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MURDER





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**MICHELLE  
HARRISON**

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*For Clair, who is a twin, and Kirsty, who isn't.*





## CHAPTER ONE

### THE MUSEUM OF CURSED OBJECTS

**M**eredith Morrow did not like the way the man was watching her. It was a look that spelled *TROUBLE*. If she had been anywhere else, she might have run, but Merry knew that at an airport, the only acceptable time to run is if you are late for your flight, and *not* when you are sensibly queuing to go through passport control.

The man's eyes slid from Merry to her passport, then across to her twin sister, Spike – real name Rose. He crooked a finger at Mum and sternly said, '*Ella*,' from beneath a bushy black moustache.

'Who's *Ella*?' Spike whispered, confused. 'Mum's name is Alice!'

‘It means “come here” in Greek,’ Merry replied, a little smug that, for once, she was a step ahead of Spike. She had purchased a small Greek phrasebook with her pocket money some weeks back, just after the trip had been booked.

‘Twins, yes?’ said the moustached man, jabbing his finger towards the sisters.

‘That’s right,’ Mum said – very patiently, Merry thought, given that there could be no mistaking that she and Spike were twins. They were identical to look at, with mischievous blue eyes, freckled noses and unruly dark hair. The only real differences were that Spike had a wonky fringe, which she insisted on cutting herself, and a slightly grumpier expression than her sister.

‘Then you explain, please, these dates of birth,’ said the man. He glowered at them suspiciously from beneath black eyebrows that were almost as bushy as his moustache. ‘They are not the same. The years are different!’

‘Well, yes,’ said Mum, pointing at the passports. ‘If you look again, you’ll see that Meredith was born on New Year’s Eve, the last day of December, and Rose was born on New Year’s Day. There are only eleven minutes between them, in fact.’

It was surprising, Merry thought, how much of a difference a frown made to someone’s face. As the man glanced at the passports again, his eyebrows shot up and his moustache lifted as his face broke into a smile.

‘Ah!’ he said excitedly. ‘I see! And this is unusual, yes?’  
‘Yes,’ Mum agreed as the passports were handed back. ‘Very unusual. The doctors said that the chances of having twins born in different years is around one in two million.’

This seemed to delight the man even further. He beamed and gestured for them to pass. ‘Madam, and twins, welcome to Crete!’

Merry beamed back, then hurried after Mum, who was already marching towards a sign pointing to baggage reclaim and telling them to *chop-chop*.

‘It does get rather tiresome, having to explain about your birthdays,’ Mum said with a sigh, pausing briefly to tuck the passports safely back in her shoulder bag. ‘If only you’d come along a few minutes earlier, Rose.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Spike replied sarcastically. ‘Or perhaps Merry could have waited a few minutes instead of being in a rush like she always is?’

‘Well, either way,’ Mum said absently, scanning the overhead screens, ‘it would have saved such a lot of bother.’

‘Hmm,’ the twins said together, sharing a glance. The truth was that their unusual birthdays – set apart between the old year and the new – was not just an odd piece of information that Mum sometimes found ‘tiresome’. The twins also had a remarkable and magical effect on time – which Mum didn’t know the half of.

And they were quite sure that their split birthdays were the root of it all.

‘Right,’ said Mum. ‘Our luggage is at baggage reclaim number two.’

By the time they reached it, the conveyor belt was already chugging around, crammed with bags and pushchairs and fat suitcases. After a few minutes, the twins’ large spotted suitcase trundled along, and a little way behind it was Mum’s. Spike had had the idea of tying bright red ribbon to both cases so they were easy to spot. With a heft and a heave, they pulled the cases free from the conveyor belt and followed the exit signs.

They stepped outside into a searing heat that almost took Merry’s breath away – she was convinced the sun here was more dazzling than ten English summers. It was now she realized that, while she’d remembered to pack some swimwear in her hand luggage, she had put her sun hat in her suitcase.

Spike, of course, could be counted on for thinking ahead. ‘*Of,*’ she said, fanning herself as she popped on her sunglasses. ‘Now, that’s *hot!*’

Squinting, Merry followed Mum, who was wheeling their suitcases to the front of a long line of taxicabs. As they waited in the queue, Mum took out a bottle of sun lotion and made them put it on. All around them, people were climbing into cars or loading bags into huge hissing coaches, which belched out hot fumes

into the already baking air. The airport was a hive of movement, but already Merry was looking beyond it into an impossibly blue and cloudless sky to rows of snow-topped mountains in the distance.

‘Spike,’ she breathed, shielding her eyes. ‘Look! How can there be *snow* when it’s the middle of summer?’

‘Because it’s a lot colder all that way up a mountain than it is down on the ground,’ Spike replied. ‘Simple.’

Within minutes, Mum had secured a taxi, and a kindly-faced driver clambered out and helped lift their luggage into the trunk.

‘*Efcharistó*,’ Merry told her. ‘That means “thank you”,’ she explained with a sideways glance at Spike, who was already rolling her eyes.

‘Did you swallow that phrasebook of yours?’

‘No, but it might have tasted better than the plane food,’ Merry said with a grin. She hadn’t *really* minded that the meal wasn’t very nice. She’d been thrilled to be on an aeroplane in the first place – it was the first time the twins had ever flown anywhere, and the whole thing – from waking up and travelling to the airport in the early hours while it was still dark, to the smell of strong coffee in the airport restaurants, and looking through the shops, to eventually boarding the plane as the sun rose – had been very exciting.

‘Snort,’ said Spike fondly. ‘Knowing you, you *would* eat a book if you could.’

‘Probably,’ Merry agreed. She loved words. She loved making them into stories and rhymes; she enjoyed the feel of them in her mouth. She was fascinated by words that seemed to look like the thing they described, like *Bed* or *Swan*. And she loved learning new ones.

‘I thought the plane food was fine,’ Spike added. She had wolfed down her meal, pudding and all, and then eaten everything Merry had left. ‘And that lovely roaring sound of the engines almost made me forget my tinnitus, even if my ears were popping like mad.’

They climbed into the back of the taxi. Despite the windows being down, the car was stuffy and Merry immediately began to sweat. She peeled her skin away from the seat, wishing Mum would hurry up and tell the driver where they needed to get to so they could start moving and there would at least be a breeze.

‘It’s in here somewhere,’ Mum muttered as the driver waited patiently for a destination. ‘Ah, here.’ She pulled out a scrap of paper and pointed. ‘*Kryfi Paralía*.’

Merry stared out of the window, willing the taxi to move off. A large coach full of tourists pulled away. She sat up a little straighter as an elegant white limousine drew up alongside the arrivals sign. A limousine usually meant someone important. Almost immediately, she spotted a man striding quickly towards the vehicle. He was dressed in light clothes with a white cap pulled down so his face was half hidden, but the way he

walked oozed confidence, as though he was used to being watched. As he neared the limo, the driver got out and rushed to relieve him of his luggage. The man lifted his head, and Merry glimpsed a dark, handsome face with unusually pale eyes. He gave the limo driver a smile so dazzling that Merry almost smiled in response – until she realized she *recognized* that smile. She nudged her twin.

‘Spike! That man in the cap – I know him from somewhere.’

‘Can’t see him properly,’ said Spike as, annoyingly, the man had chosen that moment to duck his head.

‘He obviously doesn’t want to be recognized,’ said Merry.

‘Snort!’ Spike said. ‘Then why would he ride in a limousine?’

She had a point. All around, people were staring at the luxury car. The man was about to get into the limo when a glamorous woman approached. She wore impossibly high gold sparkly shoes and bronze shorts that showed off her tanned legs. Behind her, she pulled an enormous gold suitcase, and she, too, wore a cap. Hers was covered in shiny rhinestones that glittered in the sun. From underneath it, glossy auburn hair streamed behind her. Though the cap partially hid her face, Merry could just make out a sulky, lipsticked mouth. As the man and the woman spoke, they appeared to be arguing.

‘Wonder what that’s about?’ said Spike.

Merry wondered too – but she was more interested in working out why the man was familiar. She was so busy watching them that it took her a moment to realize how hot she had become, and that the taxi had still not moved. In the front, Mum and the driver were continuing to examine Mum’s scrap of paper.

In the rear-view mirror, Merry saw an uncertain look flicker in the taxi driver’s eyes.

‘I think this is a mistake,’ she said slowly. ‘Do you mean *Mystikí Ammoudía*? Because in English, it has a similar meaning: “Secret Sands”. But this is far from here. Very far.’

‘Er, no,’ said Mum, tapping the paper. ‘*This* is the right place, I’m quite sure.’

The driver didn’t look sure at all. She tried again, struggling to find the words in English. ‘But this place, it is . . . You cannot get there any longer. There is – how do you say . . . *empódio*.’

‘I don’t know what that means,’ Mum said apologetically. ‘Merry, what does it say in your phrasebook?’

‘Er . . .’ Merry said, unsure of the spelling of the foreign word as she flicked through the pages in the Greek to English section of the book. Merry had been delighted to find that the Greek language had a different alphabet, which seemed almost as mystical and as beautiful as

Egyptian hieroglyphs. She had decided at once that she wanted to learn it – but for now, the unfamiliar letters only added to her confusion.

‘*Empódio*,’ the driver repeated. ‘I can get you close, but not all the way.’

‘Close is good enough,’ Mum said brightly.

‘Okay,’ said the taxi driver with a shrug. She started the engine. ‘We go.’

Merry cast another glance back at the bickering couple as the car moved off. She was just in time to see the woman stamping her foot and, as Merry looked, she caught another glimpse of the man’s face. Something clicked into place.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed in excitement. ‘I know who that is! It’s *Duke Rowley*!’

‘Duke Rowley?’ Spike turned back, frowning, but by now the couple was too far away for her to get a proper look. ‘You mean the one who’s in that silly TV show you’re always watching – what’s it called . . . *Sunshine* something?’

Merry nodded vigorously, still unable to believe her eyes. ‘*Sunshine and Secrets*! And it’s not silly. Every episode ends in a cliffhanger. And Leo Harrington – that’s Duke’s character – always has the biggest storylines. He was framed for a murder he didn’t commit, and so he went on the run and faked his own death. It’s addictive!’ She sat back in her seat as the taxi smoothly sped away

from the airport. To think she'd been so close to Duke Rowley and missed him by a whisker!

'If only we'd been a minute or so later,' she said dolefully. 'I could've asked for his autograph.'

'I doubt he'd have given it to you,' Spike said at once. 'I reckon he's totally obnoxious. I read in the newspaper that he had a hissy fit when a family approached him in a restaurant and asked for a photo with him.'

'I'm sure that's not true,' Merry muttered, feeling her cheeks go pink.

'I bet it is,' Spike said. 'Just because he's handsome and plays a charming character, doesn't mean Duke Rowley is like that in real life.'

Merry pursed her lips and turned to stare out of the window again. She didn't like to admit it, but Spike could be right. Still, it was exciting to have seen him in real life.

For the next hour, the taxi journeyed through the Cretan countryside, passing olive groves and churches, and pure white villas covered in vivid pink flowers that Mum pointed out as something called bougainvillea. There was far less traffic than in England, and at times their taxi was the only car on the road. Now and then, Merry glimpsed quaint little structures at the roadside which looked like miniature churches. They contained objects like religious paintings and figurines, candles and photographs. The driver explained that these were shrines dedicated to the memories of those who had

died in – or survived – road accidents in these spots.

‘Oh!’ Merry exclaimed, noticing something which had been niggling at her. ‘The driver is on the other side of the car in Greece!’

‘And on the other side of the road,’ Spike said. ‘Just like they are in American films.’

Before long, they were driving alongside a golden beach edged with little restaurants.

‘Can’t we stop, Mum?’ Spike begged, gazing at the sea. ‘Just for a while? Look how blue that water is!’

Mum shook her head firmly. ‘Yiannis is expecting us. We can’t be late.’

‘Yiannis – he is your friend?’ asked the driver.

‘Yes,’ Mum replied. ‘An old friend from years ago. We met at art school. I’m here to do some work for him for the next few weeks.’

Soon the beach was behind them, and as the car made its way along a road set into the hills, winding perilously near to the edge, Merry had to force herself to not look too closely for fear the car would topple off and fall down the cliffside. After several minutes of climbing dizzyingly higher, the taxi veered off down a narrow track and began a sharp descent to lower ground. Very soon, Merry grew concerned.

‘Spike,’ she whispered, as the view around them stretched into nothing but parched land. ‘I think we’re lost.’

Spike said nothing, but her lips tightened. Even Mum was starting to look alarmed. The driver continued along the road, winding this way and that until the car eventually stopped by a tall cliff. Ahead, the road had ended abruptly, blocked by an enormous pile of rubble. To the side, a dusty black truck was parked off the road, but no one was inside it. Several signs had been put up nearby, and while they were all in Greek, the symbols were unmistakable: DANGER! LANDFALL! DO NOT PASS.

‘We have arrived,’ said the driver, helpfully gesturing to the pile of rocks.

Mum blinked in horror. ‘H-here?’

‘*Nái.*’ The driver nodded firmly. ‘Yes. Just as I tell you. *Empódio* . . . Ah, in English, yes, I remember now – “obstruction”.’

‘Is this really it, Mum?’ Merry asked.

‘Er . . .’ Mum said, checking her piece of paper. ‘Well, I think so. Yiannis said he’d meet us here, but we’re a few minutes late.’ She pulled out a handful of notes to pay the driver. Moments later, their luggage had been unloaded and they were standing alone at the roadside as the taxi roared away in a cloud of dust.

Then Spike pointed. ‘Who’s that?’

A man had appeared through the dust cloud. Merry glanced round. Where had he come from? It was as though he’d been conjured up out of nowhere.

‘Oh, thank goodness.’ Mum sighed with relief and

waved, calling to him. ‘Yianni!’

‘I thought his name was Yiannis?’ Spike said, puzzled. ‘With an “s” on the end?’

‘It is,’ Mum explained. ‘But when you’re speaking to someone who’s Greek, you don’t pronounce the “s” at the end of their name.’

‘Alice, my friend!’ the man exclaimed. He was large and hairy with tanned skin and friendly brown eyes. He swept Mum into a bone-crunching hug, and the twins then had their cheeks enthusiastically pinched by the excitable Greek man.

‘*Ella,*’ he said, beaming. He had a deep, rumbling voice that made Merry think of bear growls and thunder. ‘It’s wonderful to see you!’ He checked his watch. ‘My other guests have not arrived yet, but I am so happy you’re here – it’s *very* exciting! I cannot wait to show you the *Spíti ton Kataraménon Antikeiménon.*’

Merry felt a tingle of anticipation. Mum had told them all about the Museum of Cursed Objects. It was a spooky collection of items that were supposedly haunted or cursed, and which Yiannis took extremely seriously. But it was one thing hearing about it, and another to be visiting in person.

‘Where exactly *is* it, though?’ Spike asked, staring at the huge rubble barrier.

‘Aha!’ Yiannis snapped his fingers and grinned. ‘I will show you. *Ella.* Follow me.’



Yiannis hoisted up the two suitcases as though they weighed no more than a couple of picnic baskets, and the Morrrows followed him along the edge of the rubble towards the rocky cliff face. Grit crunched under their shoes and a warm wind brought the sound of gulls to Merry's ears, though she could not see the sea in any direction. As they neared the cliff, Yiannis began to hum a little tune, but there was still nothing visible ahead to show where he might be taking them. Merry began to wonder whether he was quite mad. And then, a few steps on, as they rounded a ridge, a small, dark opening around the size of a normal front door appeared within the cliff face, revealing a set of narrow steps leading downward.



'*What?*' Mum blurted out, wide-eyed. 'You want us to go in there?'

Yiannis nodded, his smile widening. '*Nai*. The first adventure. To get to the museum, we must go through the caves!'

