

# TETRAD

by Jonathan Waite

*"And you will have to tell someone, of course."*

*"Tell someone? Oh yeah, that's gonna work. Who'm I gonna tell? Who's gonna believe me?"*

*"Someone who trusts you, is who. Someone you trust. A friend. You have friends, no? But you must tell one person. You will need help. To keep the secret."*

*"What about you? You dumped this thing on me. Why don't you help me?"*

*"I think you are getting more stupid as you sit there. First, I did not 'dump this on you.' You did that yourself. And second, you moron, I am dying."*

## CHAPTER ONE

"Fancy a Greek?" said Monica.

"What?" Carol, lost in her own thoughts, was thrown for a second.

Monica gestured with one perfectly-manicured hand at the restaurant across the concourse. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving," she said. "What time's his plane coming in?"

Carol looked again at her watch and at the flickering screens overhead, though she already knew.

"Hour and ten minutes. Suppose we could. I'm not really hungry though."

"Well, a coffee and a Danish then," Monica said. "You still haven't told me anything about this Chris person. I must have all your secrets." She made grabby hands in the air, and Carol laughed. Monica could always make her laugh. It partly made up for her being thin and pretty and well-dressed. Partly.

"We don't have any secrets yet," she said, when they were seated at a small round table with a mug and a plate each. "I only met him three months ago."

“When he delivered a bunch of kebabs to the college, yes,” Monica said impatiently. “Obviously one of those Noel Coward moments. What's he like?”

“Well, he's...” Carol summoned up a mental image. “He's about my height, a bit skinny, dark—obviously—with the kind of brown eyes you can get lost in. He was studying art history at the college, but he had to stop when his mum died last year. He's working at the kebab shop for his cousin or something, trying to save up the money to come back to college. Or he was.”

“And then the rich grandfather showed up.”

“Well, wrote him a letter.” Carol frowned. “It's weird that--” She stopped and held up a hand as the speaker system delivered one of its incomprehensible utterances.

“We've got ages yet,” Monica said. “What's weird?”

“His mother never told him about his granddad,” Carol said. “I think she blamed him for his father dying. The granddad, I mean.”

“How did his father die?”

“On a plane, flying back to Greece. There was some kind of mid-air explosion. They put it down to mechanical failure, but I suppose she thought if his father—Chris's granddad, I mean--hadn't summoned him back he wouldn't have been on the plane.” Carol stared across the bustling concourse, her blue eyes troubled. “And now he's done the same to Chris.”

“You do know that Chris got there okay, don't you?” Monica said in tones of mock dread.

“Of course I do,” Carol said. “He phoned as soon as he landed. He also phoned to let me know when he was arriving back, remember? And I phoned you and you very kindly offered me a lift from the station and—”

“But you said he sounded strange,” Monica persisted. “Maybe there's been a switch. Maybe the person getting off that plane will be...da da *derrrr*....someone else.”

“Not funny, Monica,” Carol said in a strained voice, and Monica relented at once.

“Sorry sorry sorry, I'm a bitch. It's just so weird, you know? Like something in a book. Handsome Greek boy goes back to homeland to claim vast inheritance.”

"I wouldn't have said he was handsome," Carol said. "And I don't suppose it'll be vast, they're not all shipping millionaires you know. But if it's enough to keep him while he finishes his education it'll be a plus."

"Yeah, 'cause the world's crying out for more art historians," Monica said. "What sort of job's he going to get with that?"

"Dunno," Carol said, "but he won't starve. He's not that kind of guy. If he has to go back to the kebab shop he'll go back to the kebab shop...but he won't have to."

Monica widened her eyes. "Touching faith the girl has. And after only three months too."

"I know him," Carol said. "Wait a minute." There was another announcement. "Athens, that's his flight. Come on."

"It's a bit early, isn't it?" Monica protested, but Carol was already halfway down the stairs. Monica gathered up her coat and purse and followed.

The arrivals lounge was full of people and luggage carts. All around Carol and Monica men and women and children were hugging each other, kissing, talking excitedly or just looking into each other's eyes as if they had crossed the realm of death to be together again. Which, in a way, Carol supposed, they had. She thought of Chris's father, and wondered what had gone through his mind in the last seconds of his life. She wondered if--

"Is that him?" Monica said, pointing. Carol looked, and something inside her unclenched, almost painfully. She let out a long breath she hadn't realised she was holding, and began waving, but Chris had already seen her and was pushing his cart towards them.

*My God, he looks ill...* she thought, and a moment later could not see what had given her the impression. Chris's skin was tanned from his brief spell under the sun, and his body and limbs even seemed to have filled out a little, become less wiry and whippet-like. He smiled when he caught her eye, and the smile was the same one she had fallen in love with. And yet there hung over him a something, a sort of aura of trouble. Before she could pin it down, he was on her and she was in his arms, and she resolutely put the worry aside. Whatever might have happened to Chris while he was away, it had not affected his abilities as a kisser.

"You gonna introduce me?" he said, once they had separated.

“Nah, you were right, Carol,” Monica said, “he's not a bit handsome.” She held out her hand to Chris. “Monica Fleming,” she said. “I'm your chauffeuse for today, at least as far as Paddington.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Chris, shaking the offered hand. “Chris Kyriakou. Guess you already know Carol.”

“Monica,” Carol said, “weren't you going to check out that perfume shop on the concourse?”

“Was I?” Monica looked elaborately innocent; then, in a moment, she relented. “Oh, all right. Ten minutes. And no frightening the trolley dollies.”

Most of the first minute passed in a gentler, more relaxed embrace, during which the last of Carol's worries melted away. He was back. He was safe. Everything would be back to normal.

“How was it?” she whispered into his shoulder. “Traumatic?”

“Bit, yeah,” he said. “Caz--”

“What?” The tone in his voice instantly put her on edge. He saw it, or felt it, and she knew he did.

“Nothing,” he said. “Only we're gonna have to talk. When we get home.”

“What about?”

“Some things I found out while I was there.”

She pulled away and looked up into his eyes. Yes, the shadow was there, faint but there. “Are we okay, Chris?” she asked, hardly daring to shape the words.

“What?” He was genuinely surprised. “No, 'course we are. That is--” He broke off, suddenly unsure. “As long as you're okay with what I've got to tell you.”

“What is it?”

“Not now,” Chris said urgently. “Look, Caz, it's okay. I haven't gone off you, I still wanna be with you. It's just something—something I found out about my family, okay? I'll tell you when we get home. Quiet, here she comes.” This last was delivered in a stage whisper that carried easily to the ears of the approaching Monica.

“That was never ten minutes,” Carol said.

"I bore easily," Monica said. "Specially when kids half my age are coming up to me and saying 'can I help you madam?' in that special tone of voice for use on shoplifters and dotty old ladies."

"Half your age?" Carol repeated.

"My spiritual age, darling," Monica said. "I've been twenty-nine since I was born, and I plan to stay twenty-nine till well after I die. Are we going yet?"

"Excuse me, Mr—ah—Kyriakou?"

The speaker was a man in a dark blue suit—or, no, Carol noticed, the jacket was actually a blazer—with close-cropped sandy hair and a pleasant, freckled face. He was carrying a clipboard.

"Yes?" Chris said, sounding strangely wary.

"I wonder if you'd mind coming with me," the man said. "There's some slight irregularity about your passport. It won't take a moment."

"Can I see your identification, please?" said Chris.

"I hope you're not going to give me any trouble about this, sir," the man said smoothly. "Just come with me and we can get this all sorted out—"

"Not till I see your ID," Chris said.

"Now listen, sonny--" the man said, his face suddenly a lot less pleasant.

"Would this have anything to do with a delivery of paper towels?" Monica said, from behind the man. "Only that's what's on your clipboard—"

With shocking suddenness, the man made a grab at Chris, who jumped back, attracting the attention of a couple of airport security men.

"All right, then," the man snarled. "You want it the hard way. Just remember, we tried being nice." He glanced at the approaching security men and turned to head for the exit, at a casual stroll.

"Everything all right, sir?" said the security man.

"Yes," Chris said to Monica. "We're going."

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"Come in, Father," said the thin man in the scarlet vestments. Father Krebs bowed and entered the richly appointed study, moving with a grace that belied his bulk.

"Your Excellency sent for me," he said.

"Had I not, you would not have been here," Cardinal Orgelli answered, with a little asperity. "Let us waste no time in stating the obvious."

"Then," Father Krebs said, "how may my order be of service?"

"There is an artifact," the Cardinal began, "which the Holy Father seeks."

"Tell me where and how it is guarded," Father Krebs said, "and it shall be his."

"It is not so simple," the other said, holding up a hand. "We have sought this thing for many centuries, and always it has eluded us, so that till recently we believed it destroyed. Also, other parties are interested. We believe the accursed Erleuchteten have already sent an emissary to retrieve it, and where they go the Americans are never far behind. Others will follow them in turn. We must be first to trace its keeper."

"When have we failed the Holy Father?"

"Since there has been no need to make use of your order since Alexander VI of blessed memory founded it, your record is excellent. I trust you to maintain this happy position." The Cardinal leaned closer. "One more thing, Father Krebs. The Holy Father is a very busy man, and it is possible that, amid the hustle and bustle of his work, he may seem not to recall having requested this artifact. On the whole, it would be less embarrassing for all concerned if the matter did not have to be brought to his attention. I hope I make myself clear."

"Entirely clear, Your Excellency."

"Very well then. Go with God, Father."

Father Krebs bowed again and left the room. The Cardinal found himself contemplating the design on the back of the priest's cassock, illustrating the name that encircled it, which he translated automatically from the Latin: the Knot Of God, or alternatively the Muscle Of God.

*Let us pray that this muscle will be equal to the task, he thought. The heathen thing must be secured and kept safe.*

\*

Donald Joseph Hershberger, who liked to be known as Don-Jay, stopped in his tracks and turned to survey the room. Something had changed. Some detail was out of whack. He needed to know if it was something he'd done, which would inevitably end up causing him trouble, or something he could blame on somebody else.

He eventually tracked it down to a small bronze figurine of a man in eighteenth-century dress, holding a book open at arms' length. The pages of the book were made of a variety of materials: gold leaf, exquisitely thin parchment, woven cotton were just some of them. All three of those pages were standing erect, as was the one made of an unidentified but still gorgeously coloured scarlet feather.

Don-Jay blew on the pages, and even tried pushing them down with one stained finger. They sprang up again.

The gadget was a detector of some kind, he'd heard, but what it was supposed to detect was a mystery to him. It wasn't static charge: the leaves of the electroscope next to it were completely inert. He sighed noisily, making the pages flutter again. This would have to be reported, and that would inevitably mean questions. He made sure that his magazines were safely stowed in the secret place, the one only he knew about, and went to find Doctor Pricklow.

The tall, spare man with the wispy grey hair was feeding Bio-Project Seventy-Four. Don-Jay tried to ignore the noises coming from the tank as Pricklow dropped the gobbets of raw meat into the steaming water.

"Uh...Doctor?" he said. He had to repeat himself twice before Pricklow turned and gazed at him reproachfully over his half-moon glasses. "Okay," Don-Jay said. "Uh. Here's the thing. I was, uh, in storeroom five, taking inventory, and--"

"You took inventory there, ah, yesterday," Pricklow said mildly. "And the day before."

"Yeah, well, security in this place is crap, anything could have happened. Anyway, here's the thing..." Don-Jay hastily explained what he had seen. Halfway through, Pricklow cut him off in mid-babble.

"Four pages, you say? And those four in particular? You're quite sure?" He shook his head as Don-Jay started again. "I'd better, ah, come and see for myself. Which way was it pointing?"

"Which way?" Don-Jay parroted blankly.

"You didn't notice. Never mind. I'll go and look, you get the, ah, van ready. And alert Professor Gefarr. This could be extremely important."

Don-Jay made a rude gesture at Pricklow's retreating back.

## CHAPTER TWO

"Who was that?" Carol said, as they emerged into the draughty concrete wilderness of the multi-story car park.

"No idea," Chris said. "But he's the third. I'll tell you about it when we get home."

"I think I'd prefer now," Carol said.

"So would I, darling," Monica added. "That creep frightened me out of my wits. What have you been doing, Chris?"

"Look, it's nothing illegal, all right?" Chris said. "Can we just leave it till we're away from here?"

"He's got a point, actually," Monica said. "Ah, there it is."

"All right," Carol said. "But you're going to tell me exactly what's going on, Chris."

"Course I will," Chris said, doing his sincere look. "Promise, babe."

"Don't call me that," Carol said absently, making to get into the back seat.

“No, let me,” Chris said, and eased himself into the tiny space. Carol raised her eyebrows, but let him.

“Right,” Monica said. “Station?”

“Um, actually,” Chris said, as Carol closed the door and took hold of the seat belt, “would you mind taking us the whole way?”

“What?” Carol said, and—

“You don't want much, do you?” Monica said.

“I'll pay for petrol,” Chris added hastily, “and we'll put you up overnight. Only—I don't wanna make too many stops between here and there.”

“This gets more intriguing by the minute,” Monica said. “All right, then. Not as if I had any plans for tonight. But I'll have to phone in work and throw a sickie. Good job it's Friday tomorrow.”

*You have got a lot of explaining to do, my laddo,* Carol thought.

Monica eased out of the parking space and within minutes they were in a stream of traffic winding its way around the maze of roads that encircled the airport buildings.

“Chris?” Monica said in a surprised voice, and Carol turned to find the back seat apparently vacant.

“Just drive,” his voice emerged from the well beneath. “And face forward.”

Carol, about to explode, suddenly noticed a man standing on the verge scanning the cars, a man in a dark blue blazer with short-cropped sandy hair. She had a sudden urge to duck down into the well herself, but before she could move they had passed him.

“If he saw us, he saw us,” Monica said calmly. “Nothing we can do about it now. Maybe I should get tinted windows.”

“Who was he, Chris?” Carol said.

“Dunno,” Chris said, straightening up as they moved on to the M25 and speeded up. “Could be anyone. Except he wasn't working for the airport.” He sounded resigned. “I'll tell you everything when we get home, okay? I'm not gonna do it now.”

"Why not?"

"I hope you're not thinking of leaving me out of this at this late stage," Monica said menacingly.

"I could drop you by the roadside, you know."

"No," Chris said wearily. "Only I don't want you swerving into another car."

"It's about your granddad, isn't it?" Carol said.

"No, it's about me," Chris said, "but he's involved. Or he was. Look, just leave it, okay?"

Monica switched on the radio before Carol could answer, and conversation became impossible.

By the time they reached the exit for Eltdown on the M3, the sun was starting to get in Monica's eyes, and she turned north with relief. Chris was asleep on the back seat, and Carol was tired and headachey from the constant noise. Several times she had heard a helicopter above, and, without clearly knowing why, had craned her neck to watch it nervously till it disappeared into the distance.

"Avevale's just a bit beyond," she said.

"Good," Monica said. "I'm going to need petrol before I get much further."

Carol lived in one of several cottages owned by Avevale College. She had started out temping for them, and had accepted the offer of a permanent post just under a year ago; the cottage came with the job, and she had gratefully moved out of her poky bedsit in the centre of Eltdown. Eight months later, Chris had started moving in, and his cousin had immediately co-opted his room above the kebab shop as extra storage for boxes of pittas and carrier bags. She wasn't sure what the college's policy was on live-in lovers. So far, the question had not arisen.

Monica switched on the headlights as they passed the sign saying WELCOME TO ELTDOWN HISTORIC MARKET TOWN PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY.

"Just head into the centre," Carol said. "Avevale is signposted from there."

"Urgh," came from the back seat. "Are we there yet?"

"Ten more minutes," Carol said automatically. "How are you feeling?"

“Stiff,” Chris said, “and not in a good way.”

“You want to stop at the shop?”

“What for?” Chris said blankly.

“Oh, I don't know. Let your family know you're back? Check if there were any messages? Pick up supper?”

“I'll cook properly. You know I hate kebabs. And there won't be any messages, and they probably haven't noticed I was gone. Nah, leave it.”

Carol shrugged. “Left at the roundabout,” she told Monica.

“It says Avevale the other way.”

“I know. We still don't know why.”

“Left over from World War Two, maybe,” Chris suggested.

“Well, I did hear the college was something really hush-hush in the war. Something to do with intelligence.”

“Not like now, then,” Chris said.

“You've got your spirits back,” Monica commented dryly.

“Well, it'll take 'em a couple of days to trace me down here, and by that time maybe I'll have thought of something. Pull into the passing place up here.”

“Why?” said Monica.

“Do as he says,” Carol said, and Monica obediently pulled into the side of the road and braked.

“Now look over there,” said Carol.

Monica looked, and a little gasp escaped her.

“Couldn't have timed it better,” Chris said, and he and Carol managed an awkward high-five over the top of Carol's seat back.

“That's where we live,” Carol said.

"It's utterly darling," Monica breathed, "specially now, with all the lights coming on. It looks like something out of an old Rupert annual. Why aren't the streetlights orange?"

"The college made the council keep the white ones. I heard it was so one of the Fellows could read while he was walking home at night. Okay, you can go on now."

Monica, with one last wistful glance at the view, got back in and started the car again, and they drove down into the little bowl-shaped valley in which the village of Avevale nestled.

Carol's cottage was one of a row of six set back from the road that led into the village. On the other side of the road flowed the Ave, a shallow, swift river about fifteen yards wide, and beyond that was one of the College's playing fields, the rugby goalposts black against the deep blue of the sky.

"All right to leave the car out here?" Monica said as they got out.

"Not much else you can do with it for the moment," said Carol. "You'll be driving back tomorrow anyway."

"Actually, I don't think I can," Monica said.

"Why not?"

"I've been thinking," Monica went on. "That creepy man knew Chris. He didn't know either of us, but he saw us with Chris, and he saw us later on in my car. Now he might be a moron, of course, but if he isn't then my car is the only lead he's got to Chris."

Carol shot a glance at Chris, who looked sheepish and mumbled something apologetic.

"And I've been thinking," Monica went on, "that whoever it is who's after Chris probably has influential friends, and not much in the way of a conscience."

Chris nodded. "I dunno who they are, but they've got clout."

"So if I drive back to London tomorrow, there's a good chance I'll be pulled over for a non-existent broken tail light, which they will then give me, followed by the discovery of enormous amounts of controlled substances in the boot, and then it's off to the secret government office with the rubber hose and the truth serum. And if it's all the same to you, I'd just as soon not."

Monica kept her poise right up to the end of the sentence, with only the tiniest wobble on the end of the last word.

"She could be right," Chris said soberly. "Sorry, Monica."

Carol busied herself with the front door key.

"So I think I'll stay here with you if that's okay," Monica went on, as they walked into the suddenly warmly lit hall, "and when you've worked out somewhere you can go, I'll come with you."

"But what about your job, your flat, your—" Carol stopped. She turned to Chris. "Is it really this serious?" she said. "Could Monica be in danger?"

"Yeah, probably," Chris said. "Look, I didn't know she was going to be bringing you," he went on. "I thought you'd come on the tube or something. And I didn't think they'd clock me so quick at the airport. I gave them the slip at Athens, or I thought I did."

"Actually, you know what?" Monica said. "I think I'll park the car somewhere else and walk back, if that's okay. No sense leading them to this house, after all."

"There's a free car park in the market square," Carol said. "Be careful."

"And stick to the lighted paths," Chris called after her.

"Okay," Carol said, when the sound of the car engine had faded away. "No more prevaricating. Tell me."

"It's not as easy as that," Chris said, a little mulishly. "I gotta lead up to it. And I could murder a tea."

"Fine," Carol said. "Come into the kitchen, Maud, and start your leading up while I put the kettle on."

Chris followed her into the kitchen, just as the phone rang.

"Don't answer it," he whispered urgently, but Carol was already taking the handset down from the wall.

"Hello?" she said. "Yes...oh, hello Mr Fayne...yes, fine, how are you? Oh, glad to hear it...no, I'll be in tomorrow as usual. Sure, no problem. See you then. That," she said, hanging up, "was Mr Fayne from college."

"Are you sure?" Chris said darkly. "Maybe he wasn't alone."

"You said it would take them two days to trace you." Carol turned on the tap and filled the filter jug.

"I could be wrong."

"Then the sooner you start talking the sooner I'll know whether or not to chuck you out on the street," Carol said sweetly.

"Well—" Chris began, and broke off as someone knocked at the door, in a peculiar three-two-four pattern.

"It's Monica," Carol said, going to open it. "That's the knock we used at school. Everything okay?" she said, as Monica darted in.

"Small towns are creepy after dark," Monica said breathlessly. "I ran all the way back. What have I missed?"

"Nothing," Carol said pointedly.

"Well, there keep being interruptions," Chris defended himself.

Carol reached down and unplugged the phone wire. She went and filled the kettle from the jug, emptied the tea pot and put two bags into it, and switched on the kettle.

"Talk," she said.

\*

A nondescript man in a grey suit, carrying a raincoat over one arm, emerged from the gangway and walked past the smiling stewardesses without acknowledging them. At Customs he flashed a badge: the officer produced a small black suitcase from under the counter and offered it to him. He took it unsmilingly, nodded and walked away.

Outside a thin rain had started to fall, but the man made no move to don his raincoat. He waited, impassively, like a statue or someone impersonating one, till a sandy-haired man in a dark blue jacket approached him.

"Mr Forbes? Your car is waiting."

"Thank God," the man said, with no trace of emotion. "I thought I would have to walk."

The sandy-haired man nodded, and led the way to a black saloon parked in the set-down zone. The man he had called Forbes got in on the driver's side, and the sandy-haired man hesitated, then went round to the other side and likewise got in.

"What happened?" said Forbes, as he set off.

"He had two others with him, Agent Dower," the sandy-haired man said. "One of them saw my clipboard and alerted him. I got the car number, though." He passed over a slip of paper, which Dower put into his jacket pocket.

"So they made you?" he said.

"Well, I, er--"

They were in the tunnel now, driving in the leftmost lane under the orange glare of the lights. Dower's right hand left the steering wheel, dipped into his pocket, came out again and slid across his lap. There was a sound like a sneeze, and the sandy-haired man gasped and folded forwards.

"Sorry," Dower said with grim humour, pressing a button on the dashboard.

All the lights in the tunnel went out. In a series of economical movements, Dower released the passenger's seat belt, leaned across and opened the door, and pushed the body out, without deviating by a foot from his course. When the lights began to flicker on again, he was already five miles away, and the body had already been run over by dozens of other cars and was completely unrecognisable. Should the bullet come to the attention of any reasonably efficient ballistics department, it would be linked to his gun, and there any attempt at investigation would come to a sudden end.

The British Government knew better than to interfere with John Dower when he was on a case.

### CHAPTER THREE

You know (Chris began) that my family's quite old, right? I mean, Kyriakou isn't our original name, just one we adopted a couple of centuries ago. Granddad had documents going right back to prehistoric times or thereabouts. We go all the way back. And we may never have been flashy rich, but we've never been poor. The investments Granddad made over to me...well, anyway.

So I flew out there last week, after I got his letter, and his driver picked me up from Athens airport and drove me out to his estate. He was standing there waiting for me, looking like Charlton Heston or somebody, but as soon as he moved I could tell he wasn't well.

"Christos," he said, and started coughing so hard he literally wet himself. A couple of blokes in white coats ran up and helped him up the path and into the house, and I went after them. It was good to get into the shade, but I didn't like the sound of that cough. Made me want to cough myself, you know?

One of the blokes in white coats headed me off at the door of his room, and showed me where I was gonna be staying. My bags were already there, so I unpacked a bit and had a lie down. It was too hot to do much, and I was knackered from the flight. Next time I saw granddad he was lying on a couch propped up on pillows, and looking a bit better, though his voice was rough. There was a stony-faced Greek woman hanging about, and I gathered she was some kind of nurse. I thought she was doing the rosary, but it turns out they're worry beads. Got you a set and all, they're in my bag. Anyway, he asked me about myself, what I'd done, what I was planning to do, and I told him. When I got to talking about you he went quiet, and I could tell he wasn't happy.

"Is it 'cause she's English?" I said. "Is it 'cause Mum was English?"

He took a long time answering me.

"Your mother was a fine woman," he said, "but Andreas should not have left Greece. He should have stayed here, maybe found a nice girl, carried on the family traditions. It is that he went to study in England, that was the problem."

"Oh yeah?" I said. "Seems to me the problem was when you made him come back."

“I had no choice about that. Just as I had no choice with you.”

“Oh, well, nice to feel wanted,” I said.

“Do not be an idiot, boy,” he said, and that started him coughing again, but just a bit. He got his breath back and went on. “I did not make the airplane blow up. But it was necessary that Andreas come here, to receive his inheritance. Since he did not, I have had to wait for you to be of age—and for your mother to pass on.”

“Yeah, and that's another thing,” I said. “Mum could have done with a bit of that. It wasn't easy for her, bringing me up on benefits and handouts from cousin Spiros.”

“I helped her on many occasions,” he said, “but it was necessary to do it without her knowing, or she would have rejected the help. She was angry, and I understand that. Check her bank statements for payments from the Adriatic Orphans Trust if you do not believe me.”

Well, that made me feel a bit less hostile towards him, 'cause I'd seen those payments myself and wondered about them. I was still a bit wary, though. I mean, whatever the ins and outs of it, he was still responsible for me never having known my dad. He'd made me miss out on so much.

I had to leave him then, 'cause he couldn't do too much at a go. The nurse chased me out, and I spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around the place. It's huge, Carol, I tell you. I'm thinking of keeping it on—we could go for holidays and that. That's if you still—well, anyway, I'm getting to it.

That evening he sent for me again. I hadn't seen him at supper, so he must have had it in his room. He looked a bit better, though it could have been the light. Different nurse, same worry beads.

“I have to tell you about your inheritance,” he said, and for the next half hour we went through all the paperwork about the money and so on, till he started to look tired and the nurse came and started poking him about. He waved her away. “I must do this now,” he said. “It has waited too long. I have waited too long.” He leaned over the side of the couch and picked up an old tin box, it looked like something from the war or thereabouts.

“This,” he said, and then he stopped and just breathed for a bit, “this has been handed down in our family for more than two thousands of years. We keep it safe. We tell no-one about it.”

"That box?" I said.

"Not the box, you imbecile, the box is what I put it in when the last container was destroyed. The Nazis were here looking for this thing, they killed my father to find it, but I kept it safe because he had already handed it over to me." He raised himself up on one elbow. "This is the most important thing you will ever do, Christos, you must swear on your life to do it."

"Why, what is it?" I said.

"It is...a relic," he said.

"What, like the fingerbone of Saint Peter or something?"

"Older. Much older." He looked at me for a long time, and then reached over and opened the box.

I don't know what I was expecting, but not what I saw. It was a little lump of stone, shaped like a pyramid but with only three sides—tetrahedron, yeah, that's it. Sandstone, it looked like, all crumbly, and there were markings on the sides. It sat there, in the box, on a pile of old papers, looking like something a kid might knock up in art class.

"That?" I said, and reached out to touch it. He knocked my hand away.

"It is important," he said, and started coughing again.

"Well, why don't you put it in a bank or something if it's that valuable?" I said, and waited for him to get his breath back.

"Because it must stay here," he said at last. "And so must you. This girl you like, you will send for her to come and live here. If she loves you, she will come. If not, you can find another girl."

Look, there's no use you blowing your top at me, I'm just telling you what he said. And I said no way.

"I live in England now," I said, "and if I've gotta look after this thing, I can do it just as well there as here." And I picked the thing up. Or at least I tried to.

It was weird. At first I thought I'd missed it, and then I thought it had crumbled into dust as soon as I touched it, and before I could start to feel bad about that I saw there wasn't any dust, or

anything at all. It had just vanished. Granddad was coughing and yelling at me, the nurse was screaming at me, and I was sitting there looking at nothing. And then I passed out.

When I woke up—I had some weird dreams, but I can't remember them—I was back in my room, on the bed, and he was sitting in a wheelchair staring at me. The nurse was by the door, obviously itching to wheel him back to bed.

“So, it has not killed you yet,” he said. “Good. That means I can do it myself.”

“What happened?” I said.

“You were stupid, is what happened. You touched the tetrad, and now it is in you.”

“In me? What do you mean, in me? It vanished.” I started to sit up, but I was feeling a bit peculiar, and I fell back again.

“I mean it is inside you. Part of you. Seven generations we have kept it safe and none of us has touched it. But you, you idiot, you have to meddle and poke. And now you must live with it.”

“Can't you get it out again?”

“Not till you die. Which will be soon. Then I will have to find someone else to carry on the keeping of it.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. I was starting to get worried. “How do you mean, I'm gonna die?”

“You will die because you do not know how to control it.”

“Well, then tell me how.”

He went red, and I thought he was gonna keel over. “Do you ever listen?” he shouted. “I am telling you, seven generations we have kept it safe. No-one has touched it in seven generations. How am I going to know what to do when some young moron touches it?”

“Oh, great,” I said. “I'm poisoned.”

“I have no sympathy for you,” said my granddad. “You brought it on yourself.”

“All right,” I said. “What do you know about it?”

“Not to touch it,” he snapped.

“Look, are you gonna help at all, or do you just wanna sit there and gloat?”

He thought about it, and made a few faces. I tried to feel if there was something inside me, but apart from that odd feeling all the time I couldn't find anything unusual.

“All right,” he said. “Much as I would like to sit and gloat, I suppose it would be easier to help you to survive, and maybe have a son to pass the tetrad on to, than to find another family I trust to guard the thing. Listen. This is all I know.

“The tetrad is a thing of power. It was a gift from the gods—or one of the gods anyway, I do not know which—to my first ancestor. It was to give power in war, healing in peace, potency to the loins, fleetness to the foot and wisdom to the heart.”

“Like a lucky charm or something,” I said. Then I saw his face and decided to shut up.

“But, like all such gifts, there is a price,” he went on, “and that is that the gift must be mastered, or it will destroy its owner and seek a better. Once absorbed, it lives in the body, and its power must be used. If it is not, it builds up and burns out the body from within.”

“Lovely,” I said. I had an image of me burning up from within.

“But the power can only be controlled by knowledge. You must learn all that the tetrad can do. Here, there is an old writing that was passed down with it.” He fumbled in his pocket and took out a scrap of paper from one of those little spiral-bound note pads. I didn't say anything.

“Study each face. Travel each edge. Conquer each corner. Know thus the centre.”

“That's it?” I said. “That's all the ancient wisdom that came with this thing?”

“You were expecting maybe a manual?” he said.

“But what does it mean?” I said, and saw the look on his face again. “All right, so you don't know. Fine. Terrific. I don't even have a clue how to use this power.”

“My great-great-great-grandfather was the last man who tried,” he said.

“What happened?”

“I only know the bones of it. They said he went mad, raped a girl in the village, killed or wounded five men who tried to stop him, escaped before they could catch him, then came back

after dark and brought one of the men back to life. Or healed his wounds, or something. But they only found that out after he was dead, because another man put a bullet into him. His younger brother cut the tetrad from his body before he was buried, and no-one has touched it with bare hand ever since. Till now."

"You've got to get it out of me!" I yelled. "They can do all kinds of surgery now—"

"It is not like that," he said. I think he was starting to realise how I was feeling, 'cause he sounded like he cared, a bit. "It is not a lump inside your body now. It is everywhere in you. When you die it will reform, as something that can be removed. But not till then."

"How could you keep something like this secret?"

"That is another thing," he said. "We kept it secret by not using it. There were many who knew of it, many who wanted it for themselves, or for their countries. But they did not know where it was, because it was simply a lump of stone. Now that it is awake, they will know, and they will want it even more. You will have to be very careful.

"And you will have to tell someone, of course--"

"I think that's quite enough," Monica said, and Chris and Carol both looked up at her tone.

"What?" said Chris.

"You frighten me to death," Monica said, "you drag me all the way down here, you make me park my car miles away and run all the way back, and all for some—some stupid *joke*?"

"It's not a joke," Chris protested. "You saw the guy at the airport—"

"Oh, yes, and who is he? One of your idiotic friends? God, Carol, what kind of sick moron are you living with?" Monica was shouting now.

"Monica—" Carol began.

"It's the truth," Chris said desperately.

"Don't talk to me," Monica said, furiously gathering up her bag. "I am going to call the police and have you arrested for this, Mr Kyriopodopolos or whatever your name is. Carol, I'm sorry,

but you need to get away from this bastard before he does something like this to you." She finally found her mobile and stabbed at the buttons.

"Don't call the police." Chris stood up.

"Oh, yes, and how are you going to stop me?"

"Monica, please--" Carol said.

"I'm warning you," Chris said.

"You lay one finger on me, mate," Monica said, "and you'll never see the light of day again. Hello?"

And then, suddenly, the room was full of noise and chaos.

\*

Father Krebs accepted his electronic keycard from the man behind the desk, and crossed the lobby to the lifts. The hotel was one of the finest in London, the suite that had been reserved for him one of its most opulent. His order required nothing less. Behind him, a bellboy who was too well bred ever to perspire pushed a trolley piled high with Father Krebs' luggage.

The lift ascended smoothly to the requested floor, and priest and bellboy passed along the corridor to its end. The bellboy took the card from Father Krebs, opened the door with some small ceremony, and wheeled the trolley into a room large enough to stage a fair-sized musical dance number and furnished in almost Oriental splendour. Father Krebs tipped him, blessed him, and waited till the door had closed again behind him before falling to his knees, hands clasped in prayer.

"Oh Lord," he whispered, "Thou knowest that my only desire is to forsake the pleasures of the flesh in Thy service. Accept this mortification of my desire, help me to forswear the sin of pride in my righteousness, and grant me Thy forgiveness. Amen."

He got to his feet, picked up the phone, dialled room service, and ordered a rare Chateaubriand steak with everything and two bottles of a rather muscular Burgundy. Then he pressed 9 for an outside line and dialled a number in South Kensington.

“Hello? Ah, yes. I wonder could I perhaps speak to Sister Eleanor. My name is Krebs, Father Krebs. Yes, thank you.” He waited. “Sister Eleanor? Yes. I believe you were notified of my arrival. I shall need to consult you urgently tomorrow on a spiritual matter. Yes, if Sister Margaret could be present as well that would be ideal. Shall we say ten-thirty? Very well. Thank you, Sister. Go with God.”

He put down the phone, lay down on the gigantic four-poster bed, and began to meditate. After a few moments, regular guttural snores filled the room.