

Shadow of Colossus

Chapter 1

Rhodes, 227 BC

Seven Days Before the Great Quake

In the deceitful calm of the days preceding disaster, while Rhodes still glittered like a white jewel in the Aegean, Tessa of Delos planned to open her wrists.

The death of her body was long overdue; her soul died ten years ago.

Ten years this day, she thought.

Tessa dragged in a breath of salty air and shivered. From her lofty position outside Glaucus's hillside home, she watched the dusk-held city's torches flicker to life. Across the capital, the day's tumult at the docks slowed. The massive statue of Helios at the harbor's frothy mouth caught the sun's last rays as it slipped into a cobalt sea. The torch he thrust skyward seem to burst aflame, as though lit by the sun god himself.

He had been her only constant these ten years, this giant in the likeness of Helios. An indestructible presence standing sentry even as life ripped from her freedom and hope. Painful as it was, tonight she wanted only to remember. To be alone, to remember, to mourn.

"Tessa!" a wine-sodden voice erupted from the open door behind her.

The symposium began only minutes ago, but Glaucus was already deep into his cups. Bad form in any company, but he rarely cared. Tessa inhaled the tang of sea air again and placed a steadying hand against the smooth alabaster column supporting the roof. She did not answer, nor turn, when she heard her fat master shuffle onto the portico.

"Get yourself back into the house!"

Glaucus punctuated his command with a substantial belch.

"Soon," she said. "I want to watch the sun god take his leave."

A household servant crept out and set two torches blazing. An oily smell surged, then dissipated. From the house there floated harsh laughter, mixed with the tinny sound of a flute.

Glaucus pushed his belly against her back and grabbed her arm. The linen *chiton* she'd taken care to arrange perfectly fell away, exposing her shoulder. She reached to replace it, but Glaucus caught her hand. He brought his mouth close to her ear, and she could smell his breath, foul as days-old fish.

"The others are asking for you." He raised his voice to a sing-song pitch. "*Where is your hetaera, Glaucus?*" they say. *'The one with more opinions than Carthage has ships.'*"

Tessa closed her eyes. She had long entertained Glaucus's political friends with her outspoken thoughts on government and power. While his wife remained hidden away in the women's quarters, Glaucus's *hetaera* was displayed like an expensive pet with sharp teeth. She had once believed she led an enviable life. But the years had stripped her of her illusions.

She stroked the polished filigree of the gold necklace encircling her throat and remembered when Glaucus fastened it there, a gilding for his personal figure of bronze.

"Now, Tessa." Glaucus pulled her toward the door.

Her heart reached for the great statue, clinging to her first memory of it, when Delos had been home and innocence had still been hers.

When I open my wrists, I will do it there.



The *andron*, central room of the men's quarters, smelled of roasted meat and burning olive oil. Glaucus paused in the doorway, awaiting the attention of those

who had curried enough of his favor to be invited tonight. When the small crowd lounging on low couches at the room's perimeter turned his way, he pushed her into the lamp-lit center. "Tessa, everyone," he shouted, "making her grand entrance!"

The room laughed and clapped, then returned their attention to the food and wine. In the corner, a young girl dressed in gauzy fabric blew thin streams of air into a small flute. Tessa's eyes locked onto the girl's for a moment. A private understanding that they were both objects of entertainment passed between them, and the girl looked away, as though ashamed to be seen so clearly. A fervent desire to protect the girl surfaced in Tessa, a maternal feeling that of late seemed only a breath away.

Glaucus pulled her to a couch and forced her down onto the gold-trimmed red cushions. He lowered himself at her right and leaned against her possessively. A black pottery bowl with gold designs waited in the center of their table, and Glaucus ladled wine into a goblet for her. To the room he said, "To Tessa – always the center of attention!" He raised his own cup, as did the fifteen or twenty others.

Tessa's gaze swept the andron, taking in the majority of men and the few women reclining against them, and the moment was suspended – cups raised toward her, drunken and insincere smiles affixed to faces, lamplight flickering across small tables piled with grapes and almonds and figs, and the flute's lament behind it all.

Will I remember this night, even in the afterlife?

"To Tessa!" Shouts went round the room, cups were drained and thumped back to tables, and the party quickened around her. Glaucus reached for her, but she pushed him away.

He laughed. "It would appear my Tessa is a bit high-spirited tonight," he said to the others. "And what shall be done with a mischievous hetaera?" His thick-lipped smile and raised eyebrow took in the room and elicited another

round of laughter. He nodded, then turned his attention to the man on his right, resuming a conversation whose beginning she must have missed.

“Your objections earlier to the naturalization of the Jews are noted, Spiro. But to extend citizenship to the foreigners among us can often be expedient.”

Tessa could not see Spiro, his frame completely blocked by the bulk of Glaucus beside her. But his voice poured like warm oil, with an air of confidence and a hint of superiority. “Like-minded foreigners, perhaps,” Spiro said. “But the Jews make it no secret that they despise Greek ways. They disdain even our proudest achievement as Rhodians – our Helios of the harbor. They must be expunged, not embraced!”

Glaucus raised a pudgy hand. “You presume an authority not given to you –”

“Only a matter of time, Glaucus.”

Glaucus snorted. “Again you presume. The people of this island are too clever to prefer seductive charm over solid leadership.”

Spiro laughed quietly. “Why, Glaucus, seductive charm? I didn’t realize you had noticed.”

Glaucus shook his head. “Perhaps the women are affected, but it is the *men* who vote.”

Tessa sensed Spiro lean forward, his eyes on her. “And we both know where men’s decisions come from.”

Glaucus snorted again and swung his legs to the floor. It took several tries to raise his ponderous body from the cushions. “Get drunk, Spiro. Enjoy your delusions for one more night. But next week I sail to Crete, and I expect them to fully support my efforts.” He nudged Tessa with a sandaled toe. “Don’t go anywhere. I will be back.”

Tessa watched him leave the room, relief at his temporary absence flooding her. She was to travel to Crete with him next week. She had no intention of ever stepping onto the ship.

The previously unseen Spiro slid to her couch now, an elbow on the red cushion Glaucus had just vacated. He was older than she, perhaps thirty, clean-shaven like most of the others but wore his jet-black hair longer, braided away from his face, and falling just above his shoulders. His eyes, deep-set and darker than the night sea, studied hers. A smile played at his lips. "What are you still doing with that bore, Tessa? You could do better."

"One slave master is as another. To have something better is only to be free." She was not truly Glaucus's slave in the usual sense, and Spiro knew it, but it made little difference.

Spiro smiled fully now, and his gaze traveled from her eyes, slowly down to her waist. He took liberties, but Tessa had long ago become heedless of offense. "That is what I like about you, Tessa. One never meets a hetaera who speaks of freedom; they are resolved to their place. But you are a hetaera like no other in Rhodes."

"Why should I not be free?"

Spiro chuckled softly and inched closer. "Why, indeed? Ask the gods, who make some women wives and give others as slaves." Spiro's hand skimmed the cushions and came to rest on her thigh. "If you were mine, Tessa, I would treat you as the equal you deserve to be. Glaucus acts as though he owns you, but we all know he pays dearly for your favors. Perhaps it is *you* who owns *him*." Spiro's fingers dug into her leg, and his eyes roamed her face and body again. Tessa felt neither pleasure nor disgust, a reminder that her heart had been cast from bronze.

A shadow loomed above them, and Spiro's hand snaked away from her leg, but not before Glaucus saw it. Tessa expected wrath, but Glaucus laughed.

"First you to think to rule the island, Spiro, and now you think to steal Tessa from me, as though she has the free will to choose whom she wants?" Spiro shifted to the next couch, and Glaucus plopped down between them again. "She will never be yours, Spiro. Even when I am dead, her owner will only hand

her to the next in line to have paid for her." He waggled an eyebrow at Tessa. "She is worth waiting for, though, I can tell you." Another coarse laugh.

Something broke loose in Tessa then. Caused, perhaps, by the vow taken while drinking in the memories of the harbor's bronze statue and the assurance that soon nothing she did would have consequence. Or perhaps it was ten years of a life in ruins, commemorated this night with nothing more than continued abuse. Whatever the reason, she rose to her feet. The room silenced, as though a goddess had ascended a pedestal. She lifted her voice.

"May the gods deal with you as you have mistreated me, Glaucus of Rhodes. I will have no part of you."

Glaucus grabbed her arm. "Your heart is not in the festivities tonight, my dear. I understand. I will meet you in the inner courtyard later."

He did this to save face, they both knew. Tessa wrenched her arm free of his clutching fingers, glanced at Spiro, and felt a chill at the look in his eyes. She raised her chin and glided from the andron.

In the hall outside the room, she looked both directions. She had no desire to stay, yet the world outside the house was no more pleasant or safe for her. She turned from the front door and moved deeper into the house.

The hallway opened to a courtyard, with rooms branching in many directions. Along the back wall a colonnaded walkway, its roof covered with terra cotta tiles, stretched the length of the courtyard. A large cistern gaped in the center. Beside it stood a large birdcage, its lone inhabitant, a black mynah with an orange beak, chirping a greeting.

Glaucus had said he would meet her here later, but from the sounds of the laughter behind her, she should be safe for a few minutes at least. She crossed to the mynah she had adopted as her own. The bird had been simply named Mynah. Tessa put a finger through the iron bars and let Mynah peck her hello.

Her head throbbed, as it always did when she wore her hair pulled back. She reached above her, found the pin that cinched her dark ringlets together, and

yanked it. Hair loosed and fell around her, and she ran her fingers through it in relief.

A sharp intake of breath from across the room jarred her. She whirled at the sound. "Who's there?"

A soft voice in the darkness said, "I am sorry, mistress. I did not mean to startle you."

Tessa's heart grasped at the kindness and respect in his voice, the first she'd encountered this evening. She put a hand to her unfastened hair. Somehow she still found it within herself to be embarrassed by the impropriety he had discovered.

The man took hesitant steps toward her. "Are you ill, mistress? Can I help you in some way?" He was clean-shaven and quite tall, with a lanky build and craggy face. It was Glaucus's Jewish head servant, Simeon.

"No, Simeon. No, I am not ill. Thank you." She sank to a bench. The older man dipped his head and backed away.

Tessa reached out a hand. "Perhaps – perhaps some water?"

He smiled. "I shall only be a moment."

She had disgraced Glaucus tonight, despite his effort to laugh off her comments. How would he repay the damage she had done him? His position as a strategos of the polis of Rhodes outranked all other concerns in his life, and he would consider her disrespect in front of other city leaders as treasonous.

In the three years since Glaucus had paid her owner the *hetaera* price and she had become his full-time companion, they had developed an unusual relationship. While he would not allow her to forget that she was not free, he had also discovered her aptitude for grasping the intricacies of politics, the maneuvering necessary to keep Rhodes the strong trading nation that it was, and to keep Glaucus in leadership within this democratic society. Power was a game played shrewdly in Rhodes, as in all the Greek world, and Glaucus had gained a competitive edge when he gained Tessa.

Rhodian society had declared her to be a rarity: beautiful, brilliant, and enslaved. But the extent to which the decisions of the city-state passed through her slave-bound fingers was unknown to most. And in this, she held power over Glaucus. She recalled Spiro's unknowing, yet astute, comment earlier... "Perhaps it is *you* who owns *him*."

Simeon returned, a stone mug in his hands. He held it out to her, and covered her fingers with his own gnarled hand when she reached for it.

His eyes returned to her hair. "I - I have never seen you with your hair down," Simeon said. He lowered his gray head again, but did not back away, and his voice was soft. "It is beautiful."

Tessa tried to smile, but her heart retreated from the small kindness. "Thank you."

He didn't look up. "If you are not ill, Tessa, perhaps you should return to the symposium. I should not like to see Glaucus angry with you."

Tessa exhaled. "Glaucus can wait."

Another noise at the courtyard's edge. They both turned at the rustle of fabric. A girl glided into the room, dressed in an elegant yellow chitôn, her dark hair flowing around her shoulders. She stopped suddenly when she saw them.

"Simeon? Tessa?" What are you doing here?"

The man beside her bent at the waist, his eyes on the floor. "The lady was feeling ill. She requested water." His eyes flicked up at Tessa, the expression unreadable, and then he left the room.

Tessa turned her attention to the girl, inhaling the resolve to survive this next encounter. At fourteen, Persephone hovered on the delicate balance between girl and woman. Glowing pale skin framed by dark hair gave her the look of an ivory doll. In recent months, as she had gained understanding of Tessa's position in her father's life, she had grown more hostile.

She raised her chin and studied Tessa. "Does my father know you're out here?" Her tone contradicted the delicacy of her features.

Tessa nodded.

“So he let his plaything out of her cage?”

Tessa’s eyes closed in pity for the girl, whose mother had abandoned her for the comfort of madness.

The girl flitted to where Mynah cheeped inside her bars, picked a leaf from a potted tree, and held it to the bird. “But who am I to speak of cages?” she said. She raised her eyes to Tessa. “We are all trapped here in some way. You. Me. My mother.”

“Cages can be escaped,” Tessa said. The words came from a deep place within her. The place that never wanted to be controlled again, that wished to be in control.

The girl turned toward her, studied her. “When you find the key, let me know.”

“Tessa!” The voice was thick with wine and demanding. Tessa turned toward the doorway. The girl beside her took a step backward. “There you are,” Glaucus said. “I’ve sent them all away.” He waddled toward them. “I am sick of their company, also.” He seemed to notice the girl for the first time. “Persephone! Why are you not in bed? Get yourself to the women’s quarters.”

Tessa could feel the hate course through the girl beside her as if it were her own body. “I am not tired. I wished to see the stars.” She pointed upward.

Glaucus stood before them now, and he sneered at Persephone. “Well, the stars have no wish to see *you*. Remove yourself.”

“And will you say goodnight to Mother?” Persephone asked. The words were spoken with sarcasm, tossed to Glaucus like raw bait. Tessa silently cheered the girl’s audacity.

Glaucus was not so kind. “Get out!”

“And leave you to your harlot?” Persephone said.

In a quick motion belying his obesity, Glaucus raised the back of his hand to the girl and struck her against the face. She reeled backward a step or two, her hand against her cheek.

Tessa moved between them. "Leave her alone!"

Glaucus turned on Tessa and laughed. "And when did you two become friends?" he said.

Persephone glared into her father's corpulent face. "I despise you both," she said.

Glaucus raised his arm again, his hand a fist this time, but Tessa was faster. She caught the lowering arm by the wrist and pushed it backward. Glaucus rocked back on his heels and turned the hatred on her.

Tessa kept her eyes trained on Glaucus, but spoke to the girl, her voice low and commanding. "Go to bed, Persephone. I will deal with your father." She sensed the girl back away, heard her stomp from the room.

The anger on Glaucus' face melted into something else. A chuckle, sickening in its condescension, rumbled from him.

"High-spirited is one thing, Tessa. But be careful you do not go too far. Remember who keeps you in those fine clothes and wraps your ankles and wrists in jewels. You are not your own."

But I soon will be.

Glaucus reached for her, and she used her forearm to swat him away like a noisome insect. "Don't touch me. Don't touch her. Take your fat, drunken self out of here."

The amusement on Glaucus' face played itself out. The anger returned. Tessa was ready.

Glaucus' words hissed between clenched teeth. "I don't know what has come over you tonight, Tessa, but I will teach you your place. You belong to me, body and spirit, and I will have you!" His heavy hands clutched her shoulders,

his alcohol-soaked breath blew hot in her face. Every part of Tessa's inner being rose up to defend herself. Ten years would end tonight.