

Chapter: One

Location: The Tenaron Lighthouse, Mani Peninsula, Greece

Local Time: 12:15 A.M. (1015 hours Zulu), May 18, 2028

They had been following the road to the lighthouse since they pushed the car off the embankment with the corpse in the trunk. Stars alone lit their way, the moon a dark grey disk against a black sky. The curving road stood out, smoother and lighter grey than the surrounding rocky terrain. A hundred meters out, a narrow path led them to their destination; the lighthouse at Cape Tenaron.

Rising at least thirty feet above its worn stone walkway, the foundation of the lighthouse looked more like a massive rectangular fort with a tall, square monument poking out the top, its precipitous revetment supporting it at least 200 feet above sea level.

“Skata, we’re late. Dammit,” Zosimus muttered then grabbed Henry’s hand realizing that the ambassador would have difficulty trekking down the steep slope, with its jagged and irregular stones.

“I cannot walk across those rocks. What are you trying to do, kill me?” Henry said pulling his hand free to walk around the other side of the fortified base for a closer look. He hesitated, stared at an empty sea reprimanding himself for losing control. As if chilled, Henry wrung his hands, trying to wipe away the angst of the day inflicted by the long drive with a murdered man in the trunk.

Zosimus followed then stood next to Henry. "Dear friend, I know what you're thinking. I am truly sorry for what happened." He hesitated and lifted a hand onto

Henry's shoulder. "But, you must believe me. That crazy Arab was sent to stop you, kill you. I could not let that happen. We have to go. There will be a boat waiting. Take hold of my hand." The lies came so easily for Zosimus, one of the many names he had used over the decades. After all, his dangerous profession was based upon deception and lies. Bringing Henry here tonight was his final act of betrayal. Once in the U.S., he'd be safe, retire, live large.

Hold the hand of a killer? Henry was not so sure. The experiences of the day continued to depress the rational part of his brain. But what if Zosimus was telling the truth? As his attaché, Zosimus had been faithful for the last four years. Greece was in deep trouble. The turmoil in the Middle East had intensified and spread like a wild fire. On the ferry trip over from Athens to the fishing village of Monemvasia he listened as Zosimus laid out his plan to safely deliver him to the secret meeting with Greece's leaders. Only the U. S. could save Greece and Henry was the U.S. representative as Greece's ambassador. How could Henry refuse such a request from the King, the Regents, and the President of Greece? Henry released a deep sigh then reached for Zosimus' extended hand.

The passing light of the beacon allowed them to safely traverse the large stones, but only momentarily. During the longer cycle of darkness, Zosimus fought to keep Henry on his feet. With the water's edge finally in view through the night's warm haze, Zosimus pulled Henry off to the left toward the flattest rock section close to the sea. Once again, Zosimus mumbled, "We're late, late."

Scared and exhausted, Henry asked, "Wait. Are we late or is the boat late. I do not see a boat."

Zosimus said nothing but gripped Henry's hand pulling him closer to the sea. When water lapped at Henry's feet, he yanked his hand out of Zosimus' loose grasp and stepped back away. "What are you doing? You know how much I hate the water."

Shaking his head, Zosimus did not go after him but instead commanded, "Stay put. Do not move or you might fall. Everything will be fine. The boat will be here."

Henry had an impossible time controlling his nerves—standing still. Not seeing any boat or even a boat light drove him crazy. Was there a meeting? Should he run? Could he run? He rubbed the tension from his graying temples, then started to count the time it took for the beacon of the lighthouse to make a complete sweep. Focusing on the counting helped calm him somewhat, but then he would imagine hearing a gunshot, then a bullet through his eye socket, and the blood—all the blood. He could not shake that horrific image of Zosimus murdering the muscular Arab twice his size. He started to shiver although the temperature was well over eighty degrees Fahrenheit.

The ancient lighthouse beacon made a complete rotation every twenty-seven seconds, lighting up Henry's world for only a couple. In the darkness, he could hear only the small ghost crabs clambering over the exposed stones, but nothing from Zosimus.

While counting he pulled his white, monogrammed dress shirt away from his moist skin. Bending down low, he rinsed the panic induced, sour sweat from his fingers, then from habit smoothed out his dark pencil moustache.

The light swung back, but this time brought with it a cold vibrating chill that Henry could not shake. When will this incessant waiting end? he kept thinking.

Oblivious to the dark, he took a step toward Zosimus, but slipped on the moss covered stones from the receding tide. He needed only one hand to stop his fall but

painfully pinched his fingers between two stones in the process. “Dammit to hell,” he yelled. As he got up he thought he saw a red light blinking at or below water level fifty meters out. Looking again, he saw nothing.

Although Henry was a prim and proper gentleman with the most refined social graces, he shook the salty wetness from his fingers and wiped his hands on his expensive slacks without a second thought. Maybe it would wash off some of the blood.

With all his grunting and swearing from his fall, Zosimus still had made no sound. Henry licked his dry cracking lips, his saliva thick. Again he fought the urge to run, although escape seemed possible now. He figured that he could sneak up the rocks during the dark cycle. What? What was he thinking?

With severely frazzled nerves, he shouted, “Zoss, please, where is your mysterious boat? There is no meeting, is there?” The light swung back. Henry could clearly make out Zosimus’ baby face, now appearing to scan the open sea while adjusting his ridiculous bow tie, an accessory Henry had never seen him wear before today.

Again, darkness enveloped them both and Henry waited, counting another beam rotation, this time in a low whisper, with shallow breaths in between. Then he heard, “SHHHSHH,” and nothing more, which made Henry even more furious. The light swept back. Henry adjusted his gold rimmed glasses then turned to see Zosimus stuffing his shoes into the front of his jeans, both pant legs rolled up.

What was he doing now? Wading? But Henry wanted it over, one way or the other. Unable to comprehend the scene or handle the fear, Henry broke the silence, “Zoss, if you do not talk to me, I will leave. DO YOU HEAR ME?”

“My dear friend, please relax. Stay still. Try not to panic.” As his voice trailed off, Henry heard him walk into the water.

A very pissed off ambassador glared toward Zosimus, trying to focus on his movements, looking right and left, catching only the slightest silhouette out of the corner of his right eye.

SSSHHSSSS. SPLASH!

Henry turned his gaze toward the noise, waiting for the light, holding his breath. He felt the returning light warm his shoulders, then looked over, but...

Zosimus had vanished.

As a telltale ripple washed over his foot, Henry fell to a squat position, his hands struggling to grip the moss covered stones under foot. Back in total darkness, his heart pounded as he screamed for Zosimus. After each wail, he waited for any response, but his rapid breathing masked all background noises. He slapped his hand over his mouth pinching his nose and listened, but heard his own hot blood pulsing. He called out again as the lighthouse’s beacon began to swing back toward the Lakonic Gulf. This time he thought he heard a small splash. There was that red light again. Was it his turn to disappear?

When he opened his mouth to call out, two blazing, green eyes emerged from below the still water ten feet in front of him, slowly rising, pointing directly at him. He looked down to see two green dots of light wiggle across his torso. It was his turn.

Henry’s screams echoed as the creature rose, slick, black and dripping. Towering over him, it lurched at him, a low growl erupting from within the creature’s chest. Coils of ribbed tubing hung from a grotesque head.

Hissssssss.

It approached slowly, seeming in no hurry, its quarry no challenge. In full out terror, Henry yelled his lungs out, "HELP, HELP, HELP ME," then frantically turned to run. He could feel its telescoping, glowing eyes burning holes in his back. Unfortunately for Henry, with the tide so low, the Italian leather soles of his Gucci loafers skidded across the viscous surfaces of the damp rocks. His swan dive had great form. It was the landing that lacked finesse. Using his head to break his fall had him seeing stars; stars that swirled lower and lower into a bottomless black hole.

In that sensory realm between consciousness and unconsciousness, Henry watched as the monster reached down for him, its piercing emerald eyes bright as laser beams, its savage, lobster-like claws snapping. Terror gripped him as the dark creature hissed his name, "Hhhhhenry, I have come for youuuu, hissssss."

He tried to move, but his limbs were leaden, now in the beast's tight grasp. He felt himself rising higher and higher then starting to spin. He tried to scream, but his mouth gaped open without a sound. Now suspended above the beast, Henry could feel its metallic lungs, hear the hissing as it exhaled, smell its ozone-like breath.

"Calm down, Ambassador," T'Mo whispered, but the gruff sound of his voice only increased Henry's agitation. He fought hard to control the struggling man safely, making his orders to protect him from harm very difficult.

The SEAL's minisub surfaced and floated only twenty yards out. The swim should have been simple, but Henry squirmed across the shoulders of T'Mo ripping at the SEAL's exposed hoses and air valves. Before he could get Henry into the proper

position to swim back, he tore T'Mo's mouth piece free from the air tank releasing a loud hiss. Then the night vision goggles flew off the SEAL's rubber hood. Henry was free.

While T'Mo dove under to retrieve his goggles, he felt his minisub's repeating sonar pulse indicating that the first man was secure. He had to move fast.

Henry furiously dog paddled toward the light, his fear of being caught again prevailing over his fear of water. He could see the shore approaching. Then something clamped around his ankle. Hisssssssssssssssssssssss.

He screamed then choked on the salt water, as the beast pulled him back into its evil, liquid realm. The shore slipped away as the light flashed overhead. He kicked too hard, fought too hard and started to sink. With his face submerged and water gushing up his nose, his hysteria intensified leaving reality far behind. His brain had reached the point where it could no longer handle the overload. Every synapse circuit breaker sparked open. All five senses shut down.

Total calmness set in. Total release. Pure peace.

He took a deep breath.