

Henriette Lazaridis Power
from *Evanthia's Legs*

The cadence of the priest's prayer accelerated a bit and Evanthia knew that he would soon stop and they would all walk home through scrubby ash and oak and upright cypresses. They would emerge from the trees and follow the path across the bottom of a rocky slope where thyme and rosemary grew in low clusters. She would be coming back into town a widow—more certainly and inexorably a widow than she had been even that morning. Now she was connected only to Andromache, a woman of twenty-one who neither needed nor perhaps wanted a mother's care.

She had hardly been alone at all since the doctor had told her Vangelis was dead. Crowds of mourners had filled the house that day, almost before she could grasp her new position. The bells from both churches had tolled loud and slow all afternoon. The mourners' cries had mingled with the din of the bells, creating a mounting wave of grief and lamentation. And it had been like a real wave, washing a surf of flowers and evergreen boughs through the house and piling them up over the mound of Vangelis' body. She tried to stand aside from it all, but the women nuzzled her with sympathy and caressed her. One old woman began to keel in rising peals of sadness, and the rest nodded their approval. They looked for Evanthia to do the same, but she was unable to muster the grief they were hoping for. The men arrived later, silently removing their hats and crossing themselves before kissing her once on each cheek. Some kissed Vangelis' cheeks, some kissed his hands, and some of the men who had worked with him bent over the side of the coffin and spoke to him, asking him again and again why he had died and

Henriette Lazaridis Power

left them alone. She wanted to ask him the same, but knew she could not keep the reproach from her voice.

Evanthia sat with Vangelis' body all through that night, her head bobbing out of guilty sleep and her back aching from the upright chair. Over and over again, she forced herself to wake from dreams of him as a young man smiling at her and laughing. She dreamed she was kissing him, and in her dreams was surprised but happy to have him back from death. All night long, Frosini moaned and sobbed at her side, and Andromache held Vangelis' hand and sniffled quietly until gray light began to seep back into the room. Each time Evanthia started up from sleep, she smelled a growing sweetness in the air, masked slightly by the evergreens and the lingering musk of the priest's incense. Each time, she was startled to see in Vangelis' face the deepening sag of death, the creeping away of who he had been out of time and into memory. By morning, when the sun touched him again, she saw almost with relief that he no longer looked like himself.

Now, standing on the hillside, a smell of rosemary came towards her through the incense—like a sweet thread pulled through the still air. She knew the scent came from the herbs that grew along the path below and pictured the heat rising off the dusty greenery, felt it moving towards her, joining into a thickening thread of fragrance that teased her to take hold of it. Her legs grew cool, as if water swirled around her, and the fragrance grew stronger. A long thread pulled past Evanthia through the air, making her almost rise up on her toes to follow it, wrapping around her until she felt like a top,

Henriette Lazaridis Power

wound tight and dizzy. The priest's voice rose and fell and rose and fell until at last it fell on the final warbled note of his prayer. When she went to move from within her cloud of fragrance, she was surprised to find she could not. Her feet in their good church shoes stood rooted to the hillside as firmly as the plane trees around her.

Almost offended at her body's disobedience, she twisted her torso once again to tug her feet from their spot. But her feet refused to budge. The twist of her body threw her off balance and she began to tip out over the slope of the hillside. For a flash, she saw her body falling like an earthquake-toppled statue and rolling to a dusty stop against the trunk of an oak. She let out a gasp and heard Frosini call out "Catch her!" as she found herself lifting her arms so that the priest and Aristotelis Katsouras could support her. Frosini leaned across her son's grave and asked "It's your legs, isn't it?" Evanthia nodded, wide-eyed. The old woman spoke as if things like this happened every day.

Evanthia sagged back into the men's arms, the seams of her dress pulling and pinching against her armpits. The rest stood frozen, staring at her with a mixture of awe and fear. 'It's not my fault,' she wanted to tell them. 'I had nothing to do with this.' But all she could manage was a sucking in of breath and an almost mumbled announcement: "I've lost the power of my legs."