

A TIME TO CAST AWAY STONES



Sometimes it's one of the supporting-role characters that stays with you. In the lurid sagas of Jack Kerouac and Ken Kesey, the tangential figure of Neal Cassady is ultimately the most memorable for me. And in the lives of Byron and Shelley, and then fifty years later the lives of the Rossetti family and the Pre-Raphaelites, it's the enduring figure of Edward John Trelawny that lingers most in my mind.

*Trelawny figured peripherally in my 1989 novel *The Stress of Her Regard*, and, as an old man, in my newest novel, the title of which has as of this writing not yet been decided on. But really the most important adventure of Trelawny's life took place in the years between the times those books cover – specifically in 1824 and 1825, in Greece.*

*Joe Stefko at Charnel House was the original publisher of *The Stress of Her Regard*, and for the twentieth anniversary of the press he asked me if I could write something further involving Shelley and Byron; and it turned out that Trelawny was the most intriguing person in the crowd.*

*In order to write this story I read Trelawny's autobiography, *Adventures of a Younger Son*, which for more than a hundred years was taken as factual and has only recently been revealed to be entirely a romantic fiction; and the 1940 biography *Trelawny* by Margaret Armstrong, written before Trelawny's deception was discovered; and the more recent and accurate*

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biographies, William St. Clair's Trelawny, The Incurable Romancer, and David Crane's Lord Byron's Jackal.

Somebody once said that you become what you pretend to be, and Trelawny had always pretended to be a romantic character out of one of Byron's swashbuckling tales. In the end I admire him.

—T. P.



I

May 1825

“Though here no more Apollo haunts his Grot,
And thou, the Muses’ seat, art now their grave,
Some gentle Spirit still pervades the spot,
Sighs in the gale, keeps silence in the Cave...”

– Lord Byron

“Oh, thou Parnassus!”

– from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*,
Canto I, LXII

Somewhere ahead in the windy darkness lay the village of Tithorea, and south of that the pass through the foothills to the crossroads where, according to legend, Oedipus killed his father. Trelawny and his young wife would reach it at dawn, and then ride east, toward Athens, directly away from Delphi and Mount Parnassus.

But it was only midnight now, and they were still in the Velitza Gorge below Parnassus, guiding their horses down the pebbly dry bed of the Kakoreme by the intermittent moonlight. It was half an hour since they had left behind the smells of tobacco smoke and roasted pigeon as they

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had skirted wide through the oaks around the silent tents of Ghouras's palikars at the Chapel of St. George, and now the night wind in Trelawny's face smelled only of sage and clay, but he still listened for the sound of pursuing hoofbeats...or for stones clattering or grinding, or women's voices singing atonally out in the night.

The only sound now, though, was the homely thump and knock of the horses' hooves. He glanced to his right at Tersitza – huddled in her shaggy sheepskin cape, she seemed like a child rocking in the saddle, and Trelawny recalled Byron's words:

And then – that little girl, your warlord's sister? – she'll be their prey, and change to one of them – supposing that you care about the child.

Byron had said it only three months after dying in Missolonghi last year, and at the time it had not been a particularly important point – but now Tersitza was Trelawny's wife, and Trelawny was determined to get her free of her brother's ambitions...the ambitions which until a few months ago had been Trelawny's too. A man had to protect his wife.

A great man?

The intruding thought was so strong that Trelawny almost glanced around at the shadows among the twisted olive trees here to see who had whispered it; but he kept his eyes on Tersitza. He wished she would glance over at him, show him that she was still there, that she still had a face.

Percy Shelley hadn't protected his wife – his first wife, at least, Harriet. He had abandoned her in England and run off to Switzerland to wed Mary Godwin, and Harriet had in fact died a year or two later, in the Serpentine River in Hyde Park. Shelley had been a great man, though, one of the immortal poets – a true king of Parnassus! – and such men couldn't be bound by pedestrian moralities out of old holy books. Trelawny had been proud to call Shelley his friend, and had

eventually overseen the poet's cremation and burial. Shelley had been a braver man than Byron, who for all his manly posturing and licentious ways had proven to be a willing prisoner of...convention, propriety, human connections.

A warm wind had sprung up now at their backs, tossing the loose ends of Trelawny's turban across his bearded face, and he smelled jasmine. *All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them*, he thought. I am even now literally turning my back on them.

With the thought, he was instantly tempted to rein in the horses and retrace their course. The British adventurer, Major Francis Bacon, would be returning here, ideally within a few weeks, and if Bacon kept his promise he would be bringing with him the talisman that would... would let Trelawny do what Byron had advised.

But he bitterly recognized the dishonesty of his own rationalization. Major Bacon would probably not be able to make his way back here before Midsummer's Eve, and after that it would almost certainly be too late. And – and Trelawny had told Tersitza that their expedition tonight was to rescue her brother, the *klepht* warlord Odysseus Androutsos, from his captivity in the Venetian Tower at the Acropolis in Athens. Odysseus had been imprisoned there two weeks ago by his one-time lieutenant, Ghouras, whose palikars were already camped in several places right here in the Velitza Gorge. Trelawny knew that Ghouras meant soon to blockade the mountain entirely, and that tonight might be the last chance he and Tersitza would have to escape.

He had no choice but to turn his back on the mountain, and on the glamorous damnation it offered.

Not for the first time, he forced down the forlorn wish that Byron had never spoken to him after dying in Missolonghi.

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A year ago, in April of 1824, Edward Trelawny had ridden west from Athens toward Missolonghi with a troop of armed palikars, eager to show Lord Byron that an alliance with certain maligned old forces really *was* possible, and would be the best way to free Greece from the Turks. Previously, especially on the boat over from Italy, Byron had laughed at Trelawny's aspirations – but shortly after their arrival in Greece, Trelawny had left the dissolute lord's luxurious quarters in Cephalonia and struck out on his own across the war-ravaged Greek countryside, and had eventually found the *klepht*, the Greek warlord, who knew something of the ancient secret ways to summon such help – and to virtually make gods of the humans who established the contact.

As Trelawny had furtively guided his band of palikars westward through the chilly mountain passes above the Gulf of Corinth, hidden by the crags and pines from the Turkish cavalry on the slopes below, he had rehearsed what he would say to Byron when they reached Missolonghi: *The klepht Odysseus Androutses and I have already paid the toll, in rivers of Turkish blood on the island of Euboea, and in blood of our own drawn by the metal that's lighter than wood – we have our own army, and our headquarters are on Mount Parnassus itself, the very home of the Muses! It's all true – join us, take your rightful place on Parnassus in the soon-to-be-immortal flesh!*

Byron wasn't nearly the poet that Shelley had been, in Trelawny's estimation, but surely any poet would have been flattered by the Parnassus allusion, Parnassus being the home of the goddesses called the Muses in classical Greek myths, and sacred to poetry and music. Trelawny would not remind Byron that Mount Parnassus was also reputed to be the site where Deucalion and Pyrrha landed their ark, after the great flood, and

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repopulated the world by throwing over their shoulders stones that then grew up into human form.

And Trelawny would not mention, not right away, his hope that Byron, who had once had dealings with these powers himself before foolishly renouncing them, would act in the role the Arabs called *rafiq*: a recognized escort, a maker of introductions that otherwise might be dangerous.

Trelawny had imagined that Byron would finally lose his skeptical smirk, and admit that Trelawny had preceded him in glory – and that the lord would gladly agree to serve as *rafiq* to the powers which Trelawny and Odysseus Androutsos hoped to summon and join – but on the bank of the Evvenus River, still a day's ride west of the mudbank seacoast town of Missolonghi, Trelawny's band had passed a disordered group of palikars fleeing east, and when Trelawny had asked one of the haggard soldiers for news, he learned that Lord Byron had died five days earlier.

Damn the man!

Byron had died still intolerably imagining that Trelawny was a fraud – *If we could make Edward tell the truth and wash his hands we will make a gentleman of him yet*, Byron had more than once remarked to their mutual friends in Italy – and that all Trelawny's reminiscences about having captured countless ships on the Indian Ocean as second-in-command to the noble privateer de Ruyters, and marrying the beautiful Arab princess Zela, were fantasies born of nothing but his imagination. Trelawny had always been sourly aware of Byron's amiable skepticism.

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His horse snickered and tossed its head in the moonlight, and Trelawny

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glanced at Tersitza – who still swayed in the saddle of the horse plodding along beside his, still silently wrapped in her shaggy cape – and then he peered fearfully back at the sky-blotting bulk of Mount Parnassus. It hardly seemed to have receded into the distance at all since they had left. If anything, it seemed closer.



Only to himself, and only sometimes, could Edward Trelawny admit that in fact he *had* concocted all the tales of his previous history – he had *not* actually deserted the British Navy at the age of sixteen to become a corsair and marry a princess who died tragically, but had instead continued as an anonymous midshipman and been routinely discharged from the Navy in Portsmouth at twenty, with not even the half-pay a lieutenant would get. A sordid marriage had followed a year later, and after the birth of two daughters his wife had eloped with a captain of the Prince of Wales's Regiment. Trelawny, then twenty-four, had vowed to challenge the man to a duel, though nothing had come of it.

But his stories had become so real to him, as he had repeated them in ever-more-colorful detail to Shelley and Mary and the rest of the expatriate British circle in Pisa in the early months of 1822, that Trelawny's memory served them up to his recall far more vividly than it did the tawdry, humiliating details of the actual events.

And now he *was* living the sort of life he had only imagined – only foreseen! – back in Italy. He habitually dressed now in Suliote costume, the red and gold vest and the sheepskin *capote*, with pistols and a sword in his sash, and he was second-in-command to Odysseus Androutses, a real brigand chief, and together they had killed dozens

of Ali Pasha's Turkish soldiers on the occupied island of Euboea.



But the memories of ambushing Turks and burning their villages on Euboea brought up bile to the back of his throat now, and made him want to goad the horses into a foolhardy gallop through the patchy moonlight. It wasn't the fact of having killed the men, and women and children too, that twisted his stomach, but the knowledge that the killings had been an offering, a deliberate mass human sacrifice.

And he suspected that when Odysseus had afterward performed the blood-brother ritual with him in the vast cave high up on Mount Parnassus, in which Trelawny had cut a gash in his own forearm with the knife made of lightweight gray metal, that had been a human sacrifice too. A *humanity* sacrifice, at any rate.



With an abrupt chilling shock he realized that the wind at his back shouldn't be warm, nor smell of jasmine. Quickly he reached across to take the slack reins of Tersitza's horse, but he had no sooner grabbed the swinging leather strap than a cracking sound to his left made him look back over his shoulder –

– the sound had been like a rock splitting, and for an instant he had been afraid that he would see again, here, the black bird-headed thing, apparently made of stone, that had been haunting his dreams and had seemed in them to be the spirit of the mountain –

– but it was a girl that he saw, pacing him on a third horse; and her horse's hooves made no sound on the flinty riverbed. Her luminous

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eyes were as empty of human emotion as a snake's, though by no means empty of emotion.

But he recognized her – she could be no one else than Zela, the Arabian princess who had died while pregnant with his child thirteen years ago. Her narrow little body was draped in pale veils that were white in the moonlight, but he was certain that they were actually yellow, the Arab color of mourning.

The smell of jasmine had intensified and become something else, something like the inorganically sweet smell of sheared metal.

She smiled at him, baring white teeth, and her soft voice cut through the clatter of the wind in the olive branches:

*“Out of this wood do not desire to go,
Thou shalt remain here whether thou wilt or no.”*

His face went cold when he abruptly remembered that Zela had never existed outside his stories.

Even as he called, “Tersitzal!” and goaded his own horse forward and pulled on the reins of hers, he recognized the lines the phantom girl had quoted – they were from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and it was on this upcoming midsummer's eve that he was to be consecrated to the mountain.

Tersitza was still slumped in her saddle, and Trelawny pulled his mount closer to hers and then leaned across and with a grunt of effort lifted her right out of the saddle and sat her limp form on his thighs as her cape came loose and blew away. Glancing down at her in the moment before he kicked his horse into a gallop, he saw that her eyes were closed, and he was profoundly reassured to feel for a moment her warm breath on his hand.

With one arm around her shoulders he leaned forward as far as he could over the horse's flexing neck and squinted ahead to see any low

branches he might be bearing down on. Tersitza's riderless horse was falling behind, and the hoofbeats of Trelawny's were a rapid drumming in the windy gorge.

Peripherally he could see that Zela was rushing forward right beside him, a yard away to his left, though her horse's legs were moving no faster than before, and the moonlight was luminously steady on her even as it rushed past in patches all around her, and her voice was still clear in his ears:

*"I am a spirit of no common rate.
The summer soon will tend upon my state,
And I do love thee. Therefore stay with me."*

Trelawny didn't spare her a glance, but from the corner of his eye he could see that her veils were not being tossed in the headwind. His breath was choppy and shallow, and the wind was cold now on his sweating face.

The village of Tithorea couldn't be more than five miles ahead of them now, and this phantom didn't appear to be a physical body. As long as his horse didn't stumble in the moonlight –

Abruptly the Zela phantom was gone, but after a moment of unreasoning relief Trelawny cursed and pulled back on the reins, for somehow they weren't in the Velitza Gorge anymore.

His horse clopped and shook to a panting halt. Trelawny could feel cold air on his bared teeth as he squinted around at the dozens or hundreds of tumbled skeletons that webbed the sides of the path now, below the rocky slopes; many of the further ones straddled the bigger skeletons of fallen horses, and the bony hands of those closer clutched ropes tied around the skulls of camels on the rocky ground. The jagged moonlit ridges far above seemed as remote as the stars they eclipsed, and faintly on the wind he could hear high feminine voices combining in alien harmonies.

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He made himself breathe deeply and unclench his fists from the reins and stretch his fingers. He recognized the place, at least – the devils of Parnassus hadn't transported them to some hellish valley on the moon.

They were in the Dervenakia Pass, where the army of the Turkish general Dramali Pasha had been trapped and massacred by the wild mountain Greek tribes nearly two years ago. The smell of decay was only a frail taint now on the night wind.

But the Dervenakia Pass was in the Morea – across the Gulf of Corinth, easily fifty miles south of where Trelawny and Tersitza had been a moment ago.

Very well, he thought stoutly, nodding as he forced down his panic – very well, I know the way to Argos from here, we can –

A clanking of stones on the road ahead jerked his head in that direction, and his tenuous hope flickered out.

A tall spidery thing like a black animated gargoyle stood in the moonlit path now, a hundred feet ahead. More rocks were breaking away from the walls of the pass and tumbling across the ground to attach themselves to it, adding to its height as he watched. Its stone beak swung heavily back and forth in the moonlight.

Its lengthening black shadow shifted across the scattered white ribcages and skulls behind it, and the high faraway voices were singing louder now, spiralling up toward a crescendo beyond the range of human hearing.

Trelawny's eyes were wide, and he wasn't breathing, or even thinking. His horse was rigidly still.

The figure ahead of them was even taller when it straightened somewhat, its long, mismatched stalactite arms lifting toward the horse and riders – and though it only roughly resembled a human body, Trelawny was certain that it was female. And when it spoke, in an echoing voice

like rushing water choked and sluiced and spilled by a slow millwheel –

“And I will purge thy mortal grossness so

That thou shalt like an airy spirit go,”

– he knew it was the same creature that had seemed to be riding at his left hand in the Velitza Gorge.

His face and palms tingled in the cold wind, as if damp with some moisture more volatile than sweat. *Thy mortal grossness.*

The thing ahead of them was hideous, but that wasn't why Trelawny ached uselessly to tear his eyes from it – the stones it was animating were crude, but they weren't *it*. The entity confronting him was an immortal ethereal thing, “an airy spirit” that only touched matter as a well-shod man might carelessly leave bootprints in mud, while Trelawny and Tersitza *consisted* of matter – fluids and veined organic sacs and tangled hairs, pulsing and *temporary*.

Trelawny yearned to hide from the thing's intolerable attention, but he couldn't presume to move. Abruptly he began breathing again, a harsh hot panting, and it humiliated him.

He was still holding Tersitza's limp, gently breathing little body in front of himself, as if it were an offering, and for a moment of infinite relief he felt the thing ahead shift its attention to her for a moment before fixing its psychic weight on him again.

The voice came only in his head now, again using lines from his memory but no longer bothering to cater to his fleshy ears by agitating the cold air:

I claim the ancient privilege of Athens:

As she is mine, I may dispose of her.

Since the thing had referred to Tersitza, Trelawny was able to look down at the girl. And though she was obviously as miniscule and ephemeral a thing as he now knew himself to be, her helpless vulnerability

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couldn't be ignored, and he scraped together the fragments of his crumpled identity enough to answer.

"No," he whispered.

The thing in the path ahead of them was growing still taller and wider, its misshapen head beginning to blot out part of the night sky, but with adamantine patience it spoke again in his head:

All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.

That was what Satan had offered Christ, in the gospel of Matthew. Edward Trelawny realized that this vast thing was offering him a chance to become something like its peer, to purge him of his body-bound mortality.

How I would have soared above Byron here, he thought.

But he wrapped his awkwardly jointed arms around Tersitza and pulled her bony form to himself.

"No," he said again, and his voice was clearer now.

He looked up from under his eyebrows, blinking away the stinging sweat – and then clenched his eyes shut, for the thing was rushing at him, expanding in his view –

– but there was no obliterating impact. After some tense length of time he began breathing again, and the taint of old decay was gone, and what he smelled on the chilly mountain breeze now was tobacco and roasted pigeon.

He opened his eyes. Tersitza was still slumped unconscious across his lap on the saddle, but the giant stone form whose slopes began a mile in front of them was Mount Parnassus, its high shoulders hidden behind clouds in the moonlight. His horse stamped restlessly in damp leaves.

They were back in the Velitza Gorge again, as abruptly as they had been taken out of it – if indeed they *had* actually been out of it, and the spirit of the mountain had not simply manifested itself to him in a

scene conjured, as its statements and first appearance had been, from Trelawny's memory and imagination.

To his right through the dark tangles of the oak branches he could see the cooking fires and the palikars' tents around the ruined Chapel of St. George.

He hugged Tersitza to him, already beginning to wish he could have accepted the stone thing's magnanimous offer.

The girl stirred at last, then sat up and glanced around.

"We're no further than this?" she whispered, shivering in his arms.

She had spoken in her native Greek, and he answered haltingly in the same language. "We were turned back." He was suddenly exhausted, and it was an effort to recall the Greek words. "We lost your horse."

"And my cape is gone." She ran her hands through her long black hair, feeling her scalp. "Was I hurt? I can't remember meeting Ghouras's soldiers!" She turned her pale little face up to him and her dark eyes looked intently into his. "Were you wounded?"

"No." For a moment he considered letting her believe that it had indeed been the palikars of Odysseus's rival who had forced them back to the mountain – but then he sighed and said, "It wasn't Ghouras who stopped us. It was – magic, enchantment." He wished he dared to tell her that he had been trying to save her from a fate literally worse than death – the opposite of death, in fact – and that it was her brother who had put her in that peril. "It was the mountain, your brother's mountain, that drove us back. Pulled us back."

"*Enchantment?*" She kept her voice down, but her whisper was hoarse with scorn. "Are you a coward after all? Odysseus is your blood-brother, and you are scared away from rescuing him by some...nymphs, dryads? *Fauns?*"

"You –" he whispered furiously, "– would be dead now, if I had not.

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And *I* would be...

"Dead as well," she said. "Turn back – I would rather be dead than have a coward for a husband."

Trelawny was mightily tempted to do as she said. I could be with Zela, he thought. Again. At last.

But he whispered, "Keep your voice down," and he waved toward the campfires at the old monastery, dimly visible through the trees. "Do you want to rouse Ghouras's men too?"

Yes, he could be with Zela – but Zela was a phantom who had never existed, and this girl, for all her maddening irrationality, was real, vulnerable flesh and blood.

You protect the ones you love. He clung to the thought. Even if they ignorantly resent you for it.

"We're not turning back," he said. Somewhere an owl whistled its low note through the trees.

"Give me a couple of pistols," Tersitza hissed, "and I'll go by myself!"

She was serious, and he found that his anger was gone. He admired courage, even – or especially – pointless courage. "On foot?" he asked with a smile. "It wasn't fauns and dryads."

For a few moments she was silent, and the wind rattled the dark branches around them. "I suppose it was a *vrykolakas*," she said with apparent carelessness, though he felt her shudder as she spoke the word. *Vrykolakas* was the Greek term for vampire.

"It was," he said, "but one made of stone instead of flesh." He remembered the vision of Zela riding beside them. "Though it could mimic flesh."

She exhaled a wavering breath, and seemed to shrink in his arms.

He opened his mouth to say something more, but she gripped his wrist with cold fingers.

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“I—have seen it,” she said humbly, almost too softly for him to hear. “It *was* the mountain, the ghost of the mountain. I—” She looked ahead toward the imposing silhouette of Mount Parnassus, which now blocked half the sky in front of them. “I had hoped we were escaping it tonight.”

“So,” said Trelawny, “had I.”

He flicked the reins, and the horse started forward along the familiar track to its stable in the guardhouse at the foot of the mountain, near the path that would lead Trelawny and his wife back up to the ladders that mounted to their house in Odysseus’s cave, eight hundred feet above the gorge.





II

June 1824

“...and fortunate is he
For whom the Muses have regard! His song
Falls from his lips contented. Though he be
Harried by grief and guilt his whole life long,
Let him but hear the Muses’ servant sing
Of older beings and the gods, and then
His memory is cleared of everything
That troubled him within the world of men.”

– Hesiod’s *Theogony*,
the Ceniza-Bendiga translation,
lines 96-102

After encountering the fleeing palikars just east of Missolonghi a year ago, and learning from them that Byron had died only a few days earlier, Edward Trelawny had pressed on with his own party of palikars and reached the marshy seacoast town the next day.

Down at the end of a row of shabby wooden houses under a gray sky, the house Byron had worked and died in stood on the shore of a wide, shallow lagoon. Trelawny had been escorted upstairs by Byron’s

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old servant Fletcher, and had found the lord's coffin laid out across two trestles in the leaden glow of narrow uncurtained windows.

Fletcher had pulled back the black pall and the white shroud, and Trelawny had scowled and pursed his lips at the evidences of an autopsy – the aristocratic face bore an expression of stoic calm, though thinned by the fever that had killed him, but the disordered gray-streaked brown hair half-concealed a crude ring cut in his scalp where physicians had removed part of his brain, and the body's torso was divided by a long incision.

When Fletcher left the room, Trelawny drew his Suliote dagger and forced himself to cut off the small toe of Byron's twisted left foot. Byron was gone, but even a relic of the man might have some value as a *rafiq*.

Byron had been a co-representative in Greece of the London Greek Committee, which had put together a Stock Exchange loan to fund the war for Greek independence, and though a big sum of cash was daily expected, all that had been provided so far in Missolonghi were several cannons. By claiming to be Byron's secretary, Trelawny prevailed on the remaining representative – an idealistic but naïve British colonel called Stanhope – to let him take away a howitzer and three three-pounders and ammunition, for the defense of eastern Attica by Odysseus Androutsos. Trelawny even managed to commandeer fifty-five horses and twenty artillerymen to haul the guns across the seventy-five miles back to the Velitza Gorge and the foot of Mount Parnassus, where Odysseus's soldiers built a crane to hoist the guns and crates up to the fortified cave.

Mavre Troupa, the Black Hole, was what the Greeks called the cave, but Trelawny had been relieved to get back to its lofty security.

The climb up to its broad lip was exhilarating – the last sixty feet of the eight hundred were a sheer vertical face, negotiated by clambering

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up ladders made of larch branches bolted to the crumbling sandstone, and the last twenty-foot ladder had a tendency to swing like a pendulum in the wind, for it was attached only at the top so that it could be pulled up in case of a siege.

The cave itself was a fairly flat terrace two hundred feet wide, with a high arching stone ceiling; the cave floor shelved up in rocky platforms as it receded into the shadows of the mountain's heart, and the various levels were wide enough for several small stone-and-lumber houses to have been built on them – Odysseus's mother and siblings lived in several of them – and the remote tunnels were walled off as storerooms, filled with sufficient wine and oil and olives and cheese to last out the longest conceivable siege. There was even a seasonal spring in the southern corner of the enormous cave, and an English engineer had begun work on a cistern so that the citizens of the cave could have water on hand even in the summer.

Philhellenes, the Englishmen who had come to fight for Greece's freedom – mostly young, mostly inspired by Byron's old poetry and recent example – seemed to Trelawny to be underfoot throughout the country these days, and, though he was one of them himself, he felt that unlike them he had shed his old links and actually become a Greek...as dark as any, attired identically, and second-in-command to a genuine mountain king right out of Sophocles.

One of these Philhellenes was the artillery officer who had come along with him on the arduous trip to Parnassus from Missolonghi, a Scotsman in his thirties who claimed to have fought in the Spanish wars; his last name was Fenton, and he had faced the rain and the muddy labor of carting the cannons to the mountain with a kind of tireless ferocious cheer – and he frequently quoted the poetry of Robert Burns. Trelawny admired him.

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Trelawny's newly acquired artillerymen stayed at the guardhouse and tents below, with the bulk of Odysseus's soldiers, but Odysseus welcomed Trelawny and Fenton when they had climbed up the final ladder to the fortified cave and stood panting on the wooden platform that projected out over the misty abyss.

Trelawny had been a little nervous about the introduction, and ready to speak up for Fenton, but Odysseus seemed almost to recognize the wiry Scotsman – not as if they had met before, but as if Odysseus was familiar with some category of men that included Fenton, and had a wary and cautious respect for its members.

The bandit-chief's eyes narrowed under his striped head-cloth as he smiled, and in the mix of Italian and Greek by which he communicated with Westerners he said, "I can see that you will be of assistance and encouragement to my dear friend Trelawny," and led him away to show him where the new guns might best be mounted on the battlements that lined the cave's rim.

Satisfied that his peculiar friends would find each other's company tolerable, and eager to get out of the glaring daylight at the front of the cave, Trelawny hurried past the groups of palikars who were clustered around the several fire-pit rings on the cave floor, and leaped up the natural stone steps to the more shadowed level where his own small wooden house had been built.

He pulled his sword and pistols free of his sash and clanked them on the table, struck a flame with his tinderbox and lit a candle, then carefully lifted out of a pocket the handkerchief that was wrapped around Byron's toe. Byron was now, in a sense, physically on Mount Parnassus, *in* the mountain, but Trelawny had no idea how he might use the toe to facilitate contact with the species with whom he and Odysseus hoped to make an alliance: the creatures referred to in the

Old Testament as the Nephelim, the giants that were “in the earth in those days.”

There was no contact between that species and humanity now, but there had been, as recently as two and a half years ago; and Byron had been one of their partners before the bridge between them had been broken. Trelawny believed they left some physical trace on the bodies of their human symbiotes, and so Byron’s toe might at least be a reminder to them of the lost alliance – and the Nephelim, the Greek Muses, could not now even in spirit venture far from Mount Parnassus, so Trelawny had brought it to them.

He laid the little cloth bundle on the table and flipped aside the hemmed edges. Byron’s toe had turned black during the month since Trelawny had taken it in Missolonghi, and he touched it gingerly.

Over the vaguely buttery smell of the candle, Trelawny was startled to catch the scent of the Macassar oil Byron had always used on his hair.

And then Byron spoke to him.

The voice was faint, and seemed to shake out of the candle flame: “Trelawny, man! This is – a huge mistake.”

Trelawny became aware that he had recoiled away from the table and banged the back of his head against one of the upright beams of the house; but he took a deep breath and walked back and leaned his hands on the table to stare into the flame.

“Will you –” he began, but the voice interrupted him.

“How did you do this? How am I returned?”

“After Shelley drowned,” stammered Trelawny, glancing nervously at the narrow window that looked out on the dim upper levels of the cave, “we recovered his boat – it was rammed in the storm by an Italian vessel, a *felucca* –”

“It wasn’t rammed,” whispered Byron’s voice, “he drowned deliberately,

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founded his boat and sank, to save his wife and last child.” The flame quivered, as if with a sigh. “But you did retrieve his boat.”

Trelawny frowned, for he was certain that their mutual friend Shelley had not committed suicide; but he let the point pass and went on.

“And,” he said, “and one of his notebooks was aboard, and legible once I dried it out. I let Mary take it, but not before I cut several pages out of it. In those pages Shelley explained how a man might become immortal.”

“And save Greece too,” said Byron’s voice, fainter but even now still capable of conveying dry mockery, “just incidentally.”

“Yes,” said Trelawny loudly, and then he went on in a whisper, “and save Greece. That’s no...mere excuse. I’m a Greek now, more than I was ever an Englishman.”

“And now you mean to be a slave.” The voice was almost too faint for Trelawny to hear. “To live forever, yes, perhaps – but not your own man any longer – not a man at all, but just a...shackled traitor to your race.” The flame wavered. “Is there a second candle you could light?”

Trelawny snatched another candle from a wicker basket hung on the wall and lit its wick from the flame of the first candle. Not seeing a candle-holder, he drew his dagger and cut the bottom of the candle into a wedge which he jammed between two boards of the table-top.

“Our bodies,” came Byron’s voice again, stronger now emanating from the two flames, “those of us who wed those things, are sacramentals of that marriage bond. And Shelley meant his carcass to be lost, or burned. He was half one of them from birth, he said, and had begun to turn to stone like them. If you could bring his poor bones here, and break away what’s human from what’s stone, you might undo this...*overture* of yours.”

“I’m not you,” said Trelawny hoarsely. “I’m not afraid of becoming a god.”

“Did Shelley – in this notebook that you found – *describe* these things that might be summoned back? Do you know what the Muses *look* like now?”

Trelawny didn’t answer right away, for Shelley had in fact drawn a sketch of one of his supernatural mentors, on a page Trelawny hadn’t cut out and taken away; the thing was grotesque, an awkward hunch-backed, bird-beaked monster.

“The physical forms they might take,” Trelawny said finally, “on one occasion or another –”

“You’ve got two children, daughters, haven’t you?” Byron went on. “Still back in England? Shelley didn’t say what sort of... *fond attentions* these things pay to families of humans they adopt? If you and your mad *klepht* call up these things, your daughters won’t survive, rely on it. And then – that little girl, your warlord’s sister? – she’ll be their prey, and change to one of them – supposing that you care about the child. All *human* family is sacrificed –”

Boots were echoingly scuffing up the stone levels toward Trelawny’s house, and he hastily pocketed Byron’s toe and swatted the two candles. Both went out, though the one wedged in the table stayed upright.

Trelawny strode to the flimsy door and pulled it open. The broad silhouette of Odysseus seemed to dwarf the figure of Fenton against the distant daylight as the pair stepped up the last stone rise.

“Come down to the edge,” said Odysseus in Italian; he went on in Greek, “where the guns will go.”

Trelawny followed the two men down the steps to the wide flat area at the front of the cave. Four six-foot sections of the stone wall had been disassembled so that the cannons might be mounted in the gaps, and Trelawny, squinting uncomfortably in the sunlight that slanted into the front of the cave, noted that only the two notches in the center of the

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wall threatened the road that wound its way up the gorge.

“But why aim the other two out at the slopes?” he asked Odysseus. “The Turks are hardly likely to come blundering in among the trees.”

“To everything there is a season,” said Fenton with a smile, “a time to gather stones together, and a time to cast away stones.” His Scottish accent was especially incongruous in this cave sacred to ancient Hellenic gods. It was apparently too great a strain on Odysseus’s frail grasp of English, for he turned to Trelawny and raised his bushy black eyebrows.

Trelawny slowly translated what Fenton had said.

The *klepht* nodded. “When you are consecrated,” he said to Trelawny, “we will sow the same seeds as Deucalion and Pyrrha did.”

“Deucalion and Pyrrha,” said Fenton, rubbing his hands together and bobbing his head as he blinked out at the gorge, “I caught that bit. The giants in the earth.”

Trelawny glanced at Odysseus, but the squinting eyes in the sun-browned face told him nothing.

To Fenton, Trelawny said, carefully, “You seem to know more about our purpose than you told me at first.” He shivered, for the gusts up from the gorge were chilly.

“Ah, well I had to see, didn’t I,” said Fenton, “that you were the lot I’ve been looking for, before I did any *confiding*. But your *klepht* has it right – sow our army from up here.”

Trelawny let himself relax – the man’s caution had been natural enough, and he was clearly an ally – and he tried to imagine thousands of kiln-fired clay pellets spraying out over the Velitza Gorge on some moonlit night, the boom and flare of the guns and then the clouds of pale stones fading as they fell away into the echoing shadows.

And then in the darkness of the forest floor the things would lose their rigidity and begin to move, and burrow through the mulch of

fallen leaves into the soil, like cicadas – to emerge in man-like forms at the next full moon. And Trelawny would be the immortal gate between the two species.

He laughed, and nearly tossed the coward Byron's toe out into the windy abyss; but it might still be useful in establishing the link.

"My army," he whispered.

Fenton might have heard him. "When," he asked, "will you – ?" He stuck a thumb into his own waistcoat below his ribs and twisted it, as if mimicking turning a key.

Odysseus clearly caught his meaning. "*Uno ano*," he said.

Trelawny nodded. One year from now, he thought, at Midsummer's Eve. But even now the sun seemed to burn his skin if he was exposed to it for more than a minute or so. During the long trek from Missolonghi he had worn his turban tucked around his face during the day – and even then he had been half-blinded by the sun-glare much of the time – but he wasn't wearing his turban now.

"We can talk later," he said, "around the fires."

The other two nodded, perhaps sympathetically, and Trelawny turned away and hurried back up the stone steps into the shadows of the cave's depths.

Back in his room with the door closed, he pulled back the baggy sleeve of his white shirt and stared at the cut in his forearm. As Odysseus had predicted, it hadn't stopped bleeding. According to Odysseus it wouldn't heal until next year's midsummer, when a more substantial cut would be made in his flesh, and a transcendent healing would follow. The bigger incision would have to be made with a new, virgin knife, but apparently Mount Parnassus had several veins of the light-weight gray metal.

Trelawny leaped when something twitched in his pocket – he was

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used to lice, and even took a certain anti-civilization pride in finding them in his hair, but he didn't want mice or beetles in his clothing – but then the wick of the tilted candle on the table sprang into flame again, and he realized that the agitated thing in his pocket was Byron's toe.

“Deucalion and Pyrrha,” came Byron's faint whisper from the flame. “Consecrated.”

Trelawny sat down on his narrow bed, then sagged backward across the straw-filled mattress and stared at the low ceiling beams. “Why do you care,” he said. “You're dead.”

“I hoped to see you,” said the flame, “back in Missolonghi – before I died. I don't have many friends that I relied on, but you're one of them.”

“You liked me the way you'd like a dog,” said Trelawny, still blinking at the ceiling. The candle-smoke smelled of Macassar oil and cigars. “You always said I was a liar.”

“I never flattered friends – not trusted friends. I never let dissimulations stand unchallenged, when I wanted honesty.” The frail flame shook with what might have been a wry laugh. “I only wanted it from very few.”

“I never gave you honesty,” said Trelawny belligerently, and a moment later he was startled at his own admission – but, he thought, it's only a dead man I'm talking to. “My mentor, the privateer captain de Ruyters – my Arab wife, Zela – none of it was true.”

“I always knew, old friend. ‘Deucalion and Pyrrha,’ though – and ‘consecration.’ What ordeal is it they're planning for you, here?”

“Old friend.” Trelawny closed his eyes, frowning. “Odysseus has a surgeon – he's going to put a tiny statue into my abdomen, below my ribs. A statue of a woman, in fired clay.”

“He took one of his ribs, and closed the flesh where it had been.’ And you want to reverse what Yahweh did, and put the woman back.” Byron's tone was light, but his faint voice wobbled.

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Trelawny laughed softly. “It frightens you even *now*? Reversing history, yes. When clay is fired in a kiln, the vivifying element is removed from the air – wood can’t burn, it turns into charcoal instead – and this is how all the air was, back in the days when the Nephelimi flourished. For the right man, the clay can still...wake up.”

Byron’s voice was definitely quivering now. “The Carbonari, charcoal-burners, try to dominate their trade, because of this. They work to keep it out of hands like...yours.”

“The Carbonari,” said Trelawny scornfully, “the Popes, the Archbishops of Canterbury! And you too – all of you afraid of a power that might diminish your – your dim, brief flames!”

Byron’s ghost had begun to say something more, but Trelawny interrupted, harshly, “And *your* flame, ‘old friend,’ is out.”

And with that he leaped off of the bed and smacked his palm onto the candle, and the room was dark again.

For a moment he thought of Byron’s question – *Shelley didn’t say what sort of...fond attentions these things pay to families of humans they adopt?* – but then he thought, *My army*, and stepped to the door to join the others, regardless of the sunlight.

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