

Chapter 1

Family and Homeland

Harry Metaxas stood alone, but in deep thought, in the back room of his restaurant in Fort Bragg. With a determined stride he walked to the window overlooking the storage building and alley behind his place of business. Claspng his hands behind his back, he gazed out of the window, but neither the sight of the storage building nor the narrow alley occupied his mind's eye at the moment. Instead he seemed to visualize an area of land in southeastern Europe stretching out into the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea with many, many islands clustering around it - like a family of happy ducklings feeling assured of their mother's watch care. This was Greece, Harry's homeland. Though small in comparison to the surrounding territories, it nevertheless played a great role in the development of world affairs in ancient times.

Pride welled up within Harry's breast as he recalled his countrymen's oft-repeated statement, "All European civilization was born in Greece!" A smile spread over his thoughtful countenance. "Here, too, is where Harry Aristo Metaxas was born in the year of 1893," he said aloud.

Startled by the sound of his own voice in an otherwise unoccupied room, he turned quickly from the window and hastened to the front of the restaurant mumbling to himself, "Time to open up for the morning's business."

Throughout the morning while he worked, the train of memories of his home island of Kefallinia, with its terraced fig and olive groves and lush grape vineyards, ran through his mind. Against that background he could readily envision the palatial two-story dwelling he had lovingly claimed as home for the first seventeen years of his life. Nor did his memories in any wise fail to include the twenty-one individuals of the Metaxas clan sheltered within its walls. Perhaps the customers' stacks of hotcakes or hashed brown potatoes with lavishly buttered toast received only mechanical attention from Harry's much practiced hand, as waves of nostalgia swept over him in his recollections of that large family group.

In conformity with the common custom of Greece, the three Metaxas brothers with their families were combined into one household. One brother was a building contractor, one a farmer, and

DETERMINED!

the third an operator of a freight company. The earnings from all three sources went into one treasury for the general support of the three families. Being the eldest brother, Harry's father, George Metaxas, acted as head of the household. His word became final in all affairs.

"How did they ever manage such an arrangement?" Harry wondered. "Why, here in America I've often heard it said no house is big enough for two families; then how could it be possible to reconcile three families under one roof?" He shook his head and murmured, "It wasn't easy!"

The voice which broke in on his thoughts at that moment was not his own, but the deep masculine voice of his helper, who had arrived to take up his duties in preparation for the onslaught of the noontime customers. "And what, may I ask, is at the bottom of that good-natured grin you are sporting?"

Instantly Harry broke into a hearty laugh. In his strong Greek accent he explained, "Well, I think I just now came up with the answer to why I am the compulsive talker you fellows are always telling me I am."

"Interesting," his helper remarked. "Out with it." He seated himself on one of the counter stools and waited expectantly.

Harry related the circumstances surrounding his early childhood in a three-family home. "There had to be rules and regulations for adults and children alike, and the rule most strictly enforced was that children were to remain silent." With a chuckle he continued, "Don't you see? All the chattering I do now is the direct result of feeling the need to make up for the time lost as a child."

The helper got off the counter stool and went to get a freshly laundered white apron. "I see your point, Harry, yet I'd like to know, considering your 'compulsive' habit now, what kept you from exploding as a child?"

Harry accepted the jest with good humor and bounced back a ready explanation, "Discipline, my boy, discipline!" He added, "What's more, in my father's endeavors to maintain unity and a peaceful atmosphere, he often asked my mother, sister, and me to make sacrifices. For example, if the women had differences between themselves Father would advise Mother, 'Give in, dear, give in. Anything to keep peace.' By the same token my sister, Evdoxia, and I had to 'give in' time and time again to the whims of our several cousins." Harry paused, then added, "Yet it can be said we were a close-knit family group on the whole. We always felt a deep affection and concern for one another."

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“Harry, what brought you to California, so far from your family and homeland? And why Fort Bragg, of all places?” his helper asked. “There must be a fascinating story behind it.”

“You’re quite right. There is.” Harry nodded. “It’s a long and roundabout story of exciting adventure, hard work, successes, romance, sorrows, with strong yearnings for homeland and loved ones generously spread throughout. But, my friend, surpassing it all are the wonderful discoveries in the things of God that have been opening up before me during the past few weeks, and I am fully determined to return home one of these days with this special message to share with my family.”