



Chapter One
❁ AN ICY SILENCE ❁

George slumped back hopelessly into the unwelcome confines of the white wicker chair. Despite his discomfort, he ignored the overwhelming desire to wipe away the beads of sweat from his brow. His heart heaved heavily deep within his chest. The fan on the bedside table whirred vociferously, chanting out a wall of white noise, but it did very little to appease the stifling heat hanging beneath the Cretan night air. The snare drum like screeching of the cicadas continued in the olive trees below the

balcony.

But George, for once, felt strangely at peace. He glanced over at the little bundle sprawled out in the cot in front of him and his heart soared at the sight of his perfect son. Above the thin layer of cotton covers lay the most endearing face – all crowned by a mass of dark hair.

Baby Jason was finally asleep.

George had waited – *and waited* – for this moment.

But it all felt so terribly wrong.

The striking, and somewhat dapper, dark-haired man shut his eyes – allowing his mind to wander back ... towards happier times.



Only six months ago, George and his beloved Enyo had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of their first child. Everything had seemed *so perfect*.

The beautiful couple met the year before in London at a lavish dinner party – hosted by mutual friends - to celebrate the turn of the year. It was 1965. George had instantly fallen in love with Enyo Podarce, and the couple

moved in together soon after. Although she was from Greece, Enyo's appearance somewhat deceived her heritage: her pale skin and almost amber like eyes cut quite a dramatic contrast with her straight dark hair; George, on the other hand, looked like a character from some sorrowful Greek tragedy – complete with smooth olive skin and thick dark brown hair.

For as long as he could remember, the dapper, dark-haired man had longed for *a wife - and a family*. Therefore, when he first set eyes upon Enyo, George felt like everything had fallen into place. Naturally, he wanted to know all about his goddess like beauty, so he immediately asked about her family.

But, in response to his question, a deathly silence fell upon Enyo's lips. After that, she did not speak to him for what seemed like days. And so, George never summoned the courage to ask his beautiful betrothed about her family – ever again.

The dapper, dark-haired man just wanted everything to be *oh so perfect*.

For too long, he himself had carried the weight of a painful past upon his shoulders. Something inexplicable had driven a huge wedge right through the heart of this kind-hearted and sensitive man's family, causing his parents to cast their only child aside – along

with a huge lump of their wealth in tow: a dowry of sorts that decreed *silence*.

At the time, George felt like his whole entire being had been sucked into the deathly depths of some unforgivable sinkhole. But thankfully, he had a few trustworthy friends – *good people* that he could *rely upon*. And so, when they had introduced him to his beloved Enyo, his life had changed. Forever.

George and Enyo seemed happy for a while, awaiting the anticipated arrival of their first child: their adopted baby. The Gods had not blessed them biologically, but this did not stop their urge to have a family. The beautiful couple had planned everything – even their first family holiday to Enyo’s birthplace of old Hersonissos in Crete. It had been the only slice of information about her past that she had revealed; and for that, George had been grateful.

Baby Keaton had glittered like a golden fleece on the striking couple’s horizon – it was everything they had ever wanted. And so, when George and Enyo could finally hold little baby Keaton in their arms, their world seemed *so wonderful*.

But time’s dark chest had other plans: an icy silence cast an unearthly web around Enyo’s motherly yearn.

A sort of Postpartum Psychosis one specialist proclaimed.

It's just like giving birth, but without the labour pains ... another had maintained.

Month after month, Enyo lay stagnant beneath Lethe's chamber of nothingness. The consultants at Bethlam Royal Hospital had *tried everything* - but it was *all to no avail*.

George was left – forlorn – to look after his perfect baby boy Jason, for time's being. On his own.



The memory was all too much. George sprang forwards and placed his head in his hands. Acrid bile bubbled at the back of his throat. His vision blurred and his head thumped. He struggled towards the balcony doors and staggered out into the early evening air. The cicadas were silent at last; instead, the solitary hooting of a long-eared owl cut through the air like an alarm from deep within some ghastly asylum.

George's vision cleared. With both hands, he grasped the solid edge of the concrete balcony. Once again, his thoughts

floated back to Bethlem...

Take a break! he could still hear the doctor's words ringing in his ear. *And find a nanny for your son!*

The voices vaulted back and forth, deep below George's sanity, like an electric current berating his every thought. But he tried to remain calm; instead, he focused on the present. And, thankfully, with some effort, it worked: he fell back into the haunting trance like toot of the owl perched above his window.

However, George's thoughts were quickly disturbed by the whimpers from the little bundle in the cot below. Jason began crying, louder than ever before, so much so, that the poor boy's sobs sounded like he was being strangled by the cruel hands of some fitful fever. George's parental instinct consumed him: the dapper, dark-haired man picked up his son and held him close to his chest. In a futile attempt to soothe Jason, he blew gently upon his forehead. But it was useless. The little bundle wriggled, writhed, kicked, and screamed - as if he was repulsed by his so-called father's embrace.

Sadness sat heavily upon George's shoulders, making it almost impossible to hold his son.

Broken, and on the edge of tears

himself, George placed his screaming baby back into the cot. Guilt gnawed at him as he turned his back on his son's cries, but it was all too much for him to bear. He shuffled towards the balcony in the need of some air.

And then suddenly he realised that he was not alone.

Nani nani to pedhi, Nani nani to pedhi...

Below, beside the old olive tree in the garden, there stooped a gnarly, withered, shadowy figure.

Nani nani to pedhi...

Its wraithlike voice chanted the unfamiliar words over and over, like a fading heartbeat close to death. In the waning light, George could see no face; only a veil of stained bandages and conglomerated blood masked its hideous features. It was cloaked in the darkest shrouds of death, and it pointed one deformed, figure-less stump towards George.

Nani nani to pedhi, oso na 'pokimithi, oso na 'rthi i mana tou...

The unearthly mantra continued as it – *the figure* – wobbled erratically forwards into the pallid moonlight of the early evening. George could not be sure, but he was almost certain that a cluster of spiders crawled over every inch of its bandaged *face*. He reeled backwards in horror, covering his mouth in disgust at the

festering figure in the garden below. But, before he could do anything, another – more terrifying – panic grappled with his heart: he could no longer hear his son’s cries. A ghostly silence shrouded every inch of the bedroom. In a frantic state of near hysterics, George lurched back towards the cot.

But baby Jason was sound asleep.

And, in the inky darkness below, the gnarly, shadowy figure had vanished.

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