Chapter Eighteen

Far away in an Athens hospital, a secretary was receiving orders concerning the reservation of a bed in the pathology wing. He passed them on to the proper administrator in the hospital. The bed was for an elderly monk from Aegina.

Nektarios was brought into the hospital at noon with the assistance of a forty year old man and two nuns. The man could hardly contain his worry and tears from the moment they entered. The proper papers necessary for admission were filled out, and then one of the two nuns left.

Nektarios was placed in a room with four beds, only two of which were occupied. The one patient, who was in the next bed, was paralyzed from the waist down from an accident. He was a family man from one of the nearby villages, and had fallen from a cliff while on his animal. He was taken from there to the hospital on stretchers. The other patient was an old retired schoolteacher who also had a urological disease.

"What do you think, venerable Euphemia?" the man asked as he dried his tears. He sighed and then asked more specifically, "Do you think that he will have the operation, and if he does, will he survive the knife?"

Sister Euphemia was in deep thought.

The man continued, "What will become of us without his blessed direction? How will we survive without his prayers?"

The nun finally replied, albeit quite disturbed. "I hope, Mr. Sakkopoulos, that the good Lord will feel sorry for the sisters, and that he will not allow our twenty-eight souls to be spiritual orphans."

"Oh," Costas Sakkopoulos sighed, "you don't know how much I owe to him. I owe absolutely everything, especially the treasure of my soul. He lead me to the wide and tall beauty of the Lord. I was young when I lost my mother, and I survived it. Then, two years ago I lost my father, a man full of self denial and proper values, and I swallowed that. However, if the holy elder, our spiritual father and leader, our intercessor to the Lord, deserts us, I don't think that I will be able to survive it. I will become destitute, like a tree in a desert."

The nun looked at him with compassion and shook her head.

Two months passed and Nektarios never had the chance to have an operation. In the meantime, Athens was excited by many events, the electoral defeat of Venizelos, changes in government and the return of the

exiled King Constantine. Ecclesiastical circles were busy talking about the fall of Metropolitan Meletios and the re-thronement of Theokletos. Amidst all this excitement, the humble, pale, old bishop monk from Aegina saw the heavens open in front of him with hosts of angels greeting him. Nektarios stood in awe at this spectacle and listened intently before giving up his soul. He heard a sweet familiar voice call him from a strange land.

"Enter child, enter into the happiness of your Lord. You are being awaited by a crown of glory."

"Are you talking to me, Lord?" Nektarios' lips managed to make out words for the last time. As he took his last breath he sensed that he was being transcended and he finally gave up his holy and patient soul to his beloved Lord, the Supreme Ruler of all the heavens, and whom he glorified for all his seventy four years.

The pious sister Euphemia was there at the time and was terribly shaken. "Your Eminence, Your Eminence," she called to him desperately. Then realizing that her fears were now a reality, she cried out for Costas Sakkopoulos. "Mr. Sakkopoulos, where is Mr. Sakkopoulos? Give me the telephone someone please, the telephone . . ."

A nurse who wraps the dead for the hospital went to her. The nun tried to say something to her, but could not because of the shock of a strange occurence. A sweet fragrance was coming from the dead body.

Immediately after, the nun and the nurse set about to change his clothing in order to bring him back to Aegina. They took off his old woolen undershirt and hastily threw it on the next bed which was occupied by the man who was paralyzed for many years. Before they could finish with the shrouds, the man instantly stood himself up from the bed, and although he was a little unsteady, he was nevertheless moving his previously paralyzed legs. The man did the sign of the cross and shouted, "I am standing. I can walk . . . Glory to God, I am actually healed. What miraculous power did that undershirt have?"

No one could understand it. The nurse and the nun stood with open mouths. A paralytic was miraculously healed and Nektarios' dead body smelled sweet. In a daze the nun took the undershirt and placed it in a bundle she was gathering. Her hands were shaking.