering hotel behind them.

'We will have a roast then; come with me Eugenia,' Christos replied. Crawling into the rubble of the burnt out building, they searched for the source of the smoke and deep inside they found red hot embers from the collapsed roof. Eugenia placed the meat amongst the embers and it began to steam and crackle.

Christos peered at the cooking leg muscle. 'You're not a very good cook Eugenia. Whatever you do, don't burn it!'

'I'll burn you,' Eugenia responded, pushing Christos backwards. He fell into a pile of ash, and stood up, his clothes and face now covered in soot.

Eugenia pointed at him. 'Mama will be upset,' and after a pause, they both fell over laughing.

When Eugenia recovered, she returned to the embers and made sure that the meat was turned regularly and when it was ready, the two returned proudly to their mother and sisters with the treasured food. 'Who is this you have brought back with you Eugenia?' Maria looked at the blackened Christos.

'He was all alone and hungry, so I brought him home for dinner,' Eugenia replied.

'Go and wash your face and hands in the sea Christos.' Maria began pulling the meat apart.

'I only need a small piece,' Elisaveth said, 'Give a bigger piece to Arête for the baby.'

Maria gave Arête a larger piece and equal amounts to the others. 'We all must eat to keep up our strength.' They ate the tough meat along with pieces of ash and gristle, but it was warm and tasty, and the only nourishing meal they would eat on the quay.

Smyrna - September 17, 1922

Make a habit of two things: to help; or at least to do no harm.

Hippocrates

Jennings knew that to be effective, he must run his relief effort from Smyrna itself, so he decided to investigate the quay for a new base and was given the use of a launch and a dozen sailors.

As they got closer to the pier, he noticed the curious site of dozens of Turks fishing from the waterfront. 'What on earth are they doing here?' he thought. He saw a fisherman pulling in a bloated body. A finger was removed to recover a ring, the pockets turned out looking for valuables and the body was pushed back in the water. Now he understood - they were fishing for bodies. An immense wave of nausea washed over him and he turned his head away from the sight. When they landed on the quay, his senses were overpowered by the smell of death and piles of bodies lay in groups everywhere. In some cases an attempt had been made to burn them, whilst others were left bloated and putrefying. The refugees were unable to escape from the terrible sights and smell.

He explored the waterfront and at the northern end of the quay, he found what he was looking for. There were two intact buildings, one of which had been a small hotel and the other a restaurant. Jennings commandeered them with his squad of soldiers, and had the American flag hung from their front balconies. They would become his new headquarters and hospital. With the help of his own YMCA workers and Red Cross personnel he managed to obtain beds from around the city to fill the rooms. Jennings spoke to Dimi. 'Now we need doctors or nurses to staff our hospital. There must be many of these people amongst the thousands here.' It didn't take long before they located five doctors and a dozen nurses who were fit enough to help. Jennings then travelled back to obtain medicines, antiseptics and instruments from the *Litchfield*, *Edsall* and the British warships. Some of the captains thought his efforts were pointless, but he refused to take no for an answer and

in six hours he had set up his field hospital and maternity ward. The captain of the *Litchfield*, Commander Powell, provided American sailors to guard the entrance to his hospital.

Jennings then explored the quay to find women in the last stages of pregnancy and those people most severely burnt or otherwise injured. It didn't take long before both buildings were overflowing with patients. The lucky few to get a bed were able to be given pain relief and for the first time, have their wounds cleaned and dressed. Jennings surveyed his small maternity ward, which was crowded with labouring women and tiny crying babies and two women gave birth in his hospital that first afternoon. The legend of the Angel of Smyrna was growing.

Later that evening, Jennings finally sat down with Dimi on the top floor balcony of his hospital. 'A good job Mr Jennings. Your hospital has brought comfort to many suffering people today, like the ancient clinic – the *aesclepion* in Pergamon north of here, where the Greek physician Galen worked.'

Jennings looked out at the refugees on the quay. 'Dimi, there are five hundred thousand people out there, injured and hungry, sitting on the cold pavement, without shelter and hundreds are dying every day. We must do much more than help a few dozen people.' Jennings heard a girl's scream, echo down the waterfront. 'What has happened to her?' he asked.

'It's been happening every night. The Turks come with their guns and abduct young girls. Some are never seen again and others struggle back in the morning. I think you can guess what is happening to them.' Jennings shook his head. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. It seemed that a scream punctuated the night every few minutes.

Despite his severe fatigue, Jennings couldn't sleep at all. His mind turned furiously with terrible sights, pained faces and imploring voices, but most frustratingly, he struggled with his failure to formulate a rescue plan.

Smyrna Harbour - September 20, 1922

*Courage consists not in taking a risk without fear;
but being resolutely minded in a just cause.*

Plutarch

Jennings knew that his relief work was only of temporary benefit. The future of half a million people on the quay at Smyrna and many other refugees along the coast north and south of the city, depended on an evacuation. He had ten more days as Kemal's ultimatum was clear, all Greeks or Armenians who hadn't left Smyrna by the 30th September would be marched inland. The men would be marched off regardless, walking for weeks into the burning heat without food or water where many would die, but if women, children and elderly were forced inland, he knew that virtually none would survive. The clock was counting down and Jennings knew that there was no Greek or international rescue planned, so he had to save as many as he could. Most of the allied warships had helped with evacuations, but the destroyers were small and only had the capacity for a few hundred refugees. On the other hand, Jennings noticed there were two large merchant ships in the harbour, which could accommodate several thousand people.

The largest was a French ship, the *Pierre Loti*, which lay at anchor without taking on refugees and he couldn't understand its inactivity. He took a launch to the ship from the *Litchfield* and spoke excitedly to the French captain about the opportunity to save the lives of thousands of women and children on the quay. His request was met with an icy refusal and a bribe was also rejected. The captain said that he had no permission from his government to perform such an evacuation and Jennings was ushered off the ship. Shortly after, the freighter raised its anchors and steamed out of the harbour, empty.

'Can you believe that?' Jennings spoke to the sailors on the launch. 'I'm not going to give up that easily though, let's try the other one,' pointing to the large Italian ship nearby. The *Constantinople* was a large rusting Italian

freighter which regularly traded goods between Naples and Smyrna and had been anchored in the harbour for ten days. The captain was waiting for him on deck as he boarded. 'Sir, I am in charge of the American Relief Committee in Smyrna and am arranging evacuation of the poor souls on the quay. Your ship is capable of evacuating two thousand refugees to the island of Mytilene and I am prepared to pay you five thousand Lire.'

'Hmm, this may be difficult Mr Jennings. We will be very inconvenienced by this venture. I'm also not certain that Mytiline will accept these people and I will be stuck with them.'

'I will personally guarantee that they will be landed at Mytiline, Captain, and I would like to offer an additional one thousand Lire for you personally as a token gift, to reduce your inconvenience.'

The captain took Jennings by the hand. 'That is a very nice gesture Mr Jennings and I may be able to help these poor people. We are agreed, you can begin boarding your refugees in the morning.' Jennings could not prevent himself from smiling as he shook the Captain's hand vigorously. He had just signed most of the YMCA's funds in Asia Minor, but he knew that this was money well spent, as two thousand people would be saved. 'Praise the Lord,' he whispered to himself. He returned to the *Litchfield* and told Commander Powell of his arrangement with the captain of the *Constantinople* and also of Kemal's guarantee of co-operation in an evacuation. Powell volunteered to inform the Turks on the wharf of the transfer of two thousand refugees to the ship in the morning and said he would provide motor launches to arrange the transportation. He warned Jennings that the evacuation would have to be performed very carefully, as the throng could riot and had already sunk one of his boats.

The next day the Turks gave permission for the evacuation but their soldiers would supervise the transfer so that no men of fighting age could leave. Jennings drew the landing party together. 'Gentlemen, we can only take two thousand, and this is going to be very difficult. We will first go to my field hospital to evacuate the hundred people there and then we need to find those most in need from the thousands of desperate people on the quay. My priority will be mothers with babies and young children, as well as those who are too injured or sick to care for themselves. I will select them. Many others will beg to be included, but we need to be firm. They may have opportunities to be rescued later.'

Jennings didn't like 'playing God' but he had no option, he had to prioritise in order to save lives. After they landed, heavily armed American sailors leapt out and formed a defensive line to prevent the crowd from surging onto the boats. His squad moved along the quay needing to repeatedly push the frantic refugees away with their rifles. Jennings evacuated the hospital and then advanced through the crowd selecting orphans, children and their mothers and located another twenty nursing mothers and their tiny babies. He also chose the injured, the old and the most sick and frail, many of whom had to be carried to the embarkation point.

The Turkish soldiers had arranged a wire fence barrier on the pier through which the refugees would pass. Many women had husbands or brothers whom at first they refused to leave behind and there were heart-breaking scenes as wives were separated from husbands, mothers from sons and children from their fathers. Those who were allowed to pass were searched and robbed of any valuables, but they knew that their lives had been saved and kissed the Italian sailors as they boarded the ship. After many trips, Jennings loaded the last launch of evacuees to leave for the *Constantinople*. He then instructed Dimi to find more sick and injured to be housed in his field hospital. 'I am proud of you Dimi. You are doing wonderful work here. Look after the hospital and the daily relief effort as best you can and I'll be back as soon as possible.' He embraced him and shook his hand. As the launch headed away from the quay, Jennings looked back at the faces of the wretched people who remained behind. Sadly he knew that many would perish before he returned.

The decks of the *Constantinople* were filled with miserable women and children, the burnt, the sick and the elderly. He walked among them in his now soiled grey-white suit, and they looked up at him with gratitude in their eyes. The Italian sailors had begun feeding them and Jennings's spirit soared as he saw them eating, drinking and regaining strength. A sick young woman kissed his hands, and a frail old man crawled forwards on his hands and knees and grasped him around the legs. They called him Angelos - Angel. As the ship slowly steamed out of the harbour Jennings heard a strange melodic sound coming from the wharf. 'What is that noise?' he asked one of the refugees.

'It is the sound of prayer – they are praying for ships.'

Jennings joined them in their prayers and looked back at the dark mass of humanity on the quay getting smaller and more distant as the ship moved

away. He knew that there were no other ships to help them and without a rescue, the hundreds of thousands of refugees who remained on the quay would either die of hunger or disease or perish inland. His mind searched for possible solutions but he could find none. The Bishop's words, Smyrna the city of myrrh and a place of comfort for those who suffered, echoed in his head. He prayed for help, for inspiration, for a miracle.

Jennings went to the bridge and wired the Red Cross in *Constantinople*.

'I am in charge of the American Relief Committee in Smyrna and have arranged the evacuation of two thousand refugees from Asia Minor to the island of Mytilene, and ask that the landings should be supervised by the Red Cross and that I be placed in charge.'

He was given full authorisation. He then wired Mytilene and asked that two relief committees, one Greek and the other Armenian be organised and prepared to meet the ship in the morning. Finally, Jennings turned to the privacy of his cabin and overcome with raw emotion, he fell onto his bed exhausted and slept properly for the first time in six days.

Smyrna Quay - September 21, 1922

*Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget
falls drop by drop upon the heart,
Until in our own despair, against our will,
comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.*
Aeschylus

By now, Elisaveth Girdis and her family had been on the quay for thirteen days. Like most of the refugees they were starving or sick as the flour and bread had run out and there was little clean water. They were weak with hunger. The last two mornings, a Turkish cart had carried away rotting and bloated corpses from the quay. It was a terrible sight but just when hope seemed lost, she noticed several launches travelling towards them and arriving at the pier. Sailors leapt off the boats and moved into the crowd led by the small man in the white suit and hat. A group of people, mainly children, were selected from the crowd and shuttled towards the boats. The family could see the group of sailors, but were unable to get close enough to them to be considered. They watched in silence as desperate people panicked and rushed into the line of sailors, only to be pushed away.

They could see that on the pier, a brigade of Turkish soldiers had gathered and waited for the evacuees. The Turks detained any men who tried to join the women and children and these men were encircled by the armed soldiers. Several who tried to escape were shot. Finally, the lucky few evacuees were transported away to a large ship in the harbour, while the captured men were marched away.

‘The rescue has begun, so just be patient and we will all be safe soon. There are many great ships in the harbour, room for everyone. The angel has come and he will return.’ Elisaveth reassured her family, but later, as the large ship steamed away, Elisaveth knew that there would be no more rescues that day. As nightfall came to the Smyrna waterfront and the family

huddled together on the cold street, Elisaveth knew that darkness meant danger; without fail every night, armed Turks came and dragged off dozens of girls. Many never returned and those who did had been beaten and bloodied and would not talk about what had happened to them. They were too ashamed to admit that they had been raped. When Turkish soldiers came into sight, Elisaveth hid her sisters under her nun's habit; they had no other defence. Trapped by the sea and the surrounding Turkish troops, the thousands lying and crouching on the quay felt totally alone and along with the others, Elisaveth and her sisters began to pray again. Elisaveth asked for the Greek government to send ships to save them, but secretly doubted that any would return. She laid her head on Arête's stomach and felt her baby kicking.

We will certainly die here, she thought, but please God let this innocent baby survive. She was right that the government would not arrange a rescue. The Greeks were in disarray and the King was shortly to be removed from power. None of the other nations would risk offending the victorious Turks to arrange an organised rescue of the stateless Ionian Greeks and Armenians. Kemal had sent a wire to the League of Nations stating that because of the 'excited spirit of the Turkish population, the Angora government would not be responsible for massacres'. He was preparing the world for any eventuality. 'It is written', he had said.

Every nation had deserted the people on the Smyrna quay. They were on their own ... except for a frail hunchbacked man steaming away on the *Constantinople*.

Mytilene - September 22, 1922

Character is destiny.

Heraclitus

After a few hours sleeping, Jennings was awoken as the ship slowed to enter Mytilene harbour. He washed, dressed and walked on to the deck. Looking at the harbour in the early morning light, he noticed many dark shapes that he couldn't quite make out. He rubbed his eyes, and then he realised that the harbour of Mytilene was filled with many large transport ships; he counted twelve in all. Jennings asked the Italian captain, 'Whose ships are these?'

'They are the troop ships which were used to evacuate the retreating Greek army from Asia Minor. You can see they are flying the Greek flag; they belong to their navy.'

'Good Lord,' Jennings exclaimed. His mind raced back to the refugees. Was this the answer to his prayers? The sight of these ships as they sat motionless at anchor, less than six hours steaming from Smyrna seemed like manna from heaven.

He was in a hurry when he walked down the gangplank. The relief committees, which included the mayor and the local orthodox priest were on the wharf waiting for them and soon they began disembarking the refugees and arranging their shelter. Once he had seen his evacuees safely housed in the village, Jennings sought out the person in charge of the Greek navy in Mytilene. He was told that General Frankos was in control of the ships, but that he may not be sympathetic. There was a rumour that Frankos was an anti-royalist and he was hoping to use the ships to help overthrow the Greek King. Frankos had his headquarters in an office in the city hall and Jennings walked into the general's office where he found him sitting behind a large table. 'So you are the YMCA man who has spoilt our quiet existence here in Mytilene.' He spoke with a sarcastic smirk on his face.

Jennings leaned across the table to shake his hand and faced him with his hands apart on the table. 'General Frankos we have a great opportunity, to rescue hundreds of thousands of your fellow Greeks from Smyrna and also many others from the rest of the Asia Minor coast. While we speak these people are dying and suffering in the most appalling conditions. Your ships can be their salvation, General. You must launch a rescue immediately.'

Frankos leaned back in his chair. 'What you ask for Mr Jennings is impossible. I am to sail my fleet into a harbour held by an enemy we have been fighting for the past three years and hope that your YMCA or Red Cross credentials will protect my men and my ships. It can't be done.'

'Yes it can, General. Kemal has promised me that the ships will be allowed into Smyrna under the American flag,' Jennings responded. 'I will ask the American navy to obtain permission for the rescue from the Turks and to guarantee the safety of your ships. The Turks will co-operate, as Kemal wants to be rid of these people. I have spoken to him'

Frankos paused. 'It may be possible but we would insist on an absolute guarantee from the Turks that the ships would be safe. Even then I can only afford to give you six ships; the others are required for government business.'

'Six ships is impossible General. It would take a month to rescue the people at Smyrna with so few, and we only have eight days left. As well as the rescue from Smyrna, we have to transport these people on to the Greek mainland. Your brothers and sisters are dying General. We simply must have all your ships.'

'Impossible Mr Jennings, you would have to make do with six ships.'

'I will get the guarantee from Kemal, General.' Jennings was upset, and turned and walked out the door. He thought if he talked any longer he would lose his temper and achieve nothing. He needed an angle.

As he walked back to the wharf Jennings saw a familiar shape in the harbour. A US battleship was steaming into the Mytiline harbour, but no, there was no such large ship in Greek waters, only American destroyers. Then he noticed this ship was flying the Greek flag.

'What is that ship?' he asked the harbour master.

'That is the *Kilkis*, our battleship, the flagship of our fleet. It used to be an American ship and we bought it from your country at the end of the Great War.'

Mytiline Harbour - September 22, 1922

It takes a wise man to recognize a wise man.

Xenophanes

Jennings remembered that the USS Mississippi had been sold to the Greek government and now amazingly, it was here. He had the absurd idea that this old American battleship was a talisman which would bring him the luck he needed. He arranged to be rowed out to the *Kilkis* and asked to meet its captain.

Commander Theophanides was a charming man who spoke good English. 'I'm very pleased to meet you Mr Jennings.' He clasped his hand warmly. 'I have heard that you saved two thousand Greek women and children today.'

'Yes, Commander, but there are many hundred thousands more to be rescued, and little time to do it.'

'What can be done Mr Jennings?'

'The troop ships in this harbour could be used to save those people and General Frankos will let me use six of his ships if we can get a written guarantee from the Turks. Would you allow me to wire Commander Powell in his destroyer in Smyrna Harbour to help arrange Turkish permission to sail the Greek transports there?'

'My ship and radio are at your disposal Mr Jennings.'

Jennings sent a wire to Powell to seek written permission from the Turks for the troop ships to be allowed to enter Smyrna Harbour and conduct the evacuation. Three hours later Powell wired back that he had obtained the permission, but the troop ships could not sail under the Greek flag and could not tie up at the wharf. Powell had also got permission for the American destroyers to accompany them and he and Admiral Bristow had already left Smyrna on the *Litchfield* and were steaming towards Mytilene with the signed document for Frankos.

‘This deserves a drink Mr Jennings,’ and Theophanides poured out two glasses of *ouzo*.

‘I don’t drink Commander, but I will celebrate with you nonetheless with a large mug of black coffee.’ Jennings was smiling.

The *Litchfield* returned at midnight and Jennings decided there was no time to be lost and he would wake Frankos immediately. Wearing a dressing gown and annoyed to be woken, Frankos looked angry as he opened his door to Jennings. ‘This is the written permission you asked for General.’ Jennings thrust the document into his hands.

Rubbing his eyes, Frankos looked at the paper. ‘And how will you personally protect my ships Mr Jennings?’

‘We Americans will take full responsibility for protection of these ships.’

‘You cannot give me any such guarantee. I cannot agree to this Mr Jennings and I don’t trust your arrangements. My ships need more protection than that and I will need a written guarantee from the US government.’

Jennings was furious and knew that he could never get such a guarantee in time. ‘Your ships are more important to you than the people you condemn to death General. You dishonour yourself and your uniform.’

He turned away from Frankos a second time.

Mytilene - September 23, 1922

*Opposition brings concord.
Out of discord comes the fairest harmony.*

Heraclitus

When he told Theophanides what had happened, the Commander couldn't believe Frankos's response. 'This is outrageous Mr Jennings. We have greater enemies within our own ranks than those we fight. I will speak to him.'

'No Commander, I have an idea. I will go above his head and wire the Prime Minister in Athens. Will you translate and send the message for me?'

'Certainly, Mr Jennings. This will be done immediately. I will wake the radio operator.'

At 4 am, Jennings sent a coded message from the *Kilkis* to the Prime Minister of Greece:

The American Chairman of Near East Relief Committee acknowledges that there are hundreds of thousands of refugees, prisoners of the Turks on the Smyrna Quay. Turks insist they must depart in seven days. American destroyers under the order of Admiral Bristow will give protection to Greek steamers entering Smyrna without Greek flag and take refugees on board. American Committee will also ensure food and shelter. American Committee Member now on board and awaits answer.

Shortly afterward, Athens wired back:

Who are you? The Prime Minister is asleep and cannot be woken.

Jennings responded:

I'm AK Jennings, in charge of the American Relief at Mytilene and Smyrna, and I need immediate permission from the Prime Minister and cabinet to use all the troop ships in Mytilene Harbour to conduct the urgent evacuation of about three hundred thousand people, mainly women and children, from the Smyrna waterfront. These people are dying – wake the Prime Minister.

Thirty minutes later, the return came:

The Prime Minister will need to call a cabinet meeting in the morning, after this he will send a response.

‘You have done all that is possible Mr Jennings. You will stay here overnight, and we will meet at breakfast and wait for the reply from Athens.’

Jennings was unable to sleep very much and after a hurried breakfast Jennings and Commander Theophanides waited impatiently for a response.

‘They should reply soon Mr Jennings. They are well aware of the plight of the people at Smyrna. Soon we will have a decision and we will have the ships.’

By noon, no response had come and at 4 pm Jennings said he could wait no longer. ‘These politicians do not share your humanity Commander; I need to show them I am serious.’

He carefully penned his next telegram to the Greek Prime Minister, and then read it out to Theophanides. Hearing the extraordinary message, the Commander gave a wry smile.

‘That should stir them into action Mr Jennings.’

The wire read:

This again is AK Jennings, in charge of American Relief in Mytilene. If I don’t have a favourable response to my request by 6 pm, I will wire back openly, without code so that the world will know that we have Turkish permission to rescue the refugees, the American navy will guarantee the ships are protected, that all we lack is ships and the Greek government would not permit its own ships to save hundreds of thousands of Greek refugees dying on the quay in Smyrna.

Theophanides laughed. ‘A Methodist pastor is openly blackmailing the Greek government. For a man of the cloth, you have a fighting spirit Mr Jennings; you would have made a good soldier.’

A few minutes later, a response came back:

Message received, will reply shortly, do not under any circumstances send any message except in code.

At 5.50 pm the final message arrived from Athens:

Mr AK Jennings is hereby appointed to the rank of Admiral in the Greek navy and all ships in the Aegean Sea are at your disposal to conduct evacuations from Asia Minor.

Theophanides looked at Jennings giving him a huge bear hug and laughed with joy.

‘You have done it, you are a genius. You are now my commander Admiral Jennings!’ Theophanides saluted him.

Jennings looked upward and closed his eyes in a prayer of thanks. He had his ships.

At 6 pm Theophanides sent a message to General Frankos and all the ship captains in Mytilene Harbour:

Mr Asa Jennings has been elevated to Admiral of the Greek Fleet by the Prime Minister and is in command. All ships will be made ready by midnight to leave for Smyrna in order to conduct the evacuation of our brothers and sisters on the Smyrna quay.

By 7 pm several ship Captains sent replies that many of their sailors were ashore and it was impossible to be ready by midnight.

Commander Theophanides replied immediately:

Failure to comply with the midnight order will result in immediate court-martial.

By midnight all twelve Greek transport ships in Mytilene were ready for departure and Admiral Asa Jennings had his rescue fleet. Jennings thanked and bade farewell to Theophanides as the Greek Battleship could not accompany them. ‘I couldn’t have done it without you Commander.’

‘You are a remarkable man Mr Jennings – it has been a privilege to have been of assistance to you. Good luck.’

Jennings boarded a boat to transfer him to his new flagship the *Propondis*. It was the 24th September and the Turks had given him until the 30th September for the evacuation.

The Quay, Smyrna - September 23, 1922

*At his best, man is the noblest of all animals;
separated from law and justice he is the worst.*

Aristotle

It was the fifteenth day that the Girdis family had endured on the Smyrna waterfront. The quay had the smell of death and excrement and the dead floated in the water or lay on the pavement. The street was an open sewer and hundreds of thousands of sick, hungry and frightened people languished all around them. Those who drifted away from the putrid smell towards the city would risk being discovered by the Chetes, who roamed the burnt out streets, attacking any Greek or Armenian they could find. Men were shot, women raped and killed and their meagre valuables were stolen. Young girls tried to disguise themselves as old women to dissuade the Turks from attacking them. There was death everywhere and by now most had lost all hope.

The Girdis family were starving and could not bear the smell and heat of the quay any longer. Maria was feverish and vomiting and Arête was very weak and feared for her unborn child. Along with two other families, they had discovered a quiet alley away from the wharf, where they found shelter in a burnt out shop. Two Greek men guarded the entrance while the women and children lay inside. Christos was talking to the two young boys who were hungry and cold. 'We won't be here for much longer and you can visit me in Alatsata when we leave here. We can play together in our orchard and eat the peaches and figs which ripen on the trees.' Eugenia didn't feel any of them had long to live, but she managed to distract the other families with memories of their night at the opera months earlier.

Suddenly gunfire rang out. Both Greek men bravely tried to defend the door but were shot through the broken windows and killed. The families retreated to the back of the shop where they huddled in a corner. The three Chetes walked in, stepping over the bodies and brandishing rifles above their

heads. Elisaveth wrapped her arms and clothing around Christos, hiding him within her nun's habit. Seeing the boy's legs under the skirt, one of the Turks walked towards her.

'Filthy whore. *Giaour!*' he snarled and reached for her dress, tearing it from her shoulder.

She turned her back on him, holding Christos against the wall, but he grappled with her roughly and turned her around. As he did, Christos leaped forward, knocking him to the ground.

'You will not touch my sister!' he shouted and began to strike the Chete on the ground, when another came from behind, slashing his throat with a dagger. Elisaveth and Eugenia ran forward to their brother, cradling his head as the lifeblood ran from his neck and onto the floor. Christos gazed into his sisters' crying eyes as the blood flowed onto the ground around him and he lost consciousness.

The Turkish irregulars grabbed Eugenia by her arms and legs and began to haul her into the street. Maria, screaming in horror, rose from her son and launched herself at the Chetes dragging Eugenia away, striking them with her hands while Elisaveth and Arête joined in the struggle, but were easily pushed away by the men. A Turkish officer with a squad of soldiers, hearing the melee, had walked up from the quay. Seeing Christos's small bloodied body and Eugenia and the three other women fighting with the irregulars, he spoke in a disparaging voice. 'You have taken to killing children and women now; you disgrace us, let her go.' The Chetes reluctantly released Eugenia, and she was gathered in by her mother and sisters.

Sobbing and in shock, they picked up Christos's body and the crying family walked back to the comparative safety of the quay.

The spectacle of the miserable crowd, the destroyed city and now the blood stained body of their beloved brother and son had driven their hopes into an abyss of despair.

Chesme - September 24, 1922

*The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways,
I to die and you to live. Which is better God only knows.*

Socrates, from Plato's Apology

John Caristinos walked around his front garden at Chesme. He bent forward to smell the chrysanthemum flowers and straightened up to gaze across the water towards the island of Chios, and beyond the mist which sat heavily on the water that morning. He thought about his family sitting around the table for breakfast and shook his head as he remembered them leaving. Ahmet walked across from his shop.

'*Kalimera John*. I have bad news I'm afraid.'

'These are sad times. What has happened now?'

'I heard that the Turkish soldiers who marched into Alatsata last week desecrated the church of Tis Panayias. They tore out the altar and the young priest was killed and his body nailed to the door of the church in a crucifixion. The tomb of the hero George Dilboy was broken open and his bones thrown out of the church.'

Caristinos shook his head and knelt down to remove a weed from amongst the flowers. 'This is terrible news. The priest was a brave fellow, and the body of a hero like Dilboy can't be desecrated in this way, Ahmet.'

'No indeed John. A wire was sent to the American President Harding who was very angry. He responded directly with an open cable to Kemal and asked that Dilboy's bones should be recovered immediately and given to the US navy, so that his body could be taken to America and interred in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington. Kemal agreed yesterday and the American sailors are arriving here this morning from the American destroyer off shore.' Ahmet pointed at the ship.

'Kemal has insisted that Nureddin Pasha, the Turkish commander here, must be present at the handover and apologise to the Americans. It is said that Pasha is furious.'

Soon after, a squad of Turkish soldiers arrived with a gun carriage carrying the coffin to the harbour. Nureddin Pasha sat in his black Imperial Cadillac limousine, but didn't leave the car as Dilboy's remains were wheeled to the waterfront. There to meet the casket were the sailors of the USS *Litchfield*. John and Ahmet watched as the US honour guard of sailors draped the casket in an American flag, placed it on the motor launch and transported it back to the destroyer. Pasha's car then sped off back towards Smyrna.

Ahmet spoke. 'He will have a proper burial now John.'

'Alatsata's most famous son deserves a proper resting place after the outrage of his tomb, Ahmet. Let us hope we all rest better than he did when the time comes.'

'Now have you helped Mr and Mrs Stamos pack their belongings onto my boat Ahmet?'

'Yes, everything is in order. They are coming soon, with their daughter and I will take them to Chios on the outgoing tide this afternoon.'

'Good, good. They are a humble family, and don't let them pay anything for the trip. Anthony will meet them at the wharf in Chios. He has arranged their lodgings.'

Later that day, after the American destroyer had left, the Stamos family knocked on the door of Caristinos's house. Manuel Stamos shook hands with Caristinos and leaned forward and put his arms around the big man. 'We are very grateful for your help John. I don't know how else we could have got away from here.'

Alexandra Stamos clasped his hand and pulled it to her lips, kissing his knuckles and crying. She looked into his face, her eyes filled with tears. 'You must come with us John.'

'No Alexandra. I'm a stubborn old man, and do you think I could leave here and live as a penniless refugee?'

'But the Turks have said we must leave. I'm very afraid what will happen if you stay,' she replied.

'I don't fear death Alexandra. I am happy with my life. I'm old and have painful joints but I am content. I desire nothing more than to stay here. My parents and my grandparents before them are buried here and here I also will be buried. If I ever left here for more than a few days, I would surely die anyway. So go along to the boat now. Ahmet is waiting for you. Safe journey.'

They left, and walked slowly across the esplanade to the wharf, and towards Caristinos's boat, while other Greeks waited on the wharf, hoping for a boat to Chios or elsewhere.

Caristinos sat down painfully in the *taverna*, overlooking the harbour. Sounds came from his knee as it bent, and pain radiated from his hip down his leg. He placed his cane on his lap, removed his hat and noticed that the sunlight felt good as it warmed his bald scalp. He heard the young Turkish boy before he saw him, laughing and skipping after his dog down the street. He had a shock of black hair, and as he came closer he noticed his huge brown eyes.

He smiled at the young fellow as he passed, but the boy did not see him. He had already passed, gone forever, Caristinos thought. He had vanished just as his own youth and health had disappeared, but he wasn't sad at his loss; he had enjoyed his own youth in this same street, beneath these trees. That was his time, but the friends of his childhood were all dead now.

It was right that the younger generations should enjoy life, laugh, make love and be happy; just as he had once. Now he was content to just enjoy their company and give advice where he could. He was content with that.

A noise rang out on the cobblestones and he turned to the sound of a horse on the road.

The Turkish Lieutenant rode along the waterfront at Chesme, looking at the Greek refugees milling around the wharf. He was searching for men of fighting age who may be hiding among the others. These men were prisoners of war and would not be allowed to escape to return one day as enemies, but would be marched inland. He also had orders that all other Greeks and Armenians, older men, women and children, had to leave Asia Minor or they too would be marched away. These were the orders of General Mustafa Kemal and there would be no exceptions.

The Lieutenant had been irritated by the attitude of the American sailors when his soldiers had delivered the remains of Dilboy to them. They had failed to acknowledge him properly and he felt insulted. As he trotted along the Chesme waterfront he noticed a large fig tree with a Greek flag painted halfway up the trunk and bristled in anger that this reminder of the enemy was still so prominently displayed. Below the tree, an old man sat relaxed, drinking coffee.

'What are you doing sitting here old Greek, under this flag. You should be leaving here with the others.'

‘This is my home Lieutenant. I am a friend of the Turks in this town,’ he said.

‘Did you paint that flag on the fig tree old man?’

Caristinos was surprised at the question. ‘Do I look like I could climb up that tree to paint a flag?’ he replied, with a half smile.

The Turkish officer was annoyed now. ‘Your insolence will not be tolerated old Greek. Get a rope on him and pull him up to that flag,’ he ordered. The soldiers tied his hands with rope and threw it over a high branch. They hauled him up to stand on the *taverna* table next to the painted flag. Caristinos clambered up with difficulty and stood up, holding the trunk with his tied hands.

‘Now scrape that flag off the tree with your fingers,’ the Lieutenant demanded.

With his hands still loosely tied together, Caristinos began scraping the paint with his fingernails, but the paint was hard and difficult to remove.

‘Hurry up old man, or we will shoot you and find another who will do it quicker.’

As he clawed at the paint, blood began to flow from under his nails. The soldiers laughed as he painfully removed it piece by piece. After twenty agonising minutes, the last remaining vestiges of blue and white paint were removed and Caristinos’s hands and shirt were sodden with blood. His body was shaking but his jaw was firm. Some of the refugees on the wharf were crying at the sight of the old man, covered in his own blood.

The Lieutenant turned to the soldiers and said ‘It is done. The outrage has been removed. Get him down.’

The soldiers then pulled on the rope and lowered him roughly to the ground. Caristinos stood up and offered his hands for the rope to be removed.

‘So you will now leave Chesme with the others old man. This land is no longer yours and your house is now the property of the Turkish Government,’ the Lieutenant smirked at him.

Caristinos looked up at the officer, still seated on his huge black horse. He gestured towards his house across the road. ‘That is the house given to me by my father and his father before him. I am a peaceful man and my shops and business bring wealth to this village. I will respect your government and do you no harm.’

Ahmet, who had heard the commotion hurried forward and stood between Caristinos and the Lieutenant. ‘Sir, it is true. He is a great business

man and generous employer; let him stay and our village will prosper, without him we will be lost.'

The officer was furious. 'Who are you to talk? You are a scoundrel who wears the Ottoman fez. We have a new government now, the Ottomans are finished and you try and deny the orders of our great leader Kemal. Get him out of the way!', he barked at his men, who hauled Ahmet away and tossed him roughly on to the road.

'Alright old Greek. Here you will stay, as you wish!' He rode up to Caristinos and kicked the old man in the side, knocking him over. 'Put the rope around his neck men!' Ahmet and the refugees waiting on the waterfront looked on in horror as the noose was placed around his neck. Mr and Mrs Stamos had arrived and were astounded when they saw Caristinos, his shirt drenched in blood. They cried out. 'Please free him. He will come to Chios with us.'

Ahmet, fell to his knees, in front of the officer, 'Please spare him, he will leave now'.

'Will you leave now old man?' the lieutenant asked.

Caristinos looked at his friend Ahmet and his Greek friends on the wharf looking on. He thought about his family, safe in Chios. With the rope tight around his neck he was unable to talk, but he shook his head and looked back at his house and the flowers in his garden.

'Pull him up,' the Lieutenant shouted. His men hauled on the rope and pulled him off his feet with the noose. Caristinos didn't struggle but his face began to turn blue.

'Now let him down!' was the next order, and he was dropped to the ground like a rag doll.

'You will have your wish old man, you will stay here.' The Lieutenant shouted to the refugees waiting on the waterfront. 'All of you watching here, this is the penalty for disobeying the orders of General Kemal. Now pull him up again!' and Caristinos was hauled to his feet by the rope stretching his neck upward. He once more looked back at his garden. The purple hyacinth will be blooming soon and he will cut some for his wife.

The Lieutenant rode forward with his sword in the air. With a long sweep he cut through his neck, the head and body both falling to the ground, the rope left swaying from the tree. The women and children on the wharf wailed at the terrible sight and Ahmet fell onto his knees in despair. The Lieutenant rode over and wiped his sword on Ahmet's back. He then sat

upright in his saddle, resheathed his sword and he and his soldiers moved north along the wharf.

Ahmet, moved alongside his old friend's body. 'Farewell Socrates,' he wept.

'You died where you wished, defending the home that you loved, like Tellus the Athenian warrior. I will bury you in your own garden old friend and tend your grave, this will always be your home and you will rest here undisturbed.'

The Stamos family walked slowly back to John Caristinos's boat, sobbing. They would have bad tidings to tell his family when they got to Chios.

Smyrna - September 24, 1922

It is not living that matters, but living rightly.

Socrates

After laying Christos's body on the ground Elisaveth went to the seawall for water to wash the blood from his face and body. Leaning forward, she found herself sobbing and noticed her tears falling into the sea. She wiped them from her face, gathered her emotions and returned to the others.

'I'm not going to let the Turks take his body away on their cart,' she said firmly. 'I will find a priest. We need to give our little brother a proper burial.' She turned and disappeared into the crowd.

Maria sat with Christos's head on her lap, stroking his lifeless face, while Eugenia and Arête laid their heads on his chest and held his dead hands. It seemed like hours before Elisaveth returned with a thin bearded priest, Father Gregory. Elisaveth asked the priest if there was an appropriate place nearby to bury her brother. Gregory said that it may be possible to get to the burnt out cathedral of St Fotini which was about one kilometre away, where there was a large graveyard, but the journey would be very dangerous with bands of Chetes roaming the streets.

'I will go alone with Father Gregory,' Elisaveth said, 'it is too dangerous for you all to come'.

'But you will never be able to carry Christos that far,' Eugenia replied, 'I will come with you'.

Maria shook her head. She was torn between a proper burial for her son and the real danger to her daughters. 'We cannot let Elisaveth go alone Mama,' Eugenia implored, 'we must go with her'.

Eugenia and Arête could not be dissuaded; all the women would go, carrying Christos's body on the wooden door that they had used as a bed for Arête for the last week. They set out in a sad procession, Father Gregory in front, followed by Elisaveth and Eugenia carrying the door with Christos's body and the weak Maria and Arête shuffling behind. They moved south and

stayed on the quay for as long as they could and then turned east into the city. At each corner, they checked that there were no Chetes in sight and moved away from the sounds of gunfire. Elisaveth recited the Lord's Prayer constantly as they walked. Dead bodies lay everywhere in the streets, many fly blown and bloated, and the priest and women crossed themselves for each one they passed.

Finally, they came to the burnt out remains of the cathedral, its steeple lying in the street, broken and black. Next to it was the graveyard with the crypts and crosses marking the Smyrniot notables who were buried there. The cathedral walls had partly collapsed into the graveyard and many of the crosses and gravestones had been shattered, but one of the graves was broken open and the coffin could be seen ten feet below. They had found a place in sacred ground where they would bury Christos. Elisaveth climbed down into the grave and her sisters passed Christos's body down to her and she placed his body on the coffin below. Maria handed his violin down and Elisaveth placed it on his chest and put his arms around it.

'He loved this violin. He will play it in paradise,' Elisaveth said.

Crying, she kissed his cheek and placed large stones around the body and the wooden door on the stones and she climbed out of the grave. Father Gregory performed the orthodox funeral liturgy and the women knelt and crossed themselves, throwing earth into the grave. They closed the broken gravesite with several large pieces of broken granite.

Only then did the sad group begin their walk back to the quay.

Mytilene - September 24, 1922

*You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships
every day.*

*You develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging
adversity.*

Epicurus

As Jennings took his place at the bridge of the *Propondis*, he ordered the Greek flags lowered on all twelve ships of his fleet. Jennings took out the small American flag that he had always carried and it was raised on the ship and with great excitement, he ordered the fleet to steam full speed ahead to Smyrna. The Greek transport ships were escorted by several American destroyers including the *Litchfield* and the *Lawrence*. Jennings wired the Greek government that all other available transport ships should steam for the harbour of the island Chios nearby, where he would meet them and facilitate their safe entry into Smyrna harbour.

Jennings couldn't sleep that night and he stood on the bridge with the captain and sailors and peered through the darkness imagining the people waiting for them. His mind was racing ahead to how he could best get them off the quay and onto his flotilla of ships and cursed the time that they were delayed in Mytiline harbour. Walking onto the deck he felt the air rushing past as the engines drove the *Propondis* forward and looking behind he saw the other ships of his little fleet ploughing through the sea. Surely this was the greatest gift he had ever been given, an opportunity to help so many. Why, of all men was he, a YMCA Boys' secretary, provided with this tool of salvation? His body shook in anticipation, but he looked at the stars above and the immensity of the heavens calmed him. Admiral of his fleet, he couldn't believe it. He closed his eyes and his mind filled with the long-suffering people to be rescued, his people. 'Thank you Lord for this instrument you have given me. Give me the strength to help these souls and

deliver them from evil. Guide them onto my ships and provide me with food and medicines to help them.'

His mind turned to the almost impossible practical task of the three hundred thousand starving sick people he would be allowed to rescue. What is required and what are my priorities? Experience and calm resolve took control of his thoughts. There is much to be done before we arrive. Beds need to be prepared for the sick and injured and medical supplies brought out of the infirmaries and onto the decks. The refugees would need food. I will ask the captains to arrange for as much hot soup as possible to be made ready and for the cooks to boil all the available beans, potatoes and other vegetables. We will need milk for the children and water and hot tea for the adults. I need to communicate this to all twelve ships and it needs to be arranged before we enter the harbour.

As dawn broke, the fleet steamed into Smyrna harbour. The previously vibrant city was charred and still except for the wisps of smoke still rising from the collapsed buildings. Almost the entire north and central parts of the city had been burnt to the ground. Jennings strained to look for signs of humanity on the waterfront but could only see a black ribbon which stretched along the quay. As they neared land he realized the ribbon was actually thousands of people covered in ash. How many had died while he had been away in Mytilene?

He knew that the surviving refugees were now starving, weak and ill and there was no time to lose. Every hour before they were rescued and fed would have a cost in human lives.

Smyrna - September 25, 1922

The sun is new each day.

Heraclitus

As dawn broke, the four women lay on the cold stones of the quay. Elisaveth felt sick but she was not concerned for herself. Arête had a fever and was weak and hungry and her baby had not been kicking as much these last few days. 'I have lost my husband, we have lost our brother and we have been driven from our homes. Now my baby is dying and I cannot bear the thought of us being taken away and tortured by the Turks. Elisaveth, pray that our souls will go swiftly to heaven,' Arête asked her sister, as she lay trembling on the ground that morning.

Eugenia held Arête in her arms, with her head on her lap. 'Shoosh Arête, don't get yourself upset. You need to keep up your strength for the two of you.'

Elisaveth spoke sternly. 'You are a strong brave woman Arête, and Georgios would be upset if he could hear what you are saying. You are going to live and so will your baby and when the light gets stronger, I will go and find some food to help you and mother get stronger. I don't want to hear any more silly talk from you.' Maria was too weak to help her daughter; she was also unwell and coughing and lay cradled in Elisaveth's arms. Elisaveth spoke to Eugenia and the others. 'I feel something good will happen today. The Virgin Mary spoke to me last night and said she would protect us. The worst is over.'

Elisaveth always gave Eugenia strength. 'There you are Arête. Elisaveth has heard a wonderful message, now get up from that cold ground and take some deep breaths. This will be a good day,' Eugenia said.

As the sun rose over the hills behind, Eugenia helped Arête stand up on her weak legs. Looking out to sea, Eugenia noticed some dots on the horizon and squinting through the early morning light she walked up to the seawall. 'There is something on the water. What is it Arête?'

‘I can’t see anything, my eyesight is cloudy. What can you see?’ Arête replied.

After a few minutes, the light improved and Eugenia found the dots became more discernable. ‘They are ships, a whole line of ships and they are coming towards us.’ Elisaveth joined them at the seawall. The ships were now easier to see and the thousands on the quay were aware that they had entered the harbour.

‘What sort of ships. Are they just another group of foreign warships?’ Arête asked.

‘I can see two American destroyers, but the other ships are different,’ Eugenia said. Then she recognised them. ‘They are the Greek troop ships that left weeks ago. They are back!’ Eugenia screamed. ‘And they are steaming towards us.’ She embraced her sisters, as other people began shouting as they recognised the incoming fleet.

‘You were right Elisaveth! The Virgin Mary spoke the truth, the ships are here to take us away!’

Behind them, Maria rose unsteadily to her feet and crossed herself as she witnessed the arrival of Asa Jennings’s fleet. Thousands on the waterfront began cheering and the four women held each other and wept.

Smyrna - September 25, 1922

*There are certain angels of God, and certain good influences,
which are His servants in accomplishing the salvation of men.*

Origen

After his fleet anchored in the harbour, Jennings took a launch to the wharf where he was met by a Turkish officer who told him the ships would need to stay at anchor and the refugees would be transported to them by light boats. Jennings erupted. 'This will slow the evacuation for days. We must have permission to bring the ships to the railroad pier! Who is your commanding officer?' After hours of furious argument, Jennings got permission for the boats to berth in rotation at the pier. The Turks arranged barricades through which the refugees would pass and where they would be inspected so that men would be prevented from leaving. As before, this would be the last opportunity to rob the refugees of any valuables. When the first ship docked, there was a rush of people forward and many were crushed. Some even tried to climb over the barricades and were hauled down and clubbed by the Turkish troops. Husbands and sons were torn from their families and put under guard by the Turkish soldiers to be marched away and several men broke away and leapt into the deep water, soon joining the other corpses floating in the harbour. Cries of anguish rang out as the wretched survivors of Smyrna faced their final humiliations.

It took two days for the Girdis family to get to the evacuation point on the pier, but by this time, Maria and Arête were too weak to walk and had to be carried forward by Eugenia and Elisaveth. As the four women approached the barricade they passed a line of dishevelled men being marched away by Turkish troops and Elisaveth recognised one of them; it was Father Gregory who had helped them. His face was bloodied and bruised and he was limping. She ran forward to comfort him but was pushed back by a Turkish soldier. How could he ever survive being marched inland? she thought, but

knew she couldn't help him. 'May the Lord protect you reverend Father,' she cried out. He turned slowly towards her, giving the sign of the cross.

The women finally reached the head of the line and were confronted by the soldiers at the barricade. Their thin bodies were groped and prodded as they passed through the gates but they had no valuables and were roughly pushed out onto the waterfront, falling onto their knees. Elisaveth knew at last they were free and looking up, in front of them, was the wonderful sight of the troopship *Propondis*. Holding each other, the four women struggled toward the gangplank when a man in a white suit and hat hurried towards them. He beckoned to several sailors with stretchers and together they picked up Maria and Arête and carried them on board with Eugenia and Elisaveth following. The two sick women were laid on the deck.

Elisaveth, dressed in her torn and filthy nun's habit reached towards Jennings, kissing his hand and kneeling in front of him, crossing herself. Jennings looked down at this thin bedraggled nun before him, with her matted hair and large sad eyes; the tears flowed down his cheeks. He turned to Arête and placed a blanket over her and then went inside and returned with a bowl of hot soup. He knelt beside Arête and spooned the life giving fluid into her mouth and then did the same for Maria. Eugenia watched as he fed her mother and sister, admiring his kind face and eyes streaming with tears. For the second time she thanked him. '*Efcharisto Kyrios.*' He understood and nodded to her. 'I'm sorry I couldn't help you earlier,' he said. Maria and Arête lay next to each other, their heads cradled by Eugenia and Elisaveth. For the first time in weeks they sobbed with relief and hope that their prayers had been answered and a miracle had been provided by this small, bent, angelic man.

Jennings was unstoppable for the next six days. As well as distributing food and water to those still waiting on the quay, he directed the boats as they entered and left the harbour, assigning their destinations to the Greek islands and ports to give the refugees the best chance of survival. A total of fifty ships arrived and took part in the evacuation; as well as Mytilene, Jennings arranged the ships to disembark refugees on the other nearby islands of Chios and Samos as well as Crete, Euboea and Salonica and Cavalla on the mainland. Soon however, the nearby islands were overflowing with refugees and ran out of food and Admiral Mark Bristol, who had initially been very antagonistic to Greece's incursion in Asia Minor, now became Jennings major ally in the evacuation. Bristol chaired the Disaster Committee and

directed the US destroyer fleet to transport flour and medical supplies from *Constantinople* to the islands as well as performing the further evacuations to the mainland. From his base in *Constantinople* and using the radio communications of his destroyers, he facilitated the transport of supplies and refugees between the Aegean islands and Greek ports.

About forty-five thousand people were rescued daily from Smyrna over the following five days, removing all the eligible refugees from the quay. On the last day, the thirtieth of September and Kemal's deadline, Jennings surveyed the quay for the last time; finally it was deserted and the last of the evacuees were on his ships. Accompanied by sailors from the USS *Lawrence*, he made a final sweep of the streets behind the quay with the sailors and his Greek YMCA workers, Dimi and Alexandros, looking for anyone who may have been left behind. His two workers had been tirelessly caring for the people in his field hospital which for the first time was now empty. Near the Turkish barracks, a large group of the Greek and Armenian men were being guarded in a barbed wire enclosure by Turkish troops before being marched away; they were a sorry sight, but he was powerless to help them. In the burnt out streets, the only sign of life were Turkish looters rummaging through the rubble. Jennings was satisfied that there were no refugees left and it was time to go, but knew that the Turks would never allow his two Greek workers to leave Smyrna. Days before he had hatched a plan to smuggle them past the Turkish soldiers and he had the sailors bring two extra American uniforms. Dressed in their new white finery, Dimi and Alexandros marched onto the launches among the squad of American sailors.

The evacuation was finally over and as Jennings sailed out of the harbour for the last time, he looked back at the burnt city. Over three hundred thousand people had been rescued but tens of thousands had died on the quay and more than a hundred thousand men and boys had been rounded up and marched inland, into oblivion. An unknown number of young children had been kidnapped and sold into slavery. Jennings had promised their families that he would do his best to recover those who had disappeared, but it was a promise that he knew he may never be able to accomplish.

The events of 1922 would remain forever in the memories of Greeks everywhere and from that date onwards they would have a fitting name for the Asia Minor disaster. It was simply called The Catastrophe.

Mytiline - God bless their souls - October, 1922

Gratitude to gratitude always gives birth.

Sophocles

Jennings was able to get an extension of eight days to evacuate hundreds of thousands of other refugees waiting all along the Asia Minor coast, at Chesme, Urla, Ayvali, Makri and other ports. A total of 1.2 million people were eventually rescued by Jennings' fleet, the largest evacuation in history.

Maria and her family were taken to the nearby island of Mytiline, where they were housed in tents, formerly used by the Greek army. The Red Cross provided food through hastily built kitchens but conditions deteriorated quickly as thousands more sick and starving refugees arrived daily. Eugenia and Elisaveth managed to keep their mother and sister fed, by helping in a kitchen but sickness and death were everywhere. As the camp became more and more crowded, tents were designated as hospitals, with attempts to quarantine people suffering from typhus and cholera. A cemetery was created on the hillside and grew rapidly.

Jennings estimated that there were 30,000 refugees on Mytiline after the arrival of the ships which included the Girdis family and realised that there was a dire shortage of food, particularly flour. As many refugees sickened and became restless, he sent a desperate message to the other US destroyers in the vicinity.

The immediate need for flour at Mytiline is imperative. We must have flour within 24 hours or there will be food panic and riot on the island. All are now depending on our promise that flour will arrive immediately. The knowledge that flour has actually been landed will calm all and help us in controlling the situation.

Finally, several weeks after they arrived, the four Girdis women were able to board a freighter bound for Salonika on the mainland. More than three

thousand people were packed onto the ship meant for about five hundred, but all were overjoyed that they were leaving the camp at Mytiline.

At Salonika however, although the camp was much larger conditions were no better, with thousands of Greek and Armenian refugees from both the Asia Minor coast and also from the Pontus arriving daily. The tent camp outside the city was located amongst a number of farm houses and barns and fortunately had a good supply of fresh water, but like Mytiline there was a stench of death and disease and a rapidly growing cemetery with hundreds of wooden crosses. All of the refugees were unfit women, children and old men who were not well enough to work on the nearby farms. The Red Cross and Near East Relief Committee were in charge and there were scores of doctors and nurses from America and England. The Girdis women were billeted to a tent with twelve other people, several of whom were sick and coughing and although Maria was now stronger, Arête was still unwell, confined to bed and now in the last stages of her pregnancy. She still had a cough and fever.

Elisaveth returned to the other women after investigating the new camp and town nearby. 'I managed to send a telegram to Aunt Helen in Athens. Hopefully she will receive it and send us money for train tickets.'

'Thank the Lord. It will be wonderful to have a roof over our heads again,' Eugenia replied.

Arête had been vomiting that morning, her face had taken on a grey colour and Elisaveth was very concerned for both her and the baby. 'Arête is still very unwell and she is not getting better. There are terrible diseases in this camp and hospital tents with smallpox, typhus and cholera. Several of the doctors also look sick, so we must leave soon.'

Maria was feeding with Arête with a spoon. 'With God's help we will leave soon. Say a prayer for your sister and her unborn child, Elisaveth.'

Eugenia and Maria knelt around Arête as she lay on a stretcher in the tent camp whilst Elisaveth prayed for her. 'Dear Lord, have pity and restore the health of your daughter Arête and her unborn child who have suffered greatly. She is a brave Christian woman who deserves to live and to have a healthy baby to bring her happiness and preserve the memory of her husband Georgios.'

The following day Elisaveth nervously returned to the telegraph office in town and found that the money had been wired from Helen in Athens. Thank the Lord, she thought, but how can we get Arête to the train station, it

is five miles away and she is too sick to walk. That afternoon the four women left the camp for the station, with Elisaveth carrying Arête in her arms.

‘I wish I could help you carry Arête, but my arms aren’t strong enough,’ Eugenia said as she shook her head.

‘I’m fine, you just help mother, I can manage,’ Elisaveth replied.

Elisaveth had to stop every mile to rest, laying Arête on the ground each time. She was weak herself, the power of her arms failing repeatedly as she carried her sister, but the strength of her heart and the force of her character drove her forward. She was totally exhausted by the time they reached the station. That afternoon they boarded a train bound for Athens. During the journey, Arête’s head lolled back on the seat and her eyes closed. The journey was a relief for the weary family and Maria’s cousin met them when they arrived. That afternoon they fed Arête argolemono soup and she opened her eyes and smiled. Later they were even attended by the family doctor. The women finally knew they had the safety of a real home, good food and medical attention and over the next month, Arête steadily improved and regained her strength.

Jennings was also in Athens, heading relief efforts for the displaced refugees which had overwhelmed the city. Many of the refugees recognised him, and when they did, they bowed before him as he passed, some calling him Admiral and others Angel. Initially, the challenges of housing and food were immense, but in the following months these problems were solved as the refugees brought the cultural heritage and financial knowledge of their rich Asia Minor communities to their new land. Greece would never be the same; its population increased and was greatly enriched by the huge influx of people from Asia Minor. Athens in particular, not only rapidly increased in size, but the wave of educated and cultured immigrants led to its rapid evolution into a great modern city. Other refugees would travel thousands of miles, to America, Australia, Europe and elsewhere, irrevocably changing those communities.

The day after arriving in Athens, Elisaveth went to the telegraph office to wire her brothers in Brisbane, Australia.

Dear John, Steven, Mark and George,

We pray you are all well.

Your mother, Elisaveth, Arête and Eugenia arrived safely in Athens today after escaping from Asia Minor.

Your brother Christos and Georgios Roumanos were killed in Smyrna.
God bless their souls.

We are staying with Aunt Helen in Athens who has been wonderful.

We will wait for Arête to have her baby which is due soon.

Then we will take a ship to Brisbane to join you once the baby is strong enough to travel.

Please wire us money for passage, as all of our money was stolen.

God Bless You,

Your Mother and Sisters.

A few weeks later, Arête delivered a healthy baby girl whom she called Despina, after Georgios's mother. The baby was strong and had a good voice and Elisaveth said that she would bear many children. A month later they boarded an Italian ship for their long voyage to Port Said, India, Fremantle, Melbourne, Sydney and finally Brisbane. A new life awaited them, but the memories of those times would stay with them forever.

Lausanne, Switzerland - 1923

For the Greeks, for whom a deeper hatred existed, was reserved a slower and more leisurely death ... All were starved and thousands died of disease, fatigue and exposure. Authentic reports from American relief workers tell of small bands far inland that had started out thousands strong.

George Horton, American Consul

Jennings had been invited to be a representative of the United States, Greece and Turkey at a meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland to exchange Greek and Turkish prisoners of war. Incredibly, all three governments trusted him to represent them at the conference. On January 30, 1923 Jennings successfully negotiated the exchange of forty thousand Greek and Turkish prisoners of war.

To replace the more than one million Greeks who had been displaced from the Aegean and Black Sea coasts of Asia Minor, the Turkish government agreed to an exchange with about four hundred thousand Turks mainly from Thracian Greece or the island of Crete. Greece also agreed to the forced transportation of all other remaining Christians in central Anatolia including those who occupied the fairy chimney communities of Cappadocia, but a small number of Christians in *Constantinople* and Turks in western Thrace were exempted from the exchange. The survivors of the thousands of Greek civilian men who in 1922 had been designated as prisoners of war and marched inland were included in the exchange. They had lived under appalling conditions and only a fraction had survived to be transported to Greece, but Jennings was instrumental in their repatriation and he had honoured his promise to their families.

On July 24 1923, the treaty of Lausanne was signed, where the exchange was finalised and the Greco-Turkish border was fixed. This decision heralded the end of the two thousand five hundred year history of Greek occupation of Asia Minor and closed the door on the Asia Minor Christians returning home. After the finalisation of the treaty, Jennings' only agenda was the safe movement and resettlement of these populations and insisted that the Western Allies assist in the housing and feeding of the refugees.

The final result of the Greco-Turkish war had major consequences. It had brought down two governments and established two new republics. The sultan fled to Malta, the Ottoman Empire was overthrown by the Young Turks and the republic of modern Turkey was born with Kemal as its first president. His new Turkish state was based on a secular constitution, somewhat curious after the policy of forced expulsions, exchanges and murders which had resulted in an almost completely Moslem population. The Greek monarchy was overthrown, and Greece also became a republic. Hundreds of thousands of Christian Ionian Greeks of eastern Asia Minor and Armenians of western and northern Anatolia were marched to their deaths in the Syrian desert. Atrocities were committed by both sides, but the events between 1914 and 1922 cost the lives of over three million civilians, mainly Armenian and Greek, and violently translocated almost as many others from Asia Minor and Greece.

The lives of everyone who had lived there would be changed forever.

Athens - 1924

I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.

Socrates

In 1924, whilst he was still arranging relief in Athens, Jennings was awarded Greece's highest civilian and military honours, the first time that both had been awarded to one person. The Golden Cross of St Xavier was presented by the Patriarch and the Medal of Military Merit by the Greek President for his work in evacuating over a million refugees from Asia Minor. He was marked as being a 'true humanitarian and altruist'. Jennings who was not used to this attention stopped in a small chapel on the way home to pray and give thanks. Afterwards, the couple returned to their hotel room and Amy removed her coat as she walked through the door. 'I am very proud of you Asa.' Jennings drew open the curtains and looked out at the view of Syntagma Square. 'Honours aren't important Amy. Giving people hope and relieving their suffering are our goals and it is wonderful to see our refugees rediscovering a normal life and thriving. Soon our work here will be over.'

'Where will we go then Asa?'

'There are people in need everywhere Amy and we will find them, trust in the Lord, he will point the way.'

'There will always be God's work for you Asa.'

Jennings put his arms around Amy and kissed her gently on the forehead. 'No man has been more blessed than me Amy. You and our children are a greater gift than the Lord has given to any king.' The telephone on the bedside table rang and Jennings picked up the receiver.

'Istanbul calling, is that Mr Asa Jennings?'

'Yes it is.'

'A moment please, I have the President of Turkey, Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, wishing to speak to you.'

'Yes of course, I will wait.' Asa looked at Amy, and raised his brow. He put his hand over the telephone and whispered to Amy, 'It's Kemal'.

‘Hello Mr Jennings, I hope you are well.’

‘Good afternoon, Mr President.’

‘You did a wonderful job at Lausanne, but now I have another job for you. We are a poor country Mr Jennings and our young people are uneducated. Izmir, or Smyrna as you knew it, has become a dangerous city. There are gangs terrorising the local people and we have almost no teachers and very few schools. There is little industry or employment and the young men who have returned have only ever known work in the army and have no other skills. Very few Turkish men had been involved in industry, in teaching or the professions. We need your help Mr Jennings. I want you to lead an Izmir Community Welfare Council to restore order to the city, and to develop schools and training colleges. This could then be a model for other cities in Turkey. Your YMCA experience and knowledge of youth welfare will be invaluable to us.’

‘This is a very important job, Mr President. I hope to complete the relief effort with the Greek and Armenian refugees shortly and after that, I would be pleased to help.’

‘Thank you for considering this Mr Jennings. The people of Izmir and Turkey are desperate for your help.’ Jennings put down the phone, and looked at Amy.

‘Well. What did he want Asa?’

‘Your question has been answered Amy and the Lord has given us a sign. Kemal says that the Turks have a huge problem in Asia Minor, with few schools or colleges. The educated Greeks and Armenians have gone, bands of youth roam the streets and Kemal wants me to help. He wants us to go back to Smyrna.’

Amy looked at him. ‘And do you want to go back there Asa, after all that happened there? The cruelty, the murders, the burning of the city, a terrible nightmare that you bore silently. I know it hurt you so much, the pain still reverberates in you every day. Are you sure you can return there?’

Asa looked out over Athens. The city was bustling with an energy that it had never known previously. Asa nodded his head. ‘I am needed there Amy more than I will be needed here. The Asia Minor Greeks are doing well. They are educated and motivated to prosper and soon they will not need any help at all. On the other hand, the Turkish children of Smyrna are starving, and without hope. Neither religion nor race are our beacon Amy and we will go back to Smyrna. There is no war there now, only ashes and memories. I

will face my demons and you will be by my side.’ He put his arms around Amy’s shoulders. ‘It will be just like our first voyage to Smyrna, Amy. We go with hope and strength to help our fellow man and with God’s strength we will succeed.’

Amy had tears in her eyes, as she embraced him. ‘Of course we will go Asa, I know the person I married. A man with the heart of a lion. I never thought you would do otherwise.’

Smyrna (now Izmir) - 1924

*You cannot step twice into the same river,
For other waters are ever flowing on to you.*

Heraclitus

On a cold grey day in March 1924, Jennings, Amy and the children left *Constantinople* to return to Smyrna on the USS *Litchfield*, but it was a very different voyage from their first one. There were no tourists or festivities, but Jennings' mood was quiet and determined, just as it had been before. They were accompanied by Admiral Bristow, still the Turkish High Commissioner. 'It is wonderful that you have accepted the invitation to help the Turks, Asa. The city is in ruins and thousands are starving.'

'I am grateful to be given the opportunity to help Mark, just as you helped me with the Smyrna rescue, I will be asking for your assistance again I'm sure.'

'Certainly, certainly. The US government hasn't recognised the new Turkish republic yet, but I hope to convince them to do so shortly. Kemal and his government are very grateful to you Asa and your support will help bring our two countries closer.'

'I'm not interested in the politics Mark, just the people, but if the recognition will facilitate our relief efforts, then so be it.'

'It will be very helpful Asa and the diplomacy is my job. You have enough on your plate.'

As they steamed into Smyrna harbour, Jennings noticed it was eerily silent. There were no other warships, freighters or fishing boats as the Turks had not been a seagoing people. Bristol shook his hand and raised his hat to the couple as Jennings and Amy walked down the gangplank to the quay. The buildings were still blackened shells and the roof of the Y Building had fallen in and only two walls remained. On the quay, only the Ottoman clock tower, the army barracks and the Governor's residence were intact. Even his

old field hospital had been looted. Kemal had renamed the city Izmir, as if to erase the memory of the fire which had stained its history.

They were met by the Turkish *Mukhtar* (mayor), along with police and armed soldiers in several cars and lorries. The *Mukhtar* spoke first. 'Welcome back Mr Jennings. We have a car to tour the city and take you to your hotel in the southern sector.'

'Thank you Sir. Please take Amy and the children in the car but I'd prefer to walk, it will give me a better understanding of the problems of the city and its people.'

'Alright Mr Jennings, if you insist, but we will need to be careful, the streets in this area are very dangerous.'

They set off, Jennings, the *Mukhtar* and the Police Commissioner followed by an armed squad of soldiers. They walked down the Rue Franque, but the previously vibrant street was silent and the boutiques, cafes and clubs were in ruins. A few bare footed children were raking through the rubble. The mayor explained that because of the loss of industry and trade, more than half of the population were unemployed. There were very few children in schools and crime and poverty were rampant. The rest of the old central city district was empty with almost every building burnt to the ground. The Opera House had completely collapsed and as they walked south, he noticed that almost all the schools, hospitals and factories in the European, Greek, and Armenian sections had been destroyed. Everywhere Jennings saw youths digging under fallen buildings and looting shops and houses and small children in rags begging in the street. In the middle of a square surrounded by collapsed shops, he noticed a small pale girl with a deformed foot lying very still next to a begging cup. He leant over and touched her forehead and noticed she was burning with fever.

'This child is very ill.' Jennings lifted up the tiny body and cradled her in his arms.

'Where is the nearest hospital?' he asked the *Mukhtar*.

'It's several miles from here, to the south. Give her to my soldiers; it is too far for you to carry her.'

'No, I'll take her,' Jennings insisted.

That afternoon, a small hunchbacked man in a white suit and Panama hat could be seen, walking briskly through the burnt out streets of Smyrna carrying a tiny girl with a club foot. Behind him, finding it difficult to keep up was the *Mukhtar* in a top hat, a troop of city officials and a squad of

soldiers. It was unlike any procession that the people had ever seen and all wondered who was this strange man and why did the *Mukhtar* and the others hurry after him.

As Jennings walked into the southern Turkish quarter, where the city was intact, he knew that here he would begin his work with community leaders in restoring hope and welfare to the city. It would take years in the face of the destroyed infrastructure, but he knew it could be done.

Finally they arrived at the Turkish hospital. He took the tiny girl to the emergency ward and carefully laid her frail body on bed and into the hands of a nurse. As he stepped back he could see her large brown eyes. She looked around in amazement at the warm room and soft bed and for the first time she could see the man who had rescued her. She wondered who was this strange foreigner who had been so kind to her. Jennings had saved another life. This time in Izmir.

Six months later, Jennings was extending his humanitarian work across Turkey to Angora itself, when he read an editorial from the *Christian Advocate*, a US newspaper It read:

A plan was worked out for a system of associations or clubs in large centers, where everything which distinguishes the threefold program of the Young Men's Christian Association shall be put in practice under the official patronage and with the support of the Turkish Government, which is Mohammedan in religion, but under the direction of Mr. Jennings, who is a 'Y' secretary and a Methodist preacher. The first of these clubs is to be opened at Angora, the new capital ... but it was stipulated by the Angora government these institutions, though redolent of the spirit of Christ, must not bear the name of Christian. That is a fundamental condition. Everything Christian, except the label!

Jennings was annoyed at the newspaper article but unrepentant. His attitude was Socratic, universal and he would dispense Christ's compassion without seeking recognition of his faith. His aim was not to seek religious conversions but to impart mercy.

Hamilton Wharf, Brisbane, Australia - April 1923

*Life is an unfoldment, and the further we travel
the more truth we can comprehend.
And to understand the things that are at our door,
is the best preparation for understanding those that lie beyond.*
Hypatia

John, Steven, Mark and George Girdis stood at Hamilton Wharf in Brisbane, Australia, waiting for their mother and sisters to arrive. John and Steven had their wives with them, while Mark and George, still single were waiting to be married later that year to girls arriving from Greece. After the telegrams six months earlier, the brothers had already mourned the death of their younger brother Christos and their brother-in-law Georgios Roumanos whom they had never met. Despite the sadness, they were now determined to make the reunion a happy occasion. As the ship approached the wharf, they saw a young woman waving madly on the front deck. They hadn't seen Eugenia for years, but soon recognised her. Nearby was Arête holding her baby, and on either side were Elisaveth and Maria.

The four women, who had lost everything and sailed half way around the world, walked off the ship with only two small suitcases. Eugenia was very excited to be seeing her older brothers. The Brisbane River was wider than any she had ever seen and there were hundreds of people on the wharf to welcome them. She couldn't see her brothers but she knew they must be there somewhere, so she just waved at all the faces on the wharf. She hurried forward alone into the waiting crowd looking for them, but all she could see were strangers. As she stood amongst the hundreds of people on the wharf, memories flooded back into her head of a quay half a world away. The crowds of people on the wharf were looking for their relatives and calling out names. Someone screamed out in joy and Eugenia mistook it for a cry of panic and she was suddenly transported back to Smyrna. In the noise and

confusion she became worried that she couldn't find her family. Where was her younger brother? 'Where are you Christos?' she shouted. 'Stop hiding. I can't find you!' She ran into the throng calling, 'Where are you?' She looked into the face of every young boy she could find.

Then behind her, she felt a warm hand on her shoulder and turning around she saw Elisaveth's kind face and her arms encircled her. Eugenia's face was frightened and confused. She looked at her sister, shaking her head from side to side. 'Elisaveth. Where is our brother Christos? He was with me on the wharf a moment ago, where has he gone?'

Elisaveth spoke softly. 'He is with the Lord, Eugenia, and in our hearts.' Slowly, the realisation of what had happened returned and she burst into tears.

Her family all arrived and suddenly she was surrounded by her brothers. Maria and the three sisters embraced their four brothers and cried. 'No more tears now. We are all together and will never again be separated,' Steven said. The large family held each other for a long time. John and Steven introduced their two wives and they all slowly walked to the road and boarded a Tramcar. It reminded the women of those in Smyrna. The tram rattled through the city streets, past the magnificent sandstone buildings in Queen Street and crossed an iron bridge over the river. John spoke as they travelled. 'We are crossing the Victoria Bridge to South Brisbane where most of the Greeks in Brisbane live. Steven and I live nearby.'

'Are there any other families from Asia Minor here?' Arête asked.

'Yes, there a quite a few and many others coming, although most of the Greeks here came from the islands of Kythera and Castelorizo.'

Soon after, they arrived at John's home in Stanley Street, South Brisbane, which was strange to Eugenia's eyes, all wooden, and raised from the ground with posts, but with beautiful wide balconies on all sides and wide open windows. Eugenia had recovered from her confusion on the wharf and was amazed and happy to see her brothers so well assimilated in this large city so distant from Asia Minor. Soon after, she felt even happier when the family began bringing food onto the table. There were Greek dishes which she recognised like *dolmades*, tomatoes filled with rice, *pasticcio*, roast lamb and potatoes, but the seafood was new. She was told they were crabs and prawns, and they had a strange taste, but she ate them and they were good. Afterwards they enjoyed the traditional Greek sweets,

kourabiades, *baklava* and *galatabouriko*. It was a wonderful feast and the atmosphere was like that of their special dinners at Alatsata.

‘You see what a city we have here ladies,’ John spoke. ‘The Turks did us all a favour, by driving us out of Asia Minor they delivered us to a land of great opportunity and above all to a peaceful community which has never tasted the curse of war.’

‘And may it never experience war; I have never felt safer at any time in my life. This is truly a different world from where we came,’ Elisaveth replied, smiling happily. Before they began to eat everyone was served a glass of sherry, and Elisaveth was asked to say grace. With tears in her large eyes, Elisaveth stood at the head of the table with her hands clasped.

‘We thank the Lord and our Holy Mother for bringing us safely to this wonderful country and to this house where we are reunited with our four older brothers and for the first time meet their gracious families. We remember the sacrifice of our brave brother Christos, father Nicholas and brother-in-law Georgios. May they rest in peace. We hope to put all bad thoughts behind us as we embrace Brisbane and Australia as our new home and we will bring to this country the Christian values and courage of heart which have always made our family strong.’

Maria raised her glass and announced ‘*Si Yia* – To life. *Kai tyn Australia*’ – and To Australia’. All the family raised their glasses ‘To life and to our new home Australia’.

South Brisbane, Australia - April 1923 - Reunited

Faults are beauties in a lover's eye.

Theocritus

A surprise was in store for Eugenia during the afternoon. Con Caristinos arrived with a huge basket of fruit for the family.

‘A small gift to celebrate the reuniting of the Girdis family,’ he shouted.

It seemed to Eugenia that he was taller than before, his hair was fairer, his smile warmer and she didn’t think he would be teasing her today, as he had before. He kissed Eugenia first and then the rest of the family. They asked Con about his life in Brisbane.

‘Con has done very well ladies, like his father he is a good business man and has a large fruit distribution business. We often enjoy his wonderful produce,’ George said.

‘Is the fruit as good as that from our orchards in Alatsata?’ Arête asked.

‘Well we don’t have figs or peaches to compare but I think you will enjoy my bananas and mangoes.’ After a time, Eugenia and Con drifted onto the large balcony. She talked about their experiences in Athens and the long sea voyage but avoided the time in Smyrna.

‘I hope you’re not going to tease me again like you did in Chesme Con?’

‘You are the one who would tease me Eugenia, you would drive me crazy but I would always let you win,’ Con replied.

‘Ha. You were not always so generous, but I would always forgive your nasty ways. It was such a long time ago Con,’ she said.

‘It was, and much has happened since then. I know that you had a terrible time on the quay at Smyrna, Eugenia. It must have been awful for you and your family. I’m so sorry you suffered like that.’

‘It seems like a nightmare now, Con. I still wake at night dreaming I’m there, the fire around us or my brother being killed. I can’t seem to believe we were saved, when so many others were killed.’

He put his arms around her shoulders and pressed his cheek on hers. 'I can't believe how strong you were,' he said.

'It was Elisaveth who kept us strong, not me. She supported all of us when father died in Athens; she fought with the Turks to try and save our brother; she gave Georgios and Christos decent burials and nursed Arête and Mama back to health; and she carried Arête for miles to the train station in Salonika. In the face of murder and disaster, she gave us strength and hope. All of us owe our lives to her.'

'Your sister is truly a saint. And how were you saved? I understand the Greek navy was not allowed to return to rescue you.'

'By an angel, Con. A bent man in a white suit gave us food and water on the quay and then brought the ships to rescue us. He spoke English but I don't know his name and without him we would all have been marched away to die. I will never forget his caring face, it shone like a saint.'

'It's truly a miracle that you are here.' Con looked into her eyes which had become tearful and she turned away embarrassed and wiped them with her sleeve.

'And what of your father and your family Con, are they in Chios?'

'My father refused to leave Chesme, Eugenia. He was killed there after he put the rest of his family on his boat to Chios. Anthony and the others are still in Chios; they are very well and plan to come to Brisbane next year. My father could never leave his home; he would have been broken hearted to have left it behind. His soul is reunited with the earth that he loved, but we all miss him greatly.'

She took his hand and squeezed it. 'We certainly will Con; he was larger than life, kind and wise. My brother Christos looked up to him like a father, and your father loved Christos like his own sons. They are together forever now, Christos and your father, playing backgammon, laughing and enjoying each other's company.' Leaning forward she kissed Con on the cheek.

Con's expression became very serious and he looked into Eugenia's eyes. 'I'm glad you came to Australia Eugenia. I have missed you.' Eugenia's eyes filled with tears. Con took out a handkerchief to dry them and put his arm around her shoulder. Eugenia cradled her head into his chest.

After a time, he brushed his lips onto hers, first gently and then as she responded, more urgently.

It was Eugenia's first kiss and she smiled lovingly back at him.

‘You said we would be reunited one day, Con, we cannot fight our destiny.’

Con kissed her again and soon after, the two walked back into the house, holding hands.

Arête saw them first, and then Elisaveth and Maria.

Washington DC - January 1935

Within the heart of every man lives a lion

Armenian proverb

It had been ten years since Jennings had seen Mark Bristol, former US Turkish High Commissioner and Admiral in charge of the US Navy in the Aegean at the time of the disaster and he looked forward to dinner at Bristol's home in Georgetown. It was a cold night and Jennings was wearing a thick black coat and warm felt hat as he was greeted at the door.

'You look well Admiral.' Jennings warmly shook hands with his old friend, removing his heavy coat.

'And you look cold Admiral,' Bristol replied, smiling.

'Please call me Asa. I'm not used to these North American winters any more, strange for a New York boy but I'm used to the mild Asia Minor weather now.'

'Will you have a glass of whiskey to warm you up?'

'I don't drink alcohol Mark, anything else will be fine.'

'Lemonade for you then. I have heard of your wonderful accomplishments in Turkey, Asa. You have established countless schools and training colleges and set up a wonderful Turkish youth welfare system. How have you done it?'

'With lots of help from here Mark. In 1930, I established the American Friends of Turkey and we now employ personnel and provide assistance to every major Turkish city. With their support we have built orphanages, established vocational training centres and funded schools and libraries. Slowly we are winning the battle, but we still have much to do.'

'I know you are also a mainstay of the Children's Protection Society in Turkey and have managed to arrange assistance for Turkish students travelling here to Washington for graduate studies. I even heard a story that you had some pure bred cattle donated to a Turkish farm. Your energy never fails to amaze me.'

‘A drop in the ocean, there is much more to accomplish. Do you remember when we first met Mark?’

‘Yes Asa. It was at the city hall to hear the address by Chrysostomos. Such an elegant speaker, he had such a very bad ending.’

‘His loss was a tragedy, as was the entire Greek incursion into Turkey. We have lived in terrible times Mark, first the Great War and then the Asia Minor tragedy.’

‘Chrysostomos was unable to help the Greeks, but you did Asa, you rose to the occasion. Living in Turkey for many years, I heard an old Armenian proverb – within the heart of every man lives a lion. You were the lion on the quay, Asa. Thank God that you were there or the Asia Minor tragedy would have been infinitely worse.’

‘We all played our part Mark, your ships and sailors were an essential factor in the rescue effort.’

‘Asa, you witnessed the destruction and suffering of Smyrna first hand, saw thousands die and nursed the injured victims. Most people would try to expunge that from their memories forever but you decided to return to Turkey and to Smyrna. It was a brave decision.’

‘It was an easy decision Mark. As you know, after the disaster the Turkish youth had few educational opportunities and were unemployed and suffering. They were as much victims of the fire as the Greeks were and I was asked to assist them. I am a YMCA man and our vocation is to help others. My job was not over after the evacuation, it had only just begun.’

‘The hatred between the Turks and the Greeks and Armenians led to these problems Asa. Whether it was religious or political is open to debate, but it was a war where cities and civilians became the front line. A new type of war.’

‘All war is a crime Mark and the children of the world are guiltless, no matter the transgressions of their fathers. In that war, like all wars, there were atrocities committed by both sides. Crimes against humanity, unspeakable horrors. But the war ended and afterwards, in Smyrna and the other cities of Asia Minor, the future of thousands of innocent children was at stake, no matter whether they were Moslem or Christian. The greatest lesson that we have learnt from our saviour was that we should forgive our fellow man. The choice was easy Mark. Tolerance and forgiveness or revenge and hatred, a friend’s helping hand or the terrorist’s bomb. Terror and revenge are never a solution. I think you know the path I follow Mark.’

‘Indeed I do Asa and I greatly respect your views. What did you think of Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, visiting Kemal in Istanbul and recommending him for the Nobel peace prize?’

‘Incredible Mark. It indicates the stature of both these men and after years of war there may be a chance of peace between Greece and Turkey after all.’

‘Amazing yes, but peace breaking out in the world is not good for military men like me. Just as well that I am retired now.’

Jennings chuckled. ‘Mark, peace or war, an old sea dog like you will always long for an ocean to cross or a ship to sail. You’re a rare commodity.’

‘And what of the Lausanne population exchange Asa? Eleven years after the event.’

‘We had to deal with the exchange as best we could Mark. It was a political decision and as you know, I objected to the translocation of so many families. Many people didn’t survive the move and most others still dream of their lost childhood homes, be they in Asia Minor, Crete or the Pontus. The politicians were satisfied that it enabled them to create strong homogeneous nations, but I don’t think that justified the cost in human misery. I dream that all people could live together happily, tolerating their differences, worshipping their own Gods in a harmonious society. There were elements of that in cosmopolitan Smyrna before 1922. One day a nation’s greatness will be built upon the diversity of its people and cities will be large multi-cultural communities. This is not so far away Mark.’

‘Not only are you a courageous man Asa, but you are also a visionary.’

‘These are tenets of the Y, and men of virtue like Lincoln and Jefferson saw it long ago,’ Jennings replied.

‘You know Asa, the ancient Greeks had a word for a special type of virtue. I can’t remember what it was, but they applied it to those people who had the greatest all round worth. Those for whom they had the most respect.’

‘Mark, it was called *arête* and indicative of the ancient Greek philosophers’ reverence of spirit of the mind which contrasted with the Roman adulation of wealth and materialism. Socrates and Aristotle strove for this spiritual excellence but they knew it could not be achieved and although they never knew Christ I believe they had a premonition of his coming. Only his life attained the perfection they struggled for.’

‘There is the pastor coming out in you Asa, you never miss a chance to preach the word. What I was trying to say is that I have the utmost respect for

you, Sir. I raise my glass to you and declare that virtue is alive in the modern world, just as much as it was in the time of Lincoln, Jefferson and Socrates. It is alive in the character and courage of Mr Asa Jennings and it is my privilege to count you as a friend. And as the Greeks say *Chronia Poula* – long years of life.’

‘And peace on earth Mark,’ Jennings replied.

Over dinner the two old friends reminisced further about their time together in Smyrna harbour years before. Later, Jennings rose to leave. ‘I have an early meeting at the Turkish consulate tomorrow morning. Many thanks to you and Mrs Bristol for a most memorable evening.’

‘You must come back to Washington again soon Asa.’

‘And you must return to Asia Minor one day, it has changed.’

‘Thanks to you. Can I call you a cab?’

‘No, it is only a short walk to my hotel. Goodbye old friend.’

Jennings shook Bristol’s hand firmly, donned his heavy jacket and stepped outside into the cold air. He had enjoyed meeting Bristol after all these years but the meeting had rekindled terrible memories of the Smyrna fire, and as he walked, he wondered how many more he could have saved if he had been able to act more quickly. It had all happened many years before, but the frustration was still raw and he shook his head sadly.

Slowly, Jennings began to notice a growing tightness in his chest which radiated up into his throat. He paused, but the tightness increased, bending him forwards. He turned to the road and after a few minutes he managed to hail a cab. Asking the driver to take him to the nearest hospital, Jennings lay down on the back seat clutching his chest. He could feel his breathing getting more difficult as the cab sped forwards and he tried to relax and slow his breathing. By the time the cab had arrived at Georgetown Hospital, Jennings was unconscious on the back seat. The driver ran into emergency and returned with a nurse and doctor.

Asa Kent Jennings, former Methodist pastor crippled by Pott’s disease, YMCA Boys’ secretary, Admiral of the Greek Navy, Hero of Smyrna and Saviour of Izmir, lay dead in the back seat of a Washington cab.

South Brisbane, Australia - 1924

Since long, I've held silence a remedy for harm.

Aeschylus

Elisaveth and Arête had finished brushing Eugenia's hair and fitted the embroidered wedding veil over her head. They arranged her light brown ringlets so that they would hang down just beneath the veil and gave Eugenia a mirror to look at herself.

'You are a picture Eugenia. Everyone will be looking at you today,' Arête said.

Eugenia stood up and looked at her outfit. Her white dress hung down to her ankles and the waist was tied with a belt made of silk white roses. Even though her dress was almost identical to the two women who would marry her brothers Mark and George in a triple ceremony that afternoon, she was delighted with her outfit. Out of the corner of her eye, she looked at Elisaveth who was now adjusting Arête's dress. As ever, she was calm and smiled approvingly as she reassured her sister. She knew what a strong person Elisaveth had been, supporting her family, always cheerful and never having a bad word for anyone. Arête turned and kissed her on the cheek; Arête loved Elisaveth too. Eugenia knew that after all they had been through, this day would at last bring some happiness back to their lives.

Elisaveth admired Eugenia's smiling profile, fair complexion and radiant beauty in her wedding dress, but even though her brown eyes were sparkling, she thought there was a hint of sadness in her face. She understood that the memories of Alatsata and Smyrna would never be erased from her sister's heart. The murders, the screams of the innocent being tortured and violated, the burnt corpses on the quay. These scenes were seared in to their minds. There was a covenant amongst the women that they would not talk of their experiences in Asia Minor. It would serve no purpose and only cause pain and rekindle anger. They would bear the horrors within their hearts,

unspoken. This collective silence was their protection from the trauma of those terrible events - that and the passage of time.

Eugenia had lost her soldier, but it was obvious that Con Caristinos would be a fine husband, and she would be safe and happy with him. He would do everything he could to help her forget, and allow her to rebuild her life. Con had thought of everything and had even provided for Maria, Elisaveth, Arête and her baby by building an extension onto his house for them to all live together. He had not just married one woman, but had taken in another four refugees. Elisaveth reflected that Con had the generous nature of his father, John Caristinos, whose indomitable spirit and courage lived on, ten thousand miles from his beloved Chesme. It was a wonderful legacy.

Elisaveth turned her eyes towards Arête. Although she was young and this was her sister's wedding day, she would always wear the black dress of a Greek widow. Georgios Roumanos would be her only husband, but she knew that Arête had a strong spirit and would survive without him. Her daughter Despina slept quietly nearby in a bassinet underneath the window, and by the way Arête frequently tended to her, it was clear she would be a treasured child and a symbol of rebirth in their new adopted home.

Elisaveth remained concerned for the nuns she had left behind in the abbey in Asia Minor, as she had written to Mother Paraskevi but there had been no response. She prayed for them regularly and hoped that one day she might hear that they were safe.

She also remembered the man with the bent back, the white angel that rescued them in Smyrna and wondered who he was and where he had come from. She would never discover his identity but his smiling face often appeared before her, providing comfort and safety. As she looked at her two sisters, healthy and happy she crossed herself and whispered. '*Efcharisto Angelos*' ... Thank you Angel.

Although much was lost, it was a miracle that they had survived. She felt sure that the blessed virgin had protected them and was now caring for her father, Christos and Georgios. It was the Lord's will that the women had been saved to come to Australia. Above all she knew the family's love would endure and they would never be separated again.

Her face was happy and serene as she walked out with her two sisters.

'We have much to be thankful for,' she thought.

The Logos

God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger.

Heraclitus

‘Do you believe in heaven, Mr Caristinos?’ Christos asked.

‘Ah, heaven, young Christos, you ask a difficult question as always. My thoughts about eternity can be gleamed from the philosopher Heraclitus, who lived a few miles from here in Ephesus, two thousand five hundred years ago. He believed that everything constantly changed, including us, and that the world order was an ever living and changing fire. But he also recognised that in change there was unity.’

‘How can that be?’

‘Heraclitus said that No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man. A man changes constantly as does a river. So Christos, change is eternal, for man there is day and night, wakefulness and sleep, youth and age, war and peace, life and death, each different, but the essence of the man is the same, we adapt to each of these changes and we are ourselves changed. For Heraclitus, Christos, we are all on a journey, ever changing, ever renewing. There is no birth or death, only change. Through our understanding and resolution of these opposites, we will understand the word, the *logos*, the truth of all things, and we will not fear death.’

‘I have never heard of him, Mr Caristinos. We learnt of Socrates and Plato at school, but never Heraclitus. Why is that?’ Christos asked.

‘You don’t have to be well known to be important you know. You are important Christos and though there are no poems written about you, you have a character which is strong and immortal. Hundreds of years after Heraclitus died the poet Callimachus wrote a poem about him. He was remembered so many years later you see and it is a wonderful ancient poem,

known by all scholars of ancient Greece.’ Caristinos knew the words well and he recited them to Christos.

They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead;
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed;
I wept, as I remembered, how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking, and sent him down the sky.
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
Still, are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

‘So Christos, every action we make, every word, changes the world and lives forever. I’m not sure about heaven Christos, but I am sure that the goodness in us lives on, and continues to influence the world after we are gone. Even if this goodness only survives in the minds of others, it can still have the power to change the future, influence thought, move mountains, alter history. That is our immortality. Everything we do can make a difference Christos, either good or bad. Many bad things have happened to the peoples of Asia Minor and we now have a choice, we can either go on hating or forgive each other, a choice that could destroy millions of lives or build a better world. Which should we do? Our actions, small or large, change the future and are important, and change starts with the choices of each individual.’

‘Can I make a difference Mr Caristinos? Does it really matter if I’m good to my mother or if I play the violin well?’

‘Yes, you do make a difference. Your mother tells me that you are an excellent son, so just continue to show your love and you will bring her great joy. When you play the violin, you play from the heart and I can feel it, it moves me, and in your music, your emotion and enjoyment come through you, to your audience. So when we show our passion, our music or our love to someone else, we transfer something of ourselves to them. This passion is part of our soul and it finds a chord in others, like a musical harmony. It becomes part of their soul and this is passed on to others and changes them and is never lost. The love, joy and passion we give others are our immortality. That is what I believe.’

Christos asked, ‘Is that why Jesus told us we should love others as we love ourselves and we would discover the kingdom of heaven?’

‘Possibly Christos, you are thinking now like the ancient Ionian scientists used to think, but on questions of religion, you will need to ask your sister Elisaveth. She is the expert.’

Christos liked being with Mr Caristinos and he enjoyed his logic and kindness. He felt the love, the *agape*, within himself and now he knew that this love was very strong, even possibly immortal. He knew he wouldn’t need to ask Elisaveth this question, because he knew the explanation was true.

Christos knew he was a fortunate person. He loved and in return had unquestioning love from his family. He knew he played the violin well and he enjoyed how he put all his heart into his performances. Mr Caristinos had made a difference, his wisdom and friendship had changed and enriched his life. Christos felt confident and contented beyond his years. What more could anyone want?

And yes, he was happy.

Historical notes

All major events described are accurately portrayed and based on the historical sources, including the Great Persecution, the Greek troops arrival at Smyrna and battle on the quay, the Greco-Turkish war, the Great Smyrna Fire, the Armenian Seminary episode, the Turkish takeover of the American Hospital, Jennings' field hospital and the details of the evacuation.

All the battles described and the events during the burning and destruction of Smyrna actually occurred, but the specific military actions of Anthony Caristinos and Pavlos are fabricated. The family events were related by my brave mother Chryssa Aroney (née Caris), as well as my grandmother Eugenia Caris (née Girdis), grandfather Con Caris and my uncle Tony Miller. Eugenia Girdis and Con Caristinos were my grandparents and all members of the Girdis and Caristinos families were true persons and their actions based on true events.

The details of Asa Jennings' life and actions are based on historical documents (see below) and I am indebted to his grandson Roger Jennings for many details regarding his life. The deaths of Asa Kent Jennings, Bishop Chrysostomos, John Caristinos, Christos Girdis, Georgios Roumanos and Nicholas Girdis are all based on true events.

All details of George Dilboy's life and the desecration of his tomb are true. Mustapha Kemal, Bishop Chrysostomos, George Horton, Admiral Bristol, Commander Theophanides, General Frankos, Nureddin Pasha, Admiral Brock, George Dilboy, Claflin Davis are all historical figures. All other characters are fictional.

Camp 52, the Y Building, the Opera House, the Ionian Sportsman's Club, the Paradise Colleges, the Aronis school, all the warships, the freighters - *Constantinople* and *Pierre Loti* all actually existed. As a child, Aristotle Onassis attended the Aronis School in Smyrna.

Alatsata is now the Turkish city of Alacati, Chesme is Cesme, Vourla is Urla, Phocaea is Foca, Smyrna is Izmir, *Constantinople* is Istanbul and Angora is Ankara. Mytilene is now called Lesbos.

My incredible late father Dr Nicholas Aroney taught me about Arête, Socrates, Tellus and Solon. I am also indebted to the enthusiastic members of the Asia Minor Historical Society, to Professor Bob Milns for his lectures and information regarding Heraclitus, to Professor John Pearn AO for his inspiration and advice, my wife Trish for her unwavering support and editing and my children Chris-Anne, Nicholas, Elizabeth and Stephanie for their encouragement.

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About the Author

Con Aroney is an interventional cardiologist as well as a professor of medicine and cardiac research scientist. He has authored over two hundred scientific papers and medical book chapters and has been principal author of the Australian guidelines for the treatment of heart attack for twelve years. In 2007 he was awarded membership of the Order of Australia for contributions to cardiology and the Heart Foundation. This book is his first piece of creative writing. He is married with four children and lives in Brisbane Australia.