Chapter 2

AT THE ARTA MANSION

Monologue

I was born in Arta five and a half centuries ago, in 1470. Back then, it was a great city, a beautiful city. The wind carried the scent of the Epirus mountains, and the city laid like a lady in the arms of Arachthos, with its crystal clear waters flowing around her. Her wealth of great, brought by merchants passing through on their way from West to East and back again. But that trade and wealth never travelled alone. Arta became a crossroads where ideas, knowledge and thought met. And, as the whole Epirus was handed to the Turks by treaty, Arta did not experience disaster.

My family had settled there before the Turks came. My mother was called Irene (Peace). My beloved father, my first teacher, was the lord Manuel Tribolis, a native of Sparta. A noble family, which had even produced a Patriarch as well as many officials who served in the Despotate of Mystras. First image I can remember is my father sitting at his wooden desk writing with his pen, a swan feather, whilst I quiet crawl around him, looking up the shelves with their leather-bound books.

From the very start of my life, I had many opportunities for deep learning and life. At a time of great ignorance amongst my compatriots, I had at my disposal my father's wisdom, the help of distinguished teachers who visited out home almost daily, and a large library – the largest in Epirus – from which to study even as a child old and the new wisdom. Not only was I born into a house of philosophers, but of Greeks and Christians too. I was taught Orthodox piety and I linked forever a love of learning with pride in my Greek descent and my true Orthodox faith. Neither ever refused me.

Endless hours of study, Little rest. And the sweetest time, the walk on the bridges of Arachthos. I always adored the bridges. Perhaps because God had sent me to serve as a bridge between two worlds. To leave a land, to cross turbulent waters, to touch another land and make it a new home.

And when I walked back and forth on one of the bridges, it was as if I could hear a voice:

"Without sacrifice, the bridge does not stand... Without sacrifice, the bridge does not stand".

I quickly spread my wings. In the early 1480s I found myself in Corfu, where I was welcomed by my uncle, Dimitrios Trivolis. My great teacher there was John Moschos, a student of the great sage Plethon Gemistus, from Mystras. Another world, cosmopolitan life and preparation to enter the gates to Europe.

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ΣΤΟ ΑΡΧΟΝΤΙΚΟ ΤΗΣ ΑΡΤΑΣ¶
Μονόλογος¶
Γεννήθηκα στην Άρτα, πριν από πεντέμισι αιώνες, το 1470. Πόλη σπουδαία τότε, όμορφη πόλη. Τ΄ αγέρι έφερνε τ΄ αρώματα των ηπειρώτικων βουνών κι εκείνη, αρχόντισσα, αφηνόταν στην αγκαλιά του Άραχθου, που κύλαγε τριγύρω της τα διάφανα νερά του. Ο πλούτος της πολύς, φερμένος από εμπόρους, που την είχαν πέρασμα από τη Δύση στην Ανατολή κι ανάστροφα. Ποτέ όμως το εμπόριο και ο πλούτοςδεν πάνε μόνα τους.Η Άρτα έγινε μαζί και σταυροδρόμι ιδεών, γνώσης και σκέψης. Κι επειδή, ολόκληρη ήΗπειρος παραδόθηκε στους Τούρκους με συνθήκη, η Άρτα δε γνώρισε καταστροφή.¶

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Η οικογένειά μου είχε εγκατασταθεί εκεί πριν τους Τούρκους.Τη μητέρα μου την έλεγαν Ειρήνη. Πατέρας μου λατρεμένος και πρώτος μου δάσκαλος ήταν ο άρχοντας Μανουήλ Τριβώλης, με καταγωγή από τη Σπάρτη. Ένδοξη οικογένεια, που έβγαλε ακόμη και Πατριάρχη, αλλά και πολλούς αξιωματούχους, που υπηρέτησαν στο Δεσποτάτ …

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