

UPSTART

By

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The room was growing a bit tawdry around the edges---curtains fraying, cracks in the stained-glass windows, a stain on the couch the maids could not get out---still, Diana called it home.

Far more dismaying was her own physical state. It had been such a long winter. "Getting downright anorexic, darling." Mammon came up behind her, examined his own face for wrinkles or (worse) spots, winced at her reflection, and retreated from the mirror.

"For gods' sakes, man, remember the year. That term won't be in vogue for another---" Oh dear, what year was it? '68 . . . '78 . . . '88. "---at least fifteen years. I'm---twiggy. Quite fashionably thin."

"You look like a rail.

"Difficult to argue with the truth. And speaking of Truth . . .

Sweeping her voluminous robes into an elegant swirl around her feet, she turned full about on the vanity stool to smile sweetly across the posh Hilton suite. "And you, my dear, look like a fat---you should pardon the expression---toad." With the grace only eons of battles (verbal and otherwise) lost and won could achieve, she rose to her feet. "I'm starving. Shall we go?"

And as they strolled arm in comfy arm through the suite to the door: "What are we doing today? ---American tourists? ---Oh, good."

Mammon opened the door and the cool draft from the excessively airconditioned hallway brushed her bare knees.

The daily squeeze in the Hotel Diana lobby was well underway by the time they arrived.

"I don't know why you always insist on eating here," Mammon grumbled, turning sideways to avoid a tourist armed with 50 pounds of camera equipment. "The food is mediocre at best."

"Only because you've developed a taste for American grease-burgers, darling." Diana paused, admiring the tall statue holding court at the far end of the lobby, an admirably accurate recreation of one of the ancient statues excavated from the nearby ruins of Ephesus. "Do you honestly wonder, my dear? How many of us have been so honored in this century?" She cocked her head, trying a different angle on the many-breasted statue. "Goodness, that would be painful at that time of the month. My male worshippers always did get a bit---carried away. Seems to me four would be sufficient to make the---" Across the jammed lobby, at one of the coffee shop tables: "Oh, look. He's here. Somehow I knew he'd be."

She pulled Mammon through the crush as smoothly as his girth would allow.

"Just a minute," he growled, and dug in his heels beside the news stand.

"Isn't he sweet!" she murmured, tapping her foot impatiently, while Mammon negotiated the price of the Wall Street Journal. "I think, perhaps, it's time I approached him. What do you think?"

He ignored her, involved in arguing over the cover price. Why, just this once, he couldn't simply pay the man . . .

"Find us a table, will you, darling?" she said, and drifted away, slowly fading as she approached the crowded table.

More crowded than usual. The new one was tall, blond, definitely middle-aged and decidedly out of place in the abundance of dark native elegance. Swiss, unless she missed her guess, and not to her taste---today.

Today, her taste ran more toward eighteen ---ma-a-aybe nineteen---slim build, golden skin, and bl-l-lack cur-r-rly hair.

And equally out of place among his co-conspirators, though his differences were more subtle than yellow-hair's. His dark sweater and form-fitting slacks, of good quality and excellent taste, were a bit frayed about the edges.

Nothing overt, but the least his excessively well-heeled 'friends' could have

done was lend him a cast-off or two for their frequent meetings in this exclusive hotel.

Sweet. Terribly sweet, the way he gazed wonderingly upon her monument. Of course, he wasn't the only one to do that---a half-naked woman with about a million and one breasts tended to have that effect on male mortals---but this mortal was different.

His name was Kemal. She'd first seen him a year ago, and with increasing frequency as time passed. At first he'd been alone, standing just inside the door while the tour groups he guided took their lunches at the feet of the spotlighted statue, waiting for them to rejoin him at the bus, as though he would not be welcome in the posh, European-style hotel. Then, barely a month ago, here he'd been. At this same table. Always with this same group. Always slightly out of place.

She came up behind him and brushed an invisible finger along his rounded cheek. He started and glanced over his shoulder, his smooth brow wrinkling with puzzlement. She chuckled silently and waited until his companions called his attention back to the conversation. Then she . . . let her fingers do a little walking . . . until the poor boy was flushed and quite thoroughly confused. With a final brush of her lips across his, she whispered in his ear

. . .

"It was wonderful, darling."

. . . and drifted back to Mammon's table, fading into Reality until, when she sat, she was quite as visible as a mortal woman.

"Have fun?" The question rose from behind the paper.

She pressed the paper down, smiled sweetly into his irritated face.

"Wonderful, darling."

He flipped the paper free, disappeared again.

She smiled as the waitress delivered her usual: steak (Diane, of course), with fruit macedonia, a dozen croissants, aubergine parmesan, haricots a beurre, pilafi, and squid etouffe aux petits champignons . . .

. . . plus a six-pack of Coors. One at a time, of course, and specially imported for her. Terrible habits one picked up in one's travels.

"You're wrong, you know," Mammon said.

"Wrong?"

Kemal's eyes, making a surreptitious scan of the lobby, met hers. She smiled.

"About what?"

"The statue," Mammon said. "It's not to honor you. The sign on the front door might read the Hotel Diana, but the whole establishment is a monument to moi."

"Never!"

"Oh, but it is, darling. The people come here to gawk at the statue, but they spend money. Lots of money. And that's why the finance company loaned the money to build your statue." His Cheshire Cat grin appeared over the top of the Journal. "Mine, darling. All mine."

She wrinkled her nose, and carefully trimmed the fat off her steak.

Asker, Deniz, Cahil, Mart and Kabil. No family names; likely not their real given names, either, but Kemal Duman hadn't known that when they'd introduced themselves, had naively exchanged his own truth for their prevarications. Now they used his true name casually---and frequently---in the presence of this . . . foreigner . . . ensuring that he, and anyone (or anything) listening, would remember it.

He ran a finger around the rim of his glass, sipped the ten-year-old Glen Kinchie within, resisting the temptation to gulp. He couldn't really afford this one. Another would mean going hungry two nights running. But he wasn't about to sit in this elite company swilling rakhi.

Six weeks ago, Kabil had been a stranger, one of many thousands he'd herded through the ruins of Ephesus. But then Kabil had casually invited him to join him and his university-educated cronies for drinks here in the shadow of her statue, where the scent of flowers filled the air regardless of the season, and the fountain's gentle spray drowned out the racket of the traffic outside.

Initially he'd felt ignorant and foolish among the students, but soon Kabil had had him pouring his heart out---about his fears that the Turkey he loved, a land rich in history and pride, was disappearing into the hands of Western developers who would destroy that history's relics in the name of socio-economic 'progress.'

Now, six weeks later, Kabil was still a stranger to him, as were these others, but their 'scholarship' and their sophisticated airs no longer impressed him. He didn't know what they believed or wanted. They claimed similar goals to his. They claimed that they wanted Turkey for the People, not the Americans or the British, or any other nation with money for development.

But their methods had grown increasingly suspect in his estimation. Even now, Kabil smiled and reached across the table to shake this foreigner's hand: a business transaction completed. Not an uncommon occurrence in this lobby, excepting the commodity in question.

"So, Duman," Kabil said, once the foreigner had left. "When did you say you'd have the bus ready?"

Kemal pressed his lips together, smothering objection. Kabil had slipped that part of the deal past him when he'd allowed his imagination to . . . wander. He'd subsequently resisted the statue's haunting presence, but by then, it had been too late, the transfer arrangements made. Besides, if they were caught, losing his job would be the least of his worries.

"Eight-thirty, no later. And wear light clothes: it'll get hot in there. We can change into the blacks later."

"I still don't like this," Mart whined. But then, Mart whined every time he opened his mouth. "I don't want to spend all morning in a baggage---"

A soft thud from beneath the table. Mart cursed and glared at Kabil, but he shut up.

"Well, we'd best get going. Tomorrow morning, then." Kabil rose, the others followed suit. "Cover it, will you, Duman?"

And they were gone before Kemal could object.

"Damned upstart."

"Who's that, darling? ---Why, those scum! They've left the poor child with the tab. He looks positively ill. ---Who's an upstart, darling?"

"Tek. Thinks he's so important. Look at this."

He slapped the paper down on her plate. She stifled complaint---this being a class hotel---and obligingly inspected the article on the 'New Look of War.'

"Good PR---that's all. I tell you, Diana, he only fights the wars. I make them."

"Yes, darling, I'm sure you do." Having made desperate peace with the waitress, (who surreptitiously slipped a bill in to cover the balance---curious behavior in a waitress, but this one was Kemal's special friend), the kid was leaving. "---Oh, my, such a view."

As the painted-on slacks passed their table, she blew a gentle breeze into his ear---

He stopped abruptly, rubbing his ear.

---and with a second breeze, she wafted a fifty into his back pocket, carefully smoothing the fabric afterward so as not to disrupt the pleasing line, all without removing her hands from the table.

He jumped. She met his eyes and smiled. He blinked and bowed politely, his dark eyes flicking to her hands folded demurely on the table, blinked again and moved quickly (from his mortal viewpoint) out of range.

She chuckled and let him go. "Oh, he is sweet."

"He was had, you know." Mammon was back behind his paper.

"Who's that, darling?"

Mammon's hand waved vaguely in the direction of the momentarily empty table.

"Shouldn't have gone over seven per, US."

Mammon insisted these days on using the New World currency, convinced it was the way of the future market; Diana didn't bother figuring the exchange. This began to sound as if Mammon knew more about her newest conquest's business

than she did. And if it affected Kemal's future, she wanted to know it, too. She double-checked the numinous disruption wall that turned their voices into white background noise even for the nearest mortal ears, then asked:

"Seven per for what, darling?"

"Guns. No overhead. Bulk quantities. Hell, I made it easy for the bastard to get them out of Israel in the first place. ---If this is any indication of the next generation's business sense, I'm sure I don't know what the world is coming to. Appalling, I say."

Diana didn't bother reminding him he knew exactly what the world was coming to---or could, if checking out specific Futures didn't take all the fun out of living the moment's Possibilities.

"Which 'bastard'?"

"The 'banker', naturally."

"Banker? You mean Yellow-hair?"

A grunt from behind the paper. "Deals contraband. Front man. Arms, mostly. His newest commodity is a rather lovely lot of fresh-from-the-factory uzis."

"Uzis?"

Such names these boys came up with.

"New version of the Israeli automatic. I suspect that's the shipment your boy's friends are after. Funny, I figured he'd go for Korudan's crowd in Greece. They're much better organized, ready to make their move on the Junta---and these guns could have tipped the balance. But they were too canny this time. Kabil paid too much, but he'll get the guns."

"What did you mean, you made it easy? What did you do?"

"Nothing much. Just a little temptation. A single truck can carry a lot of these little suckers. Slip the necessary clue to the Banker, run the transport truck out of gas at the properly isolate point, tweak the driver's greed at the right instant. Voila'." He took a sip of coffee, never taking his eyes from the paper. "All in the timing. But the banker had deeper laid plans than I gave him credit for. This Kabil is so delightfully ignorant---very easy to influence him."

She frowned at the paper. "Influence? Kabil? Just now?"

The paper slipped until she could just see Mammon's face. "He's terribly anxious to take over Turkey, lock, stock and barrel. And he's so delightfully certain of his own power. He can't possibly succeed, of course, but that unforgivable price he just paid will generate flux in the world black market, open up avenues for those who seek wealth and power." He smiled tightly. "My kind of people."

"Which? The Banker? Or Kabil?"

The grin widened. "Both, darling. Obviously, both. Power on that scale doesn't happen without the fools to support it."

The paper snapped back into place.

Well, Mammon could have his followers. She didn't want them. Could care less what happened to them. It was her Kemal she worried about. Kemal was not one of Mammon's fools, nor was he a shark. He couldn't be.

Could he?

Without a word, Diana faded out and floated out the Hotel Diana's front door.

Kemal throttled the motorcycle's engine back, let the smooth-running machine coast up to the guard's station. Berk came out, the frown on his face clearly visible in the moonlight, and Kirsi's arms tightened around Kemal's waist, her face pressed against his neck.

Kemal murmured reassurance, had that confidence rewarded when the frown lightened in recognition.

"Kemal!" Berk cried, grinning. "What are you doing here? And where'd you get this?"

A wave of the hand which might mean the cycle---or Kirsi.

"This---" Kemal tapped the leather-covered hand grips. "---was a gift from Mr. Simons."

"The man whose daughter tried to investigate the sewers the hard way?"

"That's the one. He was---grateful. I was going to sell it, but Mama---"
"And right she was, Kem." Kirsi interrupted him, arms tightening for a different reason. "You deserved something nice for risking your foolish neck. You send everything to her and your sisters. If I hadn't covered for you this morning---"

"And who is this pretty thing?" Berk asked, giving Kirsi his most lecherous smile.

"Mine," Kemal said firmly. "Keep your hands to yourself. I wanted to show her the temple by moonlight. ---Mind?"

"For you, kid---" Berk stepped back a pace and waved them through the gate.

"Thanks. I owe you one."

"Hell, just put in a good word with the Lady for me and we'll call it square." Kemal laughed and put the cycle in gear. "I'll do that."

As a tour guide, young Kemal was good, exceptionally good with his attentive audience of one besotted girl. Kemal knew his history and told it well. Kirsi, the waitress from the Diana, seemed to hang on his every word, and, from the intelligence of her occasional question, it wasn't just for Kemal's good looks.

But to Diana herself, it was all just---ancient history, and she soon wandered off into her own memories.

The white marble ruins of Ephesus glowed in the moonlight, even to the marble street down which she floated. Memory filled in the lines, the larger than expected scale, and memory populated the wide road. The vast majority of the traffic had been tourists, even then, visitors come to experience her city, to worship at her temple. The temple to her Mother Earth aspect: so much more interesting than Artemis. That virgin goddess aspect was a bitchy bore. Too bad, really, that she daren't reveal herself to the lad. The stories she could tell him of this place . . . far more personal and exciting anecdotes than he could possibly know. But he'd never believe her. That level of faith had vanished in this age of skepticism; gone to ruins like the marble rubble surrounding them.

All the beauty and the grandeur---gone, thanks to the arrows of Apollo and the damned, disgusting little bugs they carried.

Apollo and Diana. Day and night. Life and death. They'd shared Ephesus once upon a time. Too bad they hadn't seen the truth sooner, that they hadn't known which Possibility to explore. Perhaps they could have saved the city from its decline. Perhaps they might have planted a careful suggestion in a ready ear, as she'd planted the fifty in Kemal's pocket. Drain the marsh. Get rid of the mosquitoes.

The future was flux. So many possibilities. Some---like the one which had Happened---had led to an understanding and cure for malaria. Others---well, none would have found it soon enough to save Ephesus, and while the Future was flux, the Past was singular and done.

Too late now. She missed the Sun God aspect more than she cared to admit.

Mammon was another bore. Perhaps, one day soon, conditions would favor Apollo's return.

The couple had worked their way down to the temple---her temple---or what was left of it. Time had been cruel to them both. She was thin and wasted; her temple, seventh wonder of the world, had been reduced to its marble foundations.

". . . They're talking about rebuilding it." Kemal's voice, drifting to her on a breeze. Diana pricked up her ears, glided back to the temple.

"Would you like that?" Kirsi asked, sensible, insightful question.

"I honestly don't know." The lad walked out into the middle of the vast, rectangular foundations, head thrown back, eyes glowing in the moonlight. "It must have been wonderful. Largest pillared roof ever built . . . all in white marble . . . I'd love to have seen it. But---" He turned to her, biting his lip. "It's for all the wrong reasons, Kirsi. They want the money---the tourism. That's not right."

"Not all of them, Kemal." Kirsi walked up to him, took his hands in hers. "Some love the past as much as you do. There are others who would like to rebuild the glory that was."

"Do they? I wish I could believe that."

"I do."

His eyes were swimming between the long lashes. His head bent above Kirsi's. The kiss lengthened and deepened until Diana felt obliged to leave the temple's aura for the cool breeze coming off the sea and up the hill. When she'd regained control, she drifted back to the temple and silently urged the youngsters off the immediate premises. Some spots were too ripe with past energy, and she had the present to worry about.

Kirsi had sensed Kemal's upset and was probing gently regarding the arms deal. He was resisting explanation---possibly for good reason.

On the other hand, a little pressure at the right moment might just give her the information she sought.

Kirsi . . . she'd worry about Kirsi later.

The great theater of Ephesus stretched out around them, row upon semi-circular row. The round marble spot marking the acoustical focus glowed moon-white in the dark, grassy stage far below. Beyond the stage, rows of cap-stoned pillars, was the prop-storage and beyond that, the straightline demarcation of the theater gateway, lying at a perfect perpendicular to a wide marble road that vanished into the misty flat distance.

Once upon a millenia ago, some other young man had sat, hour upon hour, on these stony seats, as Kemal did now, with his sweetheart wrapped in the circle of his arm as Kirsi was in his, watching, listening, learning . . . "Imagine the plays they must have seen from here," he whispered into her soft, wavy hair. "Oedipus Rex, Antigone, the Oresteia . . ."

"Ugh, king-sacrifice." Kirsi giggled and pressed his arm against her side.

"Morbid taste you have, Kem. Give me the comedies, thanks anyway."

"They're all right, too, but think about it. Oedipus, Agememnon, Orestes ---and all the other powerful kings whose deaths brought prosperity to their people. We need kings like that. Kings willing to sacrifice all for our people, our country, not for someone else, and not for their own wealth."

"Agememnon didn't exactly jump under the knife, Kemal."

"You know what I mean."

"I suppose so. But do you honestly think Kabil will be such a leader? A man who spends the equivalent of your monthly salary on a sweater he'll never wear, then leaves you to handle the bar tab?"

He blushed. "Not really; I don't believe in him. Not any more. Once . . . but he's not what I'd hoped. Now, I'm sort of stuck."

"Why? Why not just leave them?"

"At the moment, they need me. And they know my family." He squeezed her arm.

"And they know about you. They know I won't risk any of you. But once they have this stupid shipment, they won't need me any more and I'll be free of them."

"Don't you trust me?"

"You know I do. It's them I don't trust."

She paused beside a crumbling wall, leaned her elbows on it, looking into the warren of walls, rocks and weeds.

"So many small rooms. What was this place? Do they know?"

He laughed, grateful for the change of subject.

"Well, let's see. The temple is just across the street. Lots of small rooms. What do you suppose?"

"Aha. Diana's priestesses."

"You might call them that. They undoubtedly gave a percentage to the temple coffers."

"They gave more than that."

"What do you mean."

She turned and leaned her back against the low wall, tracing his arm with a

fingertip. "Life. Death. Love. War. All different aspects of the same coin. Many of the ancient camp followers were priestesses. Before a battle, the men came to them, garnered strength from their---coupling. The good will of the goddess. Good luck in the battle to come."

He had a battle to fight tomorrow. God willing, it would be quick and clean, without bloodshed. A simple transfer of---merchandise.

Kirsi knew that. Knew the situation disturbed him and tried to coax him free of the worry. And at the moment Kemal was more than willing to be coaxed.

He hung his head and said morosely, "I've nothing to give. No money left." He blinked up at her. "Do you suppose the goddess would like a used 'cycle?"

Kirsi smiled, took him by the hand, and drew him uphill into the weed-choked maze, into shadows, where moonbeams and wind would not reach them.

"We'll think of something."

Such sweetly naive coupling. Completed almost before it was begun. Diana smiled and brushed each young cheek with her lips, wishing them both gentle, restful sleep, surrounding them with a blanket of warm air to keep them comfortable until they were ready to return home.

Someday, she'd have to instill a bit of creativity into Kirsi's libido. For Kemal . . . Perhaps Kemal would benefit from a bit more---personal instruction.

She caught the wind back to the Izmir Hilton. Mammon was still awake---on the phone to his broker in New York. He nodded to her as she drifted in through the window, but it was a good fifteen minutes before he hung up the phone.

"So. Did you have a good time?"

"They went to Ephesus."

"Oh, joy. Oh, rapture. That dump ought to be torn down once and for all. Clear the land for something useful." His bearded face lightened. "A factory, maybe. That would be nice."

"Kemal says they've plans to rebuild the temple---make it into the ultimate tourist trap. Make lots of money, it will."

Mammon snorted. "I'll believe that when I see the receipts. ---Find out anything interesting?"

"Tomorrow. Want to go with me?"

He yawned. "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

She leaned over his shoulder and stroked his beard, became distracted by the ear next to her mouth and nibbled it lightly. Kemal and his sweetheart had her feeling quite energetic.

But:

"Not tonight, woman. I just lost a cool half-mil and my head is killing me."

"Scum." She bit hard enough to draw blood and floated away on a breeze before he could retaliate.

Predictably, Kabil was late.

"What's your problem?" Kabil asked as Kemal hurried him and the others to the back of the bus. "Your American touristos aren't even up yet."

"That's all you know about it," Kemal muttered. He threw open the luggage compartment and jerked his head toward it. "Get in. Hurry."

"It stinks!" Mart groaned and complained. "The exhaust will kill us."

"The compartment is rated safe for animals," Kemal hissed. "I think you'll survive. Just get in and shut up, will you?"

"I still don't understand why we can't just pretend we're tourists." Mart whined.

"Because the bus is full, fool," Kabil answered for him. "And if the gate-guard registers you going in, he'll expect you to come out, now, won't he?"

"Hello-oh, Keee-ma-a-al!" An adolescent female voice echoed down the narrow side street.

Kemal wrenched the door down just as Teresa Preston skipped around the corner of the hotel. He twisted the lock on the panel and jolted upright in time to

avoid her rather personal greeting.

"Morning, Miss Preston." He smiled tightly, dodging her groping hands with a practiced sway. "Are the others ready to go?"

"What have you got in there?" She tried to look around him at the luggage compartment.

"Nothing. I thought I'd left something last night. I was mistaken."

A smothered sneeze.

"What was that?" she asked immediately.

"What was what?" He gave her his best wide-eyed innocence, and taking her arm with a familiarity she'd sought for three solid days, he led her toward the front of the bus and helped her up the stairs, brushing his lips across her hand before releasing it.

Funny thing, she seemed to forget completely about the noise in the baggage compartment.

"But the agency assured me . . ." The woman's voice trailed off uncertainly, and Kemal felt an honest pang of regret when he had to say:

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but, as you can see---" He waved an arm toward the loaded seats. "---I'm full."

Her bright blue eyes followed that gesture, returned mournfully to his face. A momentary flash of recognition, gone with the next breath. Tall, slender, copious blond hair---if he'd met her before, he'd certainly remember, for all she was decidedly middle-aged.

"Oh, dear," she said, breaking the spell. "What shall I do? I was to meet my friends at Ephesus. They'll be waiting for me---"

Suddenly, from the seat behind the driver's niche:

"Mama? Mama, I think I'm going to be---"

A choking cough. An exclamation. A sudden flurry to get the window down. And a very surprised passer-by on the far side of the bus.

Thanks to the blond lady's skillful soothing, the passer-by laughed the matter off. But as Teresa Preston's mother helped the precocious teenager off the bus, Mr. Preston said loudly: "I shall, of course, expect a refund . . ."

"I haven't that authority, sir," Kemal answered quietly. "But I'll make a complete report to the office. If you'll contact them, I'm certain they will---"

"My daughter's sick! Probably food poisoning! You'll hear from my lawyers." Kemal watched helplessly as Teresa's parents bundled her---despite her loud protests---back into the hotel.

"Poor thing," a voice said solicitously at his back.

He turned to find the blond woman still there.

She smiled. "I'm sure she'll be all right. Probably something at breakfast . . ."

He grimaced. "Probably just too much of everything. On the other hand, it appears we have a seat available---if you'd still like it."

She wrinkled her nose at him. "I'll just grab a towel from the hotel to put over the wet spot."

Diana pressed her nose to the window, examining each passing vehicle carefully. Not that she expected a truck marked Contraband, but one never knew---which was why she'd had to be on this bus. She'd investigated the flux last night, but they were evidently close to a primary pivotal node, so numerous were the possibilities.

Without details, she'd just have to stick close to Kemal's rear all day long. Dirty job, but somebody . . .

They were among the first visitors to arrive at Ephesus. Kemal dropped the passengers off at the entrance, then took the bus to the far end of the parking lot: only polite, or so he claimed---Diana couldn't help but notice that in so positioning the bus, the baggage compartment was carefully aimed toward the brushy hillside.

Kemal then treated his tour group to a much modified version of the same spiel he'd given Kirsi last night, then turned them loose with information pamphlets

and instructions to meet him at such and such a time, beyond the theater in the lower parking lot.

Diana faded out and drifted at his back as he returned to the bus.

His fellow conspirators emerged from the baggage compartment, sweaty and cursing, accusing poor Kemal of purposely forgetting them. Kemal swallowed any retort he might have made, halting their tirades with the simple expedient of stepping into the open at the back of the bus and raising the engine casing. When next Diana looked, they'd disappeared.

The small transport vehicle beeped a protest and Kemal stepped aside to let it pass. Yet another load for the excavation team working the far side of the temple. The fifth such load today from the large truck parked in the upper lot.

Kemal wondered which, if any, of those crates contained their shipment. Which, if any, he'd be carrying up the hillside tonight, to a hidey-hole he knew and no one else did.

Yet.

After tonight, Kabil and all his cronies would.

He made his way slowly to the lower parking lot, where he'd left the bus, stopping occasionally to answer questions---some from his own group, some from lone tourists. It was an old routine, and one he generally enjoyed. Once someone proclaimed you an expert, other someones invariably emerged from the shadows armed with observations they simply had to share. Most of the questions, he'd answered a hundred times his first week on the job. But every once in a while, usually from the most naive visitor to the ancient city, an insight occurred which opened a whole new realm of historic possibilities. Today, however, his interest waned rapidly, and he finally hurried past the crowds to the lower parking lot.

#

"What do you mean, the bus won't start?"

Sometimes, tourists were amazingly thick headed.

"Just that, Mr. Clark," Kemal said patiently. "I called for a replacement over an hour ago. He'll be here with a working bus in half an hour." He smiled placatingly, and knowing how fast Acayib could drive with an empty bus: "Maybe less."

"I know something about cars, son," Mr. Bierhorst said from the back. "Want me to take a look?"

No! Kemal wanted to say, but instead: "The mechanic will come tomorrow. He'd have been here today, but his sister's getting married and . . ."

"Nonsense. It will give me something to do while we wait."

"I really can't let you, sir. Company rules. It would be my job if---"

"Honestly, son, I'm a licensed mechanic." Bierhorst pulled out his wallet, handed over a card, but Kemal barely glanced at it.

"Sir, I---"

"C'mon, son." Bierhorst persisted. "I've worked for the bus company back home for twenty-five years. Maybe I can save your company some time and money."

Bierhorst had no reason to lie, and, perhaps it was his own raw nerves, but the others in the group seemed to be casting suspicious glances at one another. Kemal sighed and murmured:

"Thank you, sir. I'd appreciate it."

Bierhorst, as Kemal had feared, found the 'problem' the instant he raised the casing.

"Why, it's nothing but a loose wire. Try it now, son."

With a silent prayer, Kemal pressed the starter. A working bus meant he took the tourists home---and left Kabil and crew stranded.

The engine turned over . . .

Kemal's heart sank .

. . . sputtered, and died.

"Try it again."

This time---nothing.

Which circumstance solved the problem of the tourists, but not Kabil's getaway vehicle.

"You're sure you don't want a lift back to the city?" Acayib, his replacement driver, asked, across the stream of tourists they were helping onto the bus.

"I can drop you off here in the morning."

Kemal shook his head. "The bus is my responsibility. I'll feel better staying here until the mechanic can make it."

"Bad luck, the engine's going dead on you today."

"Can't blame Abi. Not every day your sister gets married." Which was why they'd chosen tonight---full moon and all---to make the transfer. "Do me a favor?"

"Name it."

"Go up topside and leave a message with the guard for me, will you?"

"No problem."

Kemal waved goodbye to his group, and climbed back into his own bus. He had to get it running before closing. He turned the key, one final attempt to start it.

Kabil would have his hide

It caught without so much as a splutter, ran smoothly in the seconds it took to gather his wits and turn it off again. Then he dropped his head into arms crossed on the steering wheel and offered a silent prayer to the goddess.

A pleasant filling of the void inside. Diana smiled at her young convert, and passed a gentle, relaxing hand over his back. He did well to recognize his benefactress. Few would.

What she didn't know about auto mechanics would fill a library, but it took no genius to lift that wire free again, nor to replace it afterward. On the other hand, it had taken exquisite skill to trick Bierhorst into seeing otherwise.

The site closed down for the night, the guard, making a final run through, stopped for a word with Kemal before returning to his station. And as darkness closed around them, the others began filtering in from the ruins, slipping on the black clothing Kemal produced from the baggage compartment.

The last to arrive was (no surprise) Kabil.

"So," he said, without preamble, "Where's this digging going on?"

"You spent the entire day here and don't know?" Kemal asked, handing him black slacks and turtleneck sweater.

"I was---otherwise occupied."

Ribald laughter echoed through the bus along with comments of a personal nature in which Kemal, frowning toward the window, evidently found no humor. Neither did Diana. She'd seen what Kabil called love-making; animals had more finesse. And the poor idiot tourist he'd lured into the ruins would have some heavy-duty explaining to do to her parents in about nine months. Not good to play those games in her territory.

"Let's just get this over with," Kemal muttered, and threw the bus door open.

Kemal led the way through the ruins, past the temple, to the excavation pit and its accompanying supply tent, where, according to the blond-haired foreigner, the single guard had been . . . taken care of. Certainly no one challenged their entry into the tent.

Inside, stack upon endless stack of crates and boxes of all shapes and sizes. Kemal despaired of ever sorting out those they'd come for, but Kabil pointed silently to one box. They worked it free of the stack and Kabil, producing a knife from his pocket, pried the lid free, revealing layers of packing material, evidently designed for shipping artifacts away from the site. Kabil thrust a hand in among the shredded fibers, grinned and withdrew what had to be one of the submachine guns.

"It's so small," Asker said wonderingly, kneeling down for a closer look.

Personally, Kemal could see all he wanted from the far side of the tent.

Small, indeed. Not much more than a foot long. And light, if the overall

weight of the crate---which must contain several of the hand weapons---was any

indication. Frighteningly easy to hide.

Kabil tilted the Uzi this way and that, poking and prodding, finally, swinging the stock around and down, clicking it into place. Another bit of burrowing in the crate uprooted a box of clips, another examination of the weapon revealed only one way to load it---trial and error actions which made Kemal's skin crawl.

"How much training have you had with one of these?" he asked, morbidly curious.

Kabil sneered up at him. "Not exactly difficult to figure." He hit the bolt above the handgrip, and waved the loaded weapon casually about the tent, making soft ack-ack sounds. "Here we come, ready or not." He caressed the barrel, kissing the tip. "Seven pounds, 14 inches, 950 RPM. Hell of a baby, don't you think?"

"If you don't drop the spare clips on your foot!" Kemal controlled the urge to bolt from the tent. "For God's sake, man, put it away!"

Kabil laughed silently, and slung the weapon over his shoulder. "Let's get these condensed and stashed." He stood up and began singling out boxes, choosing unerringly, for all that no two were marked or packaged alike, until they had a stack sorted from the rest.

Of a sudden, from outside the tent:

"Hello there, Officer Berk. How's it going tonight?"

Kemal cast an anxious glance at Kabil. Kabil frowned, then gestured the others into the shadows between boxes, doused his flashlight, and grabbed Kemal's arm, pulling him into a shadowed alcove, keeping him there with a hand on his elbow.

A reflective flash beside him, a click of metal on metal: Kabil had the Uzi unslung and ready.

The voices came ever closer, exchanging pleasantries and rude comments. Berk was just growing bored. Had discovered the empty bus and come looking for Kemal.

"Haven't seen him," the dig's night watchman's voice said, "but if I do, I'll tell him you were looking for him."

"Probably just out wandering. The kid loves this place . . ."

The voices faded again and the pressure on his elbow eased. But in his ear:

"We're going out there, Duman. You're going to give that guard a convincing story, get him back in his little office, or he's gone. Do you understand me?"

A flourish of the expensive toy punctuated the threat.

"Don't be ridiculous. Put that away. I'll take care---"

"I'll watch. Just make it good."

It wasn't exactly difficult. Kemal intercepted Berk at the temple, promised to meet him later for coffee and donuts, but for now, he said, he just wanted to---commune with the stones of the city. Berk laughed, asked if he had Kirsii stashed in the ruins somewhere, and left him without waiting for an answer. Sighing with relief, Kemal returned to the supply tent with Kabil. The others had three crates ready and were still working. But what they packed now were very definitely not Uzis.

Kemal leaned for a better look, got a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. A glance discovered Kabil looking speculatively down his long nose.

"Explosives?"

Kemal whispered, not trusting his voice.

"Naturally."

Simple, straight answer.

So why did it make his skin crawl?

"Mart, you and Cahil continue packing. ---Deniz, Asker, you come with us.

---Duman, where's that stash-point?"

The hike to the far side of the hill was a nightmare. A half-dozen of the little guns was no weight at all to shift about the inside of a tent. Four times that number, on a long hike across rough ground made, the crate's rope handle bite painfully into his bare hand, made the muscles across his back burn.

"How much . . . further?"

He was glad to hear the breathlessness in the superior Kabil's voice. He pointed

up the hill and replied, with somewhat less difficulty:

"Just past that cap-stone."

"Thank God."

From the two following them, only the sounds of labored breathing.

The ancient cellar was quite clear. Kemal had found it during his childhood explorations of this place, had cleared it out one summer for his special place. Recent development of the site had cut him off from it, but no one had yet disturbed his 'lock rock.'

Not that it really kept anyone from getting into the cellar, but the entryway couldn't be cleared without moving it, and replacing it required a special touch.

They stowed the two crates, then collapsed onto rocky benches to catch their collective breath. Suddenly, from down the hill, a scream. Gunshots. Single shots, not the staccato spray of the automatic weapons.

Asker swore, and bolted down the hillside toward the temple, stumbling over the rubble. Deniz followed at a somewhat slower pace. Kabil jerked his head after them. "Let's go."

Without a word, Kemal worked his way down the rock and brush-strewn hillside, quickly, but with careful attention to where he set his feet. They caught up with Deniz and Asker just short of the marble roadway. Asker was sprawled on the ground nursing his foot.

"I think it's broken," Asker squeaked.

Kabil grabbed him by the arm and hauled him to his feet. Forced him to walk the few steps to the more even ground of the road, then thrust his arm at Deniz. "Get him to the bus. Now. Wait for me there."

Deniz and Asker began hobbling up the long hill toward the parking lot. Kabil gestured with the Uzi in the opposite direction and Kemal led the way toward the supply tent, that singular 'me' not getting by him unnoticed.

The archaeological site had been silent since that initial scream and the crack of gunfire. But in the distance, clear to see in the moonlight, and well down the slope toward the theater: four figures. Two grotesquely twisted pairs, bent with the weight of the crates swinging between them as they hurried down the slope.

Kabil swore, aimed the Uzi at the fleeing bodies, and fired.

The barrel climbed wildly, throwing Kabil's aim (such as it was) off, and the figures hardly even hesitated in their staggering dash.

Behind them, a shout.

Berk: gun out and feet planted.

Kemal whirled. Shouted a warning. Threw himself at the old man, taking the bullets meant for Berk.

Kabil was a fast study.

The strangely calm analysis ran through his mind even as Kabil fell, Berk's better aimed bullet making short work of the would-be terrorist.

And then it was Kemal's turn to stare down the guard's gun barrel. He froze, one leg numb, the other throbbingly alive.

"Don't even think it, Kemal," Berk hissed a warning and worked his way free. Wavering to his feet, he called out to the dig's watchman.

Nothing.

Then, of a sudden, rapid fire, and, as if in slow motion, Berk stumbled backward, spraying black-in-the-moonlight blood like a fountain.

Confused, horrified, all Kemal could think of was escape from the unknown attackers. Turkish police, American CIA, Israelis, or even Mart; whoever had killed Berk would be after him next, he was certain of it. For the moment, he didn't care who that was, certainly did not count him a friend.

Not even sure his legs would work, he rolled down the marble street and into the shadowy ruins, where, ignoring the pain in his leg, dragging the other limply behind him, he wormed his way among the stones and brush, intent only

on avoiding the inevitable pursuit.

From down in the parking lot, he heard the familiar rev of the bus engine, wondered vaguely who would escape, knowing it wouldn't include him. Not tonight.

Black haze fogged the moonlit marble. His world reduced to an instinctive fight for survival. Layers of stone shielded him, now. He pulled himself to his feet, found marginal support in the numb leg, a little more in the other, and an arm that grated ominously when he leaned on it. Blind with pain and shock, he staggered deeper and deeper into a honeycomb of low walls and half stairs, thick brush and thicker shadows.

The brothel across from Diana's temple.

With a smothered sob, he realized instinct had led him to the best possible cover. He sought a partial staircase he knew well, staggered and fell, his right wrist collapsing with a nauseating snap as he tried to buffer that fall. The world greyed out for an undetermined time, but that survival instinct roused him and he tucked in under the stairs, pulling his numb leg up with his working hand.

Silence, save for the pounding in his ears, the rasp of his own breath.

The bus was gone.

No evidence of pursuit.

Free.

Free to feel the pain.

Free to feel the blood slowly soaking his pantleg, creeping up his sweater from the shattered wrist.

Free to wonder . . . why?

Curious dilemma.

Diana perched atop a tall pillar, knees clasped to her chest, and watched the mortals blithely eliminate each other without regard to motivation, waiting to see what shook out of the chaos.

On the one side, her Kemal and a pack of fools. On the other, equally foolish Greeks armed with an honest desire to get the guns to roust the Junta regime holding their homeland hostage.

In the middle, one old man who'd befriended a kid and trusted too much.

Mortals. Thousands of years of observation, and their capacity for stupidity and waste still held the power to amaze.

But the shooting had ended. The bus had departed with the two surviving Turkish fools. The Greek fools quickly collected the contraband weapons and loaded them into a truck in the lower lot. Even the two crates Kemal had stashed.

As for Kemal himself . . .

"Kem?" Soft whisper out of the shadows. "Kemal Duman, are you in here?"

Kemal bit his lip on a sob. Denied that voice out of dreams.

"Kem?"

She appeared out of the shadows, and it was--

"Kirsi?" He got her name out on the front end of a gasp.

"Kemal!"

She dropped to her knees beside him. "Oh, my gods, you're hurt"

His breath caught on attempted laughter. That was an understatement if ever he'd heard one.

"What . . . are you . . . doing here?"

"I came to find you. I was worried. . . ."

She slipped an arm beneath him, pillowed his head in her coat.

But there was a smell . . . an all too familiar oily smell, which belied her statement. He reached his good hand to brush that coat-pillow, hooked a fiber and brought it close to his face.

Packing.

Like that the archaeologists used to protect delicate artifacts. Or contraband weapons.

He let his head fall, bringing his injured arm up to hide his face, perversely

grateful for the jar to the wrist which could account for the tears in his eyes.

"Wh--who are you?"

Her hand, encased in a black glove, brushed the hair back from his face. "Such a strange question, Kemal. You know me."

"Do I?"

Her hand swept gently, but thoroughly, down his body, tenderly rearranging his wounded limbs.

"I haven't a weapon, if that's what you're looking for. Anything else---" His breath caught. "---I fear I'm not quite up to tonight."

"Kemal, I'm so sorry." She sat back on her heels.

He stared up at her, wishing the blackness didn't obscure everything, knowing it wasn't the blackness of night he fought.

"My name, sweet Kemal, is Kirke. I was born and raised on Cyprus, and I, like you, love my country and my people."

Cyprus. Half-Greek, half-Turk. A millennia old conflict in microcosm. You've been had, Kemal Duman, he thought. Aloud, he whispered: "No wonder you speak so well."

"Many of my childhood friends were Turks, Kemal. ---A fact I'd forgotten in my college years in Athens. Until you."

"Am I---" He gasped. "Am I to take that as a compliment?"

Her fingers brushed his face. "As a thank you. For reminding me not all non-Greeks are enemies."

"What---" He had to pause as a wave a pain shot through him. "---do you people plan . . . to do . . . with me?"

"The others have left. They've got to get the shipment loaded onto the boat before dawn. They left me to find you."

A chill went down his spine. "And what are your instructions, once you found me, Circe?" he asked, giving her Greek name the Anglicized pronunciation.

"Turn me into a toad?"

A long pause. Long enough to make him regret that barb. Whatever she was, alienating her further now gained him nothing. Finally, rather than answer, she asked, "What do you suppose will happen to you when the police find you in the morning?"

"I won't lie to them. I was a fool. They should know the truth about what happened tonight."

"I thought so. And do you think the Turkish army will buy that ---truth?"

"I---" There was no answer to that. Even had ---Kirke---not shown, he hadn't the strength---nor the will---to escape. And the evidence was too strong against him.

"I can't take you with me to Greece; my companions would be as anxious to extract information from you as the Turks---and as ruthless in their methods. I can't leave you here to point me out. My job here is not yet completed." His breath caught. "Have a problem, don't you?"

A sharp point touched his side.

"Do you trust me, Kemal Duman?"

Of a sudden, Kirsi's voice sounded different. Perhaps it was the increased fear pounding in his ears. But Kirsi's features seemed . . . fuzzy . . . around the edges, her dark hair glinting moonlight pale under the black scarf holding it back from her face.

"Do you trust me?"

"How can I?" His cry withered and died in the night breeze.

"Do you love Turkey?"

"Of course---"

"Do you love Ephesus?"

His breath caught. Tears fractured her hazy image.

"Do you love the goddess?"

"Yes-s-s."

"And would you, like the true Kings, give your life that the land you love might live? That your daughter might one day walk on the moon?"

"I have no daughter---" His mind grasped for stability at that one absolute truth.

"You will have, darling. Nine months from last night. The powers here are still quite potent."

"Why are you doing this to me, Kirsi?" he whispered, close to sobbing. "Just finish and be done. ---Please."

Soft lips brushed his. He found his senses lost in that kiss. Felt the pain of his wounds vanish.

Sharp, sudden agony in his gut. Hot flow of blood down his side. And then---
--- Quiet, gentle ecstasy as that heat flowed into the earth beneath him, drawing him into the goddess' embrace.

The room looked a little less tawdry today. The stain was still in the couch, but the curtains hung like new, and the stained glass sparkled in the Olympian sunshine.

As for herself . . .

Diana turned slowly, viewing her reflection from all angles.

She had curves again. Curves even Mammon appreciated from the look on his lecherous face, not so full as he generally preferred.

Mammon crossed the room, holding out his arms, his intent quite obvious. She avoided him with a smooth sway, drifted on a breeze across the Hilton suite. Mammon was quite talented. And in a pinch, he'd do nicely.

Fortunately, for now, there was no such lack.

"There he is," she said, seeing dark curly hair gleaming in the Olympian light. "---Looking a bit bemused at the moment he is, but he'll come around. One thing's certain, he won't have a headache." She turned to Mammon, brushed his furry cheek with one hand. "Goodbye, darling. Enjoy your war. I'm sure it will prove quite profitable for you."

The curly young head turned, framed in a flowering archway. Dark eyes gleamed as work-calloused fingertips gently stroked the glowing marble. Closed as he sniffed a blossom.

She smiled indulgently. They were always so charmingly bemused at first.

Meeting Mammon's resigned look: "By the by, darling, you've not quite got it straight, yet. Tek is not an upstart. Tek is but a child---a babe in the woods. You, my dear, are the upstart. You make wars. Tek fights them. But I, darling godling, win them. And when all the gold is used, all the jewels ground to dust, when all the techno-toys run out of batteries, my devoted worshippers will still thrive. I was the first to arrive and I shall, most assuredly, be the last to fade."

She smiled sweetly . . .

. . . and walked into the mirror.