

One Times One

"I don't know whether my life has been useless and merely a misunderstanding, or whether it has a meaning."

Hermann Hesse
The Glass Bead Game

"There is nothing like "within" or "without." Both mean either the same thing or nothing."

Ramana Maharshi
Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi

"First of all there is matter—and, remarkably enough, all matter is the same. The matter of which the stars are made is known to be the same as the matter on the earth...The same kinds of atoms appear to be in living creatures as in non-living creatures."

Richard Feynman
The Character of Physical Law

Caldero fiddled with the ring as he broached the question, "Penelope, where does the world come from?" a more problematic and heart-rending question for me than the unavoidable second, "How do I recognize my destiny in it?"

I am the storyteller here, no more, no less, than you or he. Yet being as forthright in his precocity as any human being could ever be, this odd yet charming boy's curiosity has compelled me only just now—without him ever asking, of course—to recount to you as accurately as possible—as is my penchant by nature and my calling by circumstances, first, the events leading up to his frank inquiry, secondly, my responses to his intellectual inquisitiveness, and finally, the unforeseen aftermath loosed upon the world, *your* world, unseen and formidable.

Not that any rational person in this world of connecting, communicating, and worship of power would ever think of fouling their precious religious and political mental habits with notions of dragons. Caldero though was matter-of-

fact about it when I mentioned *his* dragon, and he immediately redirected the focus of our regular leisurely afternoon conversation with his litany of questions.

"Are you telling me the truth, Penelope, are they all big like in the movies, are they good or evil, where do they come from, are they invisible, can they be killed, do they belong to any particular human like a dog or cat, do they have names, are they male or female?"

You could imagine all the questions any perceptive person would ask when confronted with the circumstances surrounding the presence of dragons in the world. When Caldero finally exhausted his characteristic theoretical questions, he shifted to more practical issues in much the same way that his maternal grandfather and my dear former music teacher, Kalkin Ladón, always sought the most purchase with every bit of information he might be fortunate enough to glean from a friend, an ally, or an enemy.

"If that is so, Penelope," Caldero leaned across the game board between us, careful not to disturb the large, enameled silver and hand-carved boxwood and ivory netsuke playing pieces. He became solemn as he lowered his voice to a whisper, "how do I communicate with my dragon?"

"You first summon yours with the name you will recognize in your nightly dream world, and then you must go meet the creature in the real world as it approaches."

"How will I know it? Will it look like the dragons I used to see in cartoons and movies?"

"Possibly yes, possibly no. It will look like you need it to look so that you may know clearly what kind of dragon the Cosmic Sage has twinned you with. It could be invisible like wind, like gravity, like time, like the life force in all living beings, or like mortality which defines the life of all living creatures, and which took your grandfather back to the source. On the other hand, it could be like the stars and planets we point to and outline with our fingers in the sky above this strange island. It could be like the thunder and lightning storm that passed over Tsoutsouras a few days ago, remember? and it flooded the alleys and roads for a

time. It could be like the Anapodaris that meanders through here," and I led Caldero to the large window cut into the thick, cool granite wall to see the river, "through the mountains and the olive orchards down to the sea. Or it could be visible like the waves that break on the beach down at the end of the path there where you and I walk in the cool of the evening."

"I heard you say, '*Twinned* me with?"'

"Yes, I did say that. What I mean is your other half, the hidden you, your Siren-call, your mirror-image, the yin to your yang." I stopped and paused for the effect of my words to enter into the boy's mind before I continued, "The doorway that opens unseen to your destiny much like... the next inevitable and binding move you must play on this miniature game board of life..."

I pointed dramatically to a particular *karakuri-netsuke* still on the rectangular ebony game board (which I had already determined represented his eventual winning move). I put both palms together, moved them slowly towards Caldero's face, opened them like one would open a book, and I waited for the effect of my gesture to take effect.

"Just like Masamitsu's beautiful netsuke there," and I lifted up the intricately carved ivory and silver-inlaid clamshell, felt in my palm the creamy surface of the object burnished smooth by two-hundred years of use, and handed it to Caldero, "just like this piece opens to reveal its secret only if you know how, your dragon will open its...I should say *your*...will open *your* secret, but only if you learn to ride *it*, and not let it dominate *you*."

But excuse my digression, for *this* is not the story I am entrusted to recount to you in this manuscript. I ask that you not disclose the details of this tale unless you have noble reason; that is, if someone's life or death depends on the revelation of this chronicle, then so be it: you may speak of what you are about to read. For the substance of this story is neither within nor without, neither living nor non-living. This is all I can say that is true after what has happened. Although I *am* the storyteller, it will be for you to evaluate for yourself these events in order to understand the two universal questions that my dear

boy, Caldero, once asked of me, and which *you* either have also asked already and so mounted and loosed *your* dragon, or which you fear and avoid like the dragon's fiery breath that chars your skin, flesh, bone, and marrow until you become unrecognizable because you have returned to that dust and ash you came from.

I *must* address the events that preceded Caldero's awakening before this account evaporates from my memory. It started with the ring Kalkin Ladón gave me so many years ago, a sign of his affection, I always thought, the respect he had for my musical talent, he had insisted.

"*You* must have this now, dear Penelope," my venerable teacher placed the impressive ring on my right middle finger, "for you have learned all I have to teach you—composition and poetry, scales and improvisation on the oud, the stories of Jalaludin Rumi, everything..."

He said it had been *his* composition and music teacher's ring, and thirty-seven years before she had given it to him right there, under similar circumstances in that same room of his ancestral home in the Adhamiyah neighborhood of Baghdad. Although Ladón avoided elaborating further, in spite of my insistent questioning, he continued by telling me about the origin and mystical, symbolic qualities of the black onyx and gold from which the ring had been made.

"Havila was her name, my dear teacher, as perhaps I am dear to you also, Penelope," he laughed generously as he kissed my forehead. "She said that as a young girl she had spied the ring in the Baghdad souk, and after her father refused to buy such a ring for a mere girl, she begged him to bring her back to the souk so she could see the ring one more time."

"How did she get the ring, Ladón?" I held out my hand to display the very ring to my dear old master encouraging him to continue with his story, "*This* ring."

"She told me that when she and her father returned the following week to the shopkeeper's stall, she probed the merchant for the price of the ring, and he

had told her it would cost her a song she would have to sing there and then that would have to move him to tears."

"Was she a singer, Ladón?"

"She was like you, Penelope, talented in so many ways beyond your years, singing and playing the oud, of course."

"So what did she do?"

"She asked the shopkeeper if he had a stringed instrument, and of course, he produced an oud from the back of his shop. She asked for a stool, tuned the instrument, and proceeded to sing one of Ziriab's love songs, "Mili" for the dumbfounded man. Havila was an honest woman, my dear Penelope, and when she told me that the shopkeeper, her father, and several other people who had been attracted to the music and had crowded around, all began to weep at the sadness and longing of the song and the exquisite accompaniment of her oud, I believed her. She recounted to me how, after she finished singing and playing, and the crowd began to murmur about such a musically precocious girl, the shopkeeper reached under the glass where the ring awaited its fate, picked it up gently, and handed it to her. She returned oud back to the merchant, and, as she told me so many years ago, she took the impressive gold and black onyx ring in her left hand and without thinking placed it over her right middle finger where it fit best, precisely where you are wearing that same ring, my dear Penelope."

I gently removed the ring from my finger and let my eyes wander over the surfaces of the exquisite object.

"Remember," Ladón gently laid his hand on my shoulder, "never let this ring be separated from you, always keep it in contact with your body so that it will become accustomed to your energy and your ways."

"What would happen if I lost it, Ladón?"

"It would no longer be yours to wield...it would become the instrument of the one who finds it, and that could be disastrous..."

I wanted to inquire further about what my master meant, but I felt charmed somehow as my eyes explored the ovoid curve of the blackest onyx I had ever seen, the exact size and dimension of a quail's egg. As I held the ring up and let the filtered afternoon light play on the surface of the stone, I could see the burnished areas on the sable gemstone where who knows how many owners of the ring had rubbed it with their fingers or on their cheek or against the inside of a glove, and tiny scratches where some owner's hand had forgotten the ring was there and hard things had clacked against the jewel.

Ladón waited smiling as I explored the ring with my appreciative eyes before he spoke, "Havila told me that she remembered the shopkeeper telling her that he had obtained the ring from a merchant who before the devastation of the war had travelled the Wadi Al-Rummah between Medina and Kuwait and then north to Baghdad in search of objects of historical significance and monetary value. The shopkeeper added that the travelling merchant said the ring was most certainly made in Sana'a, Yemen, and through my own investigation, when the ring was in my possession, I discovered that in all probability the ring was carried from Yemen by way of the port of Djibouti up the Red Sea where it ended up in Jeddah where the merchant found it and purchased it."

I returned the ring to my finger, "How did you determine that, Ladón?"

The old man I had loved and learned from for so long hobbled over to one of his desks covered with stacks of books, manuscripts, and curious objects of scientific and anthropological interest. He uncovered a large leather-bound volume and began flipping through the pages, finally nodding his head when he found what he was looking for.

"Here," he pointed to the passage on the page, "Here, in the book of Genesis..." and he read, "Chapter two, The Garden of Eden."

A river rose in Eden watering the garden; and from there, it separated into four branches. The name of the first is Phison, which encircles all the land of Havila where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx are there. The name of the second river is Gihon, which encircles

all the land of Chus. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

"Gold and onyx," he stated matter-of-factly, "Most probably referring to modern-day Yemen."

I removed the ring again and peered closely at how the small oblong onyx stone was held fast, perpendicular in its setting, by five miniature gold fingers emerging from the wide gold band that had been tooled intricately to appear like a deeply veined hand. Whoever had made this ring had also cast a small exact simulacrum of the ring on what was obviously the middle finger of the five prong-fingers of the ring resting impatiently on my middle finger. I suddenly wondered if...

I looked up, hurried over to Ladón's desk, and began to rummage around. "Magnifying glass," I uttered as I pushed aside books and papers.

"Yes," my master replied, "Look closely as I did, my dear Penelope, and you will see it."

He produced a large glass apparently from nowhere, and he handed it to me with a nod to the ring on my finger. There it was—on the middle finger of the simulacrum ring—an even tinier duplicate of the ring, impossible to make out with the naked eye, but clear in all its detail with the magnification of the glass.

"My God, Ladón, it's three tiny rings in one, and...I'm afraid to look any closer to see if there is another even more infinitesimal ring hiding from my eyes and mocking me."

"There is *not*," he nodded with a wry smile, "I have looked, as I am sure Havila and all the other unknown previous owners have looked. Whoever made this object was a master jeweler and a mage in my opinion, perhaps a Pythagorean alchemist, or a Persian mathematician. Look at the proportions of the ring itself and, of course, the smaller and smaller simulacra rings. You have discovered very quickly, as I would have guessed, my dear Penelope, the secret of this object."

"What *is* the secret of the ring, Ladón?"

"I will express in words, my dear, what you already know in your body. In this ring, the maker expressed very cleverly the mystery of the Cosmos continually recreating itself *from* itself, one times one, and the form the maker chose to express his or her understanding is, very appropriately, the Ouroboros, the serpent eating its tail..."

I lifted the ring close to the magnifying glass to inspect the sides of the ring band, and although worn almost smooth by years, centuries, perhaps, I observed incised crosshatch markings of what appeared to be, after what my master had just told me, what appeared to be scales, serpent scales. Of course! As I followed the scales around the edge of the ring to just beneath the onyx egg, I was shocked, in spite of what Ladón had just said, to make out an eye, an open mouth, and in that mouth what appeared to be a tail, the tail of the serpent, the Ouroboros! Just as my master told me. He knew already. Of course!

Ladón continued smiling as he relished my sudden realization, "Yes, you see now the endless cycle of the manifested world returning to the unmanifested realm giving rise to the manifested and so on and so on in time and outside of time. And now *you*, dear Penelope, have possession of the mysterious power of this ring.

"What exactly," I put the ring carefully back on my right hand and looked into my master's eyes as I spoke the obvious question, "is the power of this ring, this object so strange and beautiful."

His answer that moment became the answer *I* would offer my Caldero many times in the lifetime of *our* relationship.

Yet I must tell you briefly...*briefly*, so I don't fall back again into my own nagging black night of desperation over the hatred that has arisen between our Shi'a and Sunni brothers and sisters...I must quickly, very quickly recount for you the tragic events in Kalkin Ladón's family—his wife, Nerites, and his only daughter, Barakah, how the war left *me* where I am now without my own dear master, in exile on a lonely seashore here in Crete for only God knows how long,

but, more importantly, with the last hope of our lineage, my student, Caldero, Barakah's only son.

You *must* have heard of the dreadful catastrophe at the Al-Aaimmah bridge on August 31, 2005, the panic and pitiful chaos of our Shi'a brothers and sisters when they heard the rumors of more mortar and suicide attacks at the Al Kadhimiyah Mosque, how they surged across the bridge to our side, where we Sunnis lived then in the Adhamiya sector of Baghdad, how they tried to escape what they thought was imminent suicide attack and bloodshed, how the crush of people, the old, young, and infirm, how they panicked and pushed each other into the Tigris below, how hundreds died that horrible day.

Many Sunnis in the neighborhood heard the loudspeakers that day calling for help to rescue people from the river, and many Sunnis rushed to the bridge to help rescue their Shi'a brothers and sisters. My master, Ladón, his wife, Nerites, Barakah, Caldero, and I had rushed the block or so to the bridge hoping to help in any way possible. Only God knows why Nerites held on to Ladón's hand when he must have been pushed inadvertently over the side of the bridge, oh, my God! into the water thirty feet below. One moment they were next to us in the chaos, reaching over the side of the bridge pulling people up from the churning water, and the next moment they were gone from view. Caldero jumped into the river, into the heaving mass of shouting, screaming people, and I watched him frantically dive under the water again and again in his brave but futile attempt to bring his grandfather and grandmother back from death.

Within the month Barakah had prayed the last time at her husband's gravesite, prayed for all brave soldiers on all sides of the war. We sold virtually everything we could cart to the souk—Ladón's collections of antiquities from Babylon, Nimrud, Nineveh, Ur, so many others; his scientific instruments—microscopes, telescopes, surgical tools; his geological collections of minerals and fossils; most of the jewelry from his and Nerites' sides of the family—silver, carnelians, turquoise; and all the welcoming furniture that had graced the house for generations. Dinars were converted quickly into small cut diamonds, and it

was without suspicion or discovery that Barakah and I hid and carried our future with us on a freighter from Beirut to Pireas in Greece and from there to the middle of the Mediterranean to the southern coast of Crete, here in Tsoutsouras, where we now make our stand against the increasing ignorance and judgment in the world, here between mountain and sea, where at this desk made of fragrant olive wood I am writing this account with the hand that until only recently wore Ladón's ring, the ring given him by his master, Havila, the ring which now my young inquisitive apprentice bears, unsuspecting and unprepared for the discovery that awaits *him* in the ring.

Before our arrival here in Tsoutsouras seven months ago we had not heard the stories we have recently been gathering from weathered old taciturn men and women at the market who pull me or Caldero aside to whisper urgently in our ears about the dragon skeleton found in one of the local coastside caves, Drakospilia, and some add that several locals have sworn to actually seeing the dragon. So many other myths and legends based in the caves in this area swirl and gather in our heads now—stories about bronze and clay figurines of men and pregnant women sculpted into erotic preoccupations, precious jewellery, clay axes and ship models, Egyptian statuettes, and what appear to be Minoan objects of remarkable technological development.

Both Caldero and I ask to be taken to these places of hushed mystery, but as of yet, no one has offered to lead us up the mountain or down to the seaside caves. We will investigate for ourselves, I am certain. Surely God has led us here, by means of each of our hundreds and hundreds of apparently inconsequential decisions, to confront what must be our own dragons in this heavenly purgatory so isolated from the fire dragons of fear and judgement and ignorance destroying centuries of culture and learning in our beloved Middle-East.

"Havila died of remorse," Ladón warned me the day he gave me the ring and after I had expressed my love for him. "Both she and *her* master, whose name she never uttered, let themselves get too close to the dragon fire, and

everything of their relationship was destroyed because of that—the wisdom, the learning, the affection, the beauty, all because they let their love and affection for each other cross over to the side of passion. She had already years before given me the ring I now give to you, Penelope, and when her last days came on so suddenly like the night, during the entire week she was preparing for death by turning inward, I played the oud for her.”

“What songs did you play for her?” I asked assuming that I would someday be in a similar situation with my master.

“I sat and played the notes of my history with her, no song in particular, more of a Cosmos of songs, much like living and unliving things compose the Cosmos, things manifest and unmanifest. I allowed all of that to flow through my heart, my arms, and into my fingers as they pressed the fret board and plucked the strings of the oud. On the eve of the sixth day I had been playing for a half an hour very passionately without thought or words, and when I looked over to her, she had already without a word left this world of the manifested through the door of her heart and returned to the unmanifested world.”

Ladón paused a few moments in silence as he recalled the death of his master, and together he and I merged in the shared silence to accept the responsibility of our own roles in each other’s living and in each other’s inevitable passing. When he had collected himself, he strode over to the armoire behind his desk and produced an oud, the *same* oud, I already knew without asking. He played from his heart for me, for Havila, and for himself, I am sure. When we could no longer see each other in the falling dusk of that fall evening, one of my last in Baghdad, he suddenly and inexplicably stopped playing the beautiful instrument, but, nevertheless, the music continued for longer than I ever would have thought. That is my last peaceful memory of us together. I still love him.

So Ladón and Nerites are now gone, the two people I had always thought of as my true parents. But then again Barakah and Caldero are here with me, one whom I love and consider to be my sister, and the other whom I love and consider to be my son although neither is. I have the oud still with me, Havila’s,

Ladón's; Ladón's game board, of course, a miniature world of action and consequence; and the ring is here, Havila's ring, my master's ring, *our* ring, now on Caldero's finger. It will be with these objects so charged with mystery and power that I will, without delay, gather and marshal this testimony, as much as it is in my power to do so, considering how easily it has spread out onto these pages, spread wide across this small cusp of time and place, *my* time and place, like the mouth of the Anapodaris River a few hundred feet from this room as it shifts and spills naturally and unconsciously into the vast and voiceless Mediterranean Sea that surrounds us.

Once the first several months' preoccupation with finding and restoring the old granite ranch house her on Crete—abandoned and in disrepair in the middle of the overgrown olive orchard we bought, and introducing and orienting ourselves to the small village life of Tsoutsouras—the small but sufficient market of goat meat and cheese, wine, vegetables, olive oil, kitchen implements, and basic hardware; once that age-old familiar human process gave way to the simple routines of daily life—water, food, coffee, study, tending *our* goats and olive trees, rest, and sleep; once we could finally say we lived in Tsoutsouras, I began to notice little changes in Caldero and in myself.

That afternoon two months ago when Caldero asked me, "Penelope, where does the world come from? and "How do I recognize my destiny in it?" I noticed him unusually restless, incessantly twisting the ring on his finger, then in the middle of our game and conversation getting up incessantly to walk to the window to peer outside.

"Let's walk farther up the river tomorrow, Penelope, explore some of those caves the people say are up there, see if we can find the dragon skeleton..." he chuckled, but I sensed an earnestness in his tone of voice that made me listen more closely.

Each morning for several days we filled a knapsack with water, bread, and cheese and tramped the rugged riverside up into the steep serpentine gorge of the Anapodaris River flanked by sheer rock walls eroded over millennia into

fantastic organic shapes that resembled fossilized people, ogres, gods, or giants from mythology. Many sections of the gorge and the river are blocked by huge boulders, and we had to scramble around uphill or into the cool river rushing down the canyon. Each day we trudged into the narrowing ravine a half hour longer before turning around to arrive back home later and later in the afternoon.

Caldero and I spoke little while in the river gorge, and we communicated with minimal nods of the head, pointing here or there, shrugs of the shoulders, facial expressions. We had spent fifteen years together in Baghdad and now almost another year here in Crete; we understood each other's feelings, thoughts, and needs without having to wrest those private inner worlds out into the often harsh and judgmental world around us. We shared our impressions of each day's outing as we three sat around the kitchen table eating our evening meal. Without ever deciding beforehand, we talked with Barakah only about what we saw, not what we had felt, not what we had done. Each evening there was less to discuss with Barakah about our daily journey and exploration, and Caldero and I often lapsed into uncomfortable moments of silence when we each withdrew our minds from the table to recall moments in the river or in a cave or in a strange light or in a cool shaded glen when he and I had merged somehow in the mysterious intersection of time, place, history, and affection, something that is beyond the ability of words to identify or locate for someone who has never known that world or been in such a place.

"Penelope, is it safe..." As we were drying the plates from dinner, Barakah broached what I knew was her anxiety for her only son, "is it wise for you and Caldero to be walking back into the river all alone? After all there is no map, and the people say this place is enchanted...we've seen the ruins and the strange sculptures those people made, the Minoans, and I think about what they say about a dragon skeleton in that cave..."

"I love Caldero as if he were my son, Barakah," and as I hugged her, I realized I should not have described my affection for the boy that way. "I would

never put him or myself into a dangerous situation..." and I wondered as I spoke the words if that was indeed true, "or take us to a place that could harm us." We embraced as sisters, continued chatting about which goats were ready to kid and which ones we would sell, how we were going to deal with the olives that were ready to harvest from our recovering orchard, what other supplies from the village we would need to start making our own cheese, and how much red wine our neighbors, Lukios and his wife, Ariadnh, would trade us for our goats or olives or cheese.

The next morning storm clouds from northern Africa appeared unexpectedly on the horizon, and I felt in my chest the drop in atmospheric pressure. I also perceived in every part of my body that something infinitesimal in the natural harmony of the morning had shifted, fractured, distorted. Caldero did not appear for breakfast, so after Barakah and I finished our coffee and bread and cheese, she went to check on him while I tidied up the table.

"He's not in his room!" Barakah's voice reverberated off the stone walls of the old building, "or anywhere..." She rushed into the small kitchen and added what I had already felt and feared, "He's not here, Penelope!"

"I'm sure he's just gone for a stroll by himself," I tried to ignore the overwhelming gravitational crush of understanding in my stomach. "He was talking yesterday about retracing our walk to collect some stones from the river, so I wouldn't..." I knew immediately that he had left alone to begin his journey into the nameless headwaters of himself, and that the river would lead him to his inner destination and eventually to his destiny in the world. As I embraced Barakah to comfort and assure her that Caldero would be alright, I realized that he would *not* be alright. When he came back, *if* he came back, something would have changed, died, been killed, and something would have emerged unsheathed and threatening from the psychological pressure and historical urgency building up in the boy, in *us*, since calmer days in Baghdad.

"I wouldn't worry about him, Barakah," I tried to diffuse the situation and close the topic, "He'll come back, he will...let's wait for him to return on his own."

The warm North African storm blew in its anger over the beach and up into the mountains and gorge above us. We shuttered the windows, and I sat in my room with my master's oud in my lap as I followed the face of the windstorm in my heart as it must have pushed Caldero further up into the gorge; high up into the caves we had decided previously not to explore because they felt too eerie to us both; deep into sudden granite clefts leading off the river rush into secret artesian-fed glens of willows inhabited by ancient white cranes; down into shallow pools here and there where the river widens, calms, and hides the agates, fossil trilobites, and gold nuggets that fascinated Caldero; and further close up into the inaccessible and unknown headwaters of the Anapodaris where the ferocity of the North African storm would eventually spend and dissipate itself into the deep limestone bedrock under the river.

The evening shadows returned alone without the accompaniment of the boy Barakah and I waited for and loved.

"It's too late to do anything now..." I consoled us both. "If he is not back by morning, we will get mules from Lukios and go find him."

We sat close together at the table as night extinguished the light of the day and intensified our anxiety and fear. I poured red wine into Barakah's glass, and she slowly filled mine until the labelless bottle was empty. Late that night after all the lights in the house had been dark for hours, I awoke suddenly when I heard my door open.

"Can I come in, Penelope?"

I lit the kerosene lantern and saw him clearly. He was naked, covered with streaks of dirt and mud, his feet wrapped with pieces of his clothing, bloodied and in near shreds. He smelled of burned flesh.

He reached up to touch my face, and the black onyx ring glistened in the orange light of the lantern. While I cleaned and bandaged the burns, cuts, scrapes, and abrasions on his body, he told me everything he had seen, everything he had done, everything he now understood, and everything he wanted to do. We fell asleep hours later, and I dreamed.

Red hand prints on the wall of our house...The radio blaring about Hitler killing us Jews...My father yelling for us to get out of the house...Flames in the house...Windows breaking...I'm running outside with my father and my mother...Shooting sounds from all around us...My father falling with blood all around his head...Mother yelling for me to run and not stop...Looking back I don't see Mother...A man grabs me and carries me off the street into his house...

I awaken with a start. Caldero is gone from my room. I hear voices in the kitchen. I see the faces of my father and mother in my mind's eye. I am suddenly overwhelmed with gratitude to Kalkin Ladón for saving my life from the anti-Jewish Iraqi Arabs on that horrible day in Baghdad 1941.

Within the month we arrange for the three of us to bus north to the Heracion airport. Caldero's one-way ticket flies him to Greece and the oracle at Delphi.

In the evenings now I play the oud for Barakah, and she drinks Lukios' strong red wine to Caldero's health.

Last night I dreamed a black egg gave birth to a dragon. I tell no one that I carry his child.