

*Fatherless children used to seek refuge in the gods;
he chose to be a god.*

*Dedicated to the memory of
Khaled el-Asaad, who was tortured and
beheaded for protecting the artefacts of
the ancient city of Palmyra...*

They were walking in the dim light of evening. The music that was shattering the silence of the night was clawing at their ears. A red light was flashing through the open door. The stench of blood struck her nostrils. She grimaced, knowing what was in store for her, but she did not stop and carried on behind her assistant Tobias, who was shuffling forward in his hooded coveralls towards the crime scene. As they neared the scene, the noise from the flat became almost unbearable. It felt like an earthquake. The entire building was shaking, and the smell was becoming even more powerful. She noticed that Tobias, who was now at the door, had stopped. She could not see his face but she could sense his horror. Chief Inspector Yıldız was not scared; she was just curious as to the scene that had so horrified her assistant. She hurried forward and tapped him on the shoulder. Tobias jumped, and stared at Yıldız as though seeing her for the first time.

“Oh my God... Chief. It’s... It’s like an abattoir in here. The whole place is drenched in blood...”

Yıldız did not even hear Tobias. Her eyes were fixed on the opposite wall - on a huge picture dominated by yellows, oranges and browns. Under a flashing red light was a painting of a regal figure, a long-haired, bearded king wearing a crown and sitting with great solemnity upon a throne. Although his golden hair and beard gave him a wizened, elderly look, he also had a body that would have made any athlete jealous. A winged nymph of some kind was perched on his right hand and in his left hand he held a staff, the head of which featured the head of an eagle staring menacingly at them. Near the bottom of the painting, by the base of

the throne, were some red stains. That was when she saw the body on the ground. He was lying naked face-up on the ground, his hands tied at the wrists and palms facing up. She held her breath, took a few steps forward and saw it. A bloody piece of meat in the man's hands. It couldn't be... Surely not? She took a couple more steps forward... Yes, she was right. In the dead man's hands was a heart, still dripping with blood. The left side of the victim's chest had also been carved open.

“How the hell did...” said Tobias, switching on the room's lights. “How.... You mean he sacrificed his own heart to the king?”

Yıldız did not answer but instead turned to face the source of the red lights, less foreboding now that the room's lights were on. Out of a computer on a nearby desk, a video on loop was booming out the song that was shattering the night, making the entire room shake. On the band at the bottom of the clip on the screen was the title of the song:

“Altar of Zeus.”

“Not to a king, Toby. To Zeus. The victim offered his heart to the King of the Gods.”

*Those that forget shall pay the
price for forgetting!*

I shall start where you have forgotten. In the last city where my name was erased, in the last temple where my last statue was destroyed, from the last words of my last prophet's final prophecy, in the smoking flesh of the last animal sacrificed on my altar, from my last subject's last pleading invocation, uttering my name with love, veneration and terror.

The ruthlessness of time, the treachery of man, the impotence of speech, the inadequacy of prayer, the disintegrating stones, the crumbling marble nor the rotting wood shall prevent my imminent rule. Once again, I shall cleave the skies open with lightning and rain thunderbolts down upon your gleaming cities; once again, I shall submerge your lands under water and curse you with sickness and disease; once again, I shall deceive your foolish kings and drive you to war; once again, I shall fill your seas with fat fish and adorn your branches and vines with sweet fruits; once again, I shall enrich your soil with golden ears of grain; and once again, I shall fill your barns with fertile livestock. Once again, you shall fall to your knees before me in supplication and enter my temples one by one in reverence, your bodies and your tongues trembling as you utter my name.

Once again, you shall remember how I detest you, how I love you, how I doubt you and how I trust in you. You shall

remember, one by one, that which your ancestors, grandfathers and fathers forgot. You shall remember how merciless I can be, as well as how merciful. You shall know once more my unbridled fury, as well as my infinite compassion. You shall know once again how I protected you from woe and from ruin, how I dispelled the adversity and pestilence that sought to coil themselves around you and how I brought ruin and calamity upon you.

You! People of weak memory, of weak mind and of low morals. I shall commence on the day you forgot me. I shall once again sit upon my golden throne in Olympus so that I may witness all your sins. I shall reinstate my kingdom so that your plunder of the skies and the earth shall come to an end. I shall once again bring abundance to the soil, sanctify the seas, and purify the air. I shall become more powerful than before, more despotic, and more ruthless, and all that you have forgotten about me I shall write and record, in your blood, word by word, line by line...

Once more I shall recount tales of eternal darkness, of chaos, of Gaia, our Mother Earth, of my grandfather Uranus, of my father Kronos and of I, Zeus. I shall recount the tales of my bloody and terrible battles with the Titans and the Giants and of my glorious victory over them so that you may read and remember and never forget. If you do not read my words, then I shall carve them into your wretched bodies.

Tyranny shall become your wisest teacher. Oppression shall open to you the gates of virtue and keep you cowed. You shall beg for forgiveness. You shall build temples in my name more spectacular than those built before, you shall fashion even more wondrous statues of me and you shall sacrifice your own flesh to me on ever vaster altars to beg for my mercy. Mercy, however, shall not be easily gained. And this is because you are traitors, hypocrites and liars. You love comfort, whilst you flee from that which is arduous. One, however, reaches Godthrough the path of

toil and struggle. Because God is the truth: unchanging, irrefutable, unforgettable.

Yet you have forgotten. You act as though Zeus never existed, as though you never worshipped him, as though you never begged for his mercy, as though you never died and killed for him. You thought that time would overthrow Zeus' rule. That my rule, like those of my grandfather Uranus and my father Kronos, would come to an end. You thought new gods would replace me and that these new gods would be more powerful, wiser, more ruthless and more merciful than I. You thought that I would turn to dust when my temples were brought to ruin and that my immortal body would be scattered to the winds when my statues were destroyed. It was your belief that I would cease to breathe were you to cease reciting your prayers to me. That were you to stop bringing me sacrifices, my soul would not be nourished and would be lost in the depths of darkness like a fading star.

Do not deny it. This is what you thought, and that is why you were so eager to forget me. Kings, heroes, aristocrats, slaves, women, the elderly, children; all of you. This is what you did, and as you did so, you laughed, drank wine and made merry. You danced and shamelessly satisfied your lust. You wished to eradicate from your miserable lives the god you had worshipped for more than a thousand years. You entombed Zeus, for whom you were once willing to lay down your lives, in your marble sarcophagi and in your sealed underground vaults like an accursed being that no longer wished to be remembered. You mocked my loves, you made light of my triumphs, you scorned my miracles, and my name became the subject of your hilarity and your cheap mirth. You wished to erase my name, my form and my word from your weak memories, remove them from your cowardly hearts and banish them from your sinful souls. And such was your foolishness, you looked at your eras without me and thought you had succeeded in this.

However, the time of the gods is not the same as the time of man. The years that make up one of your lifetimes is for us gods but a moment, a single breath. And now that fleeting moment is over. Now, the most terrible era of your fate is about to begin.

That is why I shall begin in the place you thought you had forgotten. Those that forget shall pay the price for forgetting. Those that did not show due respect shall be rewarded with the severest of punishments: those that tore me from their hearts shall have their hearts torn out, those that turned their faces away from me shall have their skin flayed from their faces, those that denied me shall have their mouths filled with dirt, those that did not enter my temples shall have their legs cut away at the knee, and the arms of those that did not bring me sacrifices shall be severed from their roots. None whatsoever shall be spared my wrath.

I, Zeus, Lord of the Earth and the Sky, Supreme God, Lord of the Titans, of the Giants, of man and of all creatures, have this to say to you:

Let this be my pledge to Gaia, our Mother of the Earth, to my grandfather Uranus, to my mother Rhea, to my father Kronos, to the Titans, to all the other gods and to all the creatures of the World; those that betrayed me shall suffer the most terrible vengeance, and those that defied me shall remain accursed and be cast into the flames to writhe in agony.

Chapter One

“Those that betrayed me shall suffer the most terrible vengeance, and those that defied me shall remain accursed and be cast into the flames to writhe in agony.”

Tobias read aloud the words in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting of Zeus, words that had been written almost in the style of an artist’s signature.

“We might be wrong, Chief. This guy hasn’t been sacrificed. He’s been punished for not heeding Zeus’ words. Killed by the King of the Gods, no less.”

“What a load of nonsense. Who believes in Zeus in this day and age?” Yıldız answered while going through the pockets of a light-green summer jacket in the wardrobe. Tobias went back to the words in the painting.

“I wouldn’t know about that but that’s the only meaning that can be derived from what’s written here.”

Yıldız did not answer. She had found ID in one of the jacket pockets. Cemal Ölmez. Born in Berlin.

“Looks like the victim was Turkish,” she muttered. “Odd...”

Her assistant did not seem to think the victim’s background was that important, but Yıldız could not dismiss it so easily. When Turks were involved in murder cases, usually it did not involve such elaborate arrangements. Rather, the perpetrator and victim usually knew each another and the killings were usually over a debt, a woman or an inheritance. No, this was very strange. She shut the wardrobe

and walked over to the desk with the computer. The music was still booming out but they had now grown used to it, just as the stench of blood no longer bothered them. Next to the keyboard on the desk were some sheets of paper with sketches of human faces. The sketches must have been drawn by the victim but the faces looked as though they were from another era.

“It says here, *The most terrible of vengeance shall be visited upon those that betrayed me*, Chief,” Tobias said insouciantly. “I’ll tell you what, this King of the Gods certainly has good handwriting. Just look at this lettering. It’s beautiful.”

Still holding the sheets of paper, Yıldız turned to her assistant.

“Handwritten, you say?”

Tobias’ face was so close to the writing, his nose was almost touching the wall.

“Looks like it.” Then, suddenly struck by doubt, he added, “Or isn’t it?”

Yıldız put the sheets of paper back down on the desk and walked over to the painting. Although her coveralls made it tricky, she bent over and began examining the letters lodged between the two front legs of Zeus’ throne.

“No, Toby. I’m afraid Zeus did not write this. It is a computer printout. The killer cut it to size and carefully stuck it to the painting.”

As she stood up, she looked over at the body again. He looked to be in his thirties and had a handsome face; death had yet to ruin his fine features. Instead, the large black eyes just stared blankly at the ceiling. “Far too calm,” Yıldız said to herself. “No expression of fear or terror. It’s possible he was under heavy sedation when his heart was being removed. He didn’t notice a thing.” While she was relieved for the victim, she could not help feeling a growing consternation as she looked at him. It truly was a grim sight. The heart in the young man’s large hands was growing darker by the moment, like a red flower losing its brilliance, and

the drops of blood seeping through his fingers and falling onto his chest were growing heavier. The body was rapidly growing cold.

Yıldız leant over and examined the gap between the body and the wall and checked around the feet and the head. When she did not find what she was looking for, she turned to her assistant.

“Any sign of a tool or weapon? Because a serious surgical procedure has been performed here.”

Tobias was still fixed on the writing on the wall.

“Sorry, what was that, boss? Erm, no. Nothing.” He was now looking at the victim’s gaping chest. “It must have been a knife, right?”

“A knife, yes, but also perhaps a scalpel or something more professional,” Yıldız replied, scanning the room. “You cannot remove a man’s heart with just any old cutting instrument. You need to get through the ribcage. He was given an anaesthetic, or at least extremely powerful sedative. Do you see anything like that around?”

Her assistant scanned the room but he did not see any blade sharp or strong enough to slice a human chest open all the way down, nor did he see any bottles of medicine or serum equipment. As he looked around, he noticed a little bookcase by the desk. He walked over to have a better look. The books were all about art and artists, with names like Picasso, Dali and Van Gogh standing out.

“Looks like the deceased was an artist, boss. He must have been the one that painted Zeus.”

“Looks like it, Toby.” Yıldız turned to look at the Chief Deity. “I can’t say I know much about art but he hasn’t done a bad job.”

Her assistant’s eyes opened in amazement.

“Hasn’t done a bad job? Boss, the picture is stunning. I can’t even draw stickmen.”

Yıldız gave a distracted laugh before walking over to the books on the shelves.

“Otto Dix, Rivera, Chagall, Monet, Gauguin, Cezanne,” she muttered. “All the important artists of the twentieth century are here. Yes, Toby, our victim was most definitely an artist.” Scanning the titles on the spines of the books on the lower shelf, she noticed books on another subject. “And here there are books about computing. These are all technical books. Nothing to do with art.” She looked over at the body again. “Seems the deceased had a wide range of interests.”

They heard a bell ring. At first, they thought it was the doorbell but then they realised it was a telephone. However, neither Yıldız nor Tobias had that particular tone on their phones. They exchanged glances and began looking for the ringing phone. There was no phone on the desk so Tobias opened the top drawer. There it was. A mobile phone ringing amongst all the other odds and ends. The name ‘Rafael’ lit up the screen. Tobias picked up the phone and pressed the answer button.

“Hello? Yes?”

“Hello? Cemo?” a male voice at the other end asked. “Cemo? Is that you?”

“No, this isn’t Cemal,” Tobias replied sternly. “Who is this?”

“Where’s Cemal?” The man’s tone had changed.

“This is Inspector Tobias Becker. Who is this? Answer me now!”

After a pause, the voice answered.

“Inspector? Why is there an inspector there? What’s happened?”

Tobias raised his voice.

“Tell me who you are first and what your connection to Cemal is.”

“My name is Rafael Moreno,” came the anxious reply. “I’m a friend of Cemal’s.”

“And why are you calling him?”

“We are working on a project together. A mural on the walls of one of the squatter houses on Köpeniker Street. We

were supposed to be working on it together this evening but he hasn't turned up. Everything is okay, isn't it? Has something happened to Cemal?"

"Why are you worried? Is something supposed to have happened to him?"

"Of course not, no. That's not what I meant. It's just that Cemal is very punctual. He's the type to let you know if he can't make it and so when I didn't hear from him, I started to worry. That's why I'm asking if something has happened to him. He is okay, isn't he? Everything is in order, isn't it?"

Tobias ignored the man's growing unease.

"When did you last see Cemal?"

After a few moments' silence, Rafael answered.

"Two nights ago. He came to our place for dinner." There was another pause before he went on, imploringly. "What's happened to Cemal? Why aren't you telling me?"

"I'm very sorry, Mister Moreno," Tobias eventually said, "But Cemal is dead. He was killed this evening. The perpetrator has yet to be identified."

"What?" the voice cried out in horror. "How? What do you mean he's dead?"

He could not say any more and began weeping. Tobias stood there holding the telephone and listening to the man's sobs and wails. Tobias waited but Rafael would not calm down. It was all too much.

"Now listen to me, Mister Moreno. I have to hang up now but I will need to speak to you again, face to face. We will need your help so we shall be calling you soon. My condolences. I am sorry for your loss."

With that, he hung up and turned to Yıldız.

"The guy sounded pretty distraught. They must have been good friends. He sounded like a foreigner, one of the new arrivals. You can tell he wasn't born here by his terrible German."

Yıldız was looking at the telephone.

"Does that phone have a password?"