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Chapter 1

Ugarit: Sardow Discovers Her Heart's Delight

I yearn to go aboard the graceful Minoan ships and sail away, away from the dust, sail away to the moon and the sun, away from everything I know; sail away to where I am close to the water and can enter it at any time and then twist and turn while the water flows around me. The salt taste on my lips at the shore feeds my desire to be on and in the water.

When small, I dreamed of the great green sea before I ever entered it. Instantly I was at home; I welcomed its embrace, turned and twisted joyfully as the salt water surrounded me. I did not yet have the language to tell others of my dreams, so my parents and kin knew not that the sea was home to me. The smell of the rich salt air, the wheeling and cries of the shore birds, the mysterious, beckoning green water, was already familiar. Others splashed and choked and gradually learned to be at home in the salty water, but for me, I knew how to make my way in it almost before I could walk. My mother, Arina, saw my comfort and, after signaling the others to keep an eye on me, did not try to prevent me from cavorting in the water. Some days, the large smiling sea creatures came close into shore, and as I swam with them, it seemed to me that they were relatives. I did not fear them, although the others did.

When first I saw them as a small child, the trading vessels from Minos entranced me, the prow and the stern lifting proudly to the air and wind, the sail to be used when the wind was with them, all the oars ready for when the wind was not with them. The men who sailed in them were brown and lithe, walking with the exquisite balance that survival

on those ships demanded. When first I saw the pottery that came from those ships, I had to have it, needed it for my own work, craved it with a passion that did not diminish. Petros, my eldest brother and protector, found a way for me to possess some of it, how I do not know. The images entered my dreams; the ships and the men that sailed them kept me company in the night. I had to have that beauty before me as I worked with the clay to make my own kind of beauty.

“Petros, does anyone on the ships know who made these?”

“Not that I have been able to find, little sister, and I have tried. But if I show too much interest, it may be dangerous for all of us, so I have to be careful.”

“Why dangerous?”

“I just know and can’t tell you why. The men of the sea are different from those of us of the land. That I do know. We never let them know where we live and work.”

Instead of being frightened, I was the more intrigued. Could the men who transported such beauty be dangerous? Of course they could -all the history of my people shows that the makers of beauty or the purchasers of beauty could and would be dangerous. I could not deny Petros’s instincts, just as I would not go to the port unprotected.

I grew, and my earlier fascination with the ships and those who sailed them did not vanish but, as though a strong and vibrant root, spread throughout myself me, invading my waking moments as well as my dreams, which became ever more vivid. I collected works from Minos, studied them, and became more and more curious about the land that permitted them to be made. Yet I knew from my family’s stories of my grandfather, Thutmose, the Egyptian artist of the reign of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaton,

and his troubles that talent alone and beauty alone would never protect an artist. I knew that Hoval, Thutmose's gifted son, remained mysterious to those who coveted the jewelry he made, and in that was as much safety as could be obtained in an uncertain world.

The Minoan ships are long and narrow, with a sail and many oars for when they are becalmed. I see them as they set out from the land, skimming the water, the man at the helm keeping it steady. I have seen some of them returning bedraggled after being caught in a storm, some of those who would be at the oars missing, so I know that there are dangers. I yearn.

We are at the harbor; Petros is off to get us some food. I know he can see me from where he is. Someone is always here to guard me, especially since I grew into my womanly self. I often think about my grandmother and how she survived after her grandfather died. All those years, and then she had Hoval, my father, but was still alone until at the last Thutmose came back to her. I would like to be alone, if only for a short time. I am rarely alone, except when I am making my pieces, but even then I am alone only in my mind, for always there are other people about. Perhaps my family doesn't think I could survive, as she did. They always seem to be guarding me from a danger that I do not perceive.

A foreign voice speaks to me. "Do you find our ships comely?" black eyes stare into mine. It is the ships' master. Even when he was a boy, I noticed him. He noticed me.

"I find your ships as thrilling as birds in flight."

He draws in his breath, as if surprised. "They are dangerous if you don't know what you are doing," He warns me. "Dangerous even if you do."

“I have seen ships come in after a storm, so I know. Beauty can be dangerous and can never be controlled.”

“The men who sail are also dangerous for they are always thinking about being at sea. Their minds are never on shore, only their bodies and only for the feeding of those bodies.”

“For some who make beauty, it is the same.”

As if aware that our time is short and much must be said in a few words, he says, “The man who is usually with you?”

“My brother. He is getting food for us.”

“I have noted that you are well guarded, but not at this moment. I could carry you off.” His steady eyes measure me: he sees that I am not afraid.

“But you will not.”

“No, I will not, but I might want to.” His eyes roam over me as they might a robust meal of bread and ale.

I study him, memorize his features, his smell, the way he moves his body. He is already halfway into my dreams. I notice his hands, scarred in the way my father’s hands are scarred, from working with them.

He continues, “Your brother and others of your kin collect pottery from my people. I know you are artisans, and I hear that one of yours is a great maker in this art. I have seen some of it. A vase with a sinuous octopus curling, another with one of our trading ships, and others I have heard of but not seen. I have grown curious, for it seems an odd thing. Until recently your people were known only for jewelry.”

Feeling shy and exposed, for few know of my working with pottery, I wonder if I

can trust this man and let him know that it is I who need the works from his island home.

“The pottery from your land is beautiful. It will last forever, or the memory will,”
I say.

He glances at my hands, then looks at me with sharp surmise – my hands have betrayed me for they are shaping clay, patting clay, shaping the lid with clever fingers as I talk. He sees. He knows. I stand quietly. Few believe that a mere woman could know this art. Or any art.

“You.” He almost reaches out to touch me. “You are the one who makes.” Delight shows on his face, swamping out curiosity and perhaps lust. He moves closer, the heat of his body now evident. His smell is familiar to me, though I have never been this close to him before; partly the sun, partly the salt, but mostly his essence. He would like to put his arms around me. Part of me would like that. Part of me hesitates. Should I be afraid? Instinct says no, but inexperience should never be a guide.

“Sardow.” I turn to Petros who has returned with some bread and cheese and ale. His shoulder touching mine, he looks at the man from the ship ready to protect me.

“This is my brother, Petros. I don’t know what you are called.”

“I am called many names, but the name I use here is Lukenow.”

Petros quietly asks, “Have you the need for many names?” He is filled with suspicion, though unless you know him you would miss it.

“Sometimes people find my birth names hard to get around their tongues, so I use this name while here in Ugarit.”

“Where are you from?”

“Minos, the land of the ships.”

“You are a person of the sea then.”

“Yes, but not one of the ‘sea peoples.’ I do not come to do harm, only to trade.”

“Petros, he knows that I am the pottery maker.”

“We must be getting back, Sardow.” Petros knows more than I do about those seeking to take me and use my gifts for their own ends. He gives me the food to carry and taps my elbow, our old signal. I turn and go with him, never looking back. My grandmother, Hasna, would be proud of me. I can almost feel Lukenow’s eyes on me, studying. He will not be able to follow us home to find out where we live. Petros is skilled in the arts of deception and concealment.

“That man is dangerous to you.” Petros comments quietly.

“Why do you say that?”

“He wants you.” He keeps his eyes off of me, scanning for danger that might come upon us unaware.

“Many want me.” I have heard this from Yunai and many of the others.

“He wants you in the way of a man and woman. He is used to getting what he wants. He is the master of the ship, and perhaps master of many ships.”

“He told me he is of the sea and will always be. That he is not of the land.”

“He still wants you. Beware of him, Sardow. I know that look in a man’s eye.” Petros sounds worried, but as usual nothing shows on his warrior face.

“I will be careful.” I must be careful. This is the man I want.

