

CHAPTER 1 KNOSSOS PALACE

Knossos Palace baked under a hot summer sun as Matthew and Mason and their parents walked among the ruins, along with dozens of other tourists. Matthew, the historian, was contemplating the fact that Knossos, on the Greek island of Crete, had been at its peak thousands of years ago. He tried to picture how the people lived.

He needed somebody to talk with about his thoughts, and Mason was closest. "This was part of the Minoan civilization, just like Santorini."

The boys had just been to the crescent-shaped island of Santorini.

Matthew continued. "Knossos was very advanced. The palace had running water and a good ventilation system to keep the rooms cool in summer."

Mason asked, "Where was the Labyrinth?"

He saw that a few of the rooms had been restored, but there was no sign of the ancient maze.

Matthew had his own ideas about that. "It may have been the whole palace, with its many rooms and corridors. Judging from the floor plan I've seen of Knossos, it must have seemed like a maze, which is what labyrinth means."

"The legend is that the Minotaur, half man and half bull, was kept in the Labyrinth."

"Legends often come from reality. Here, take a look at this fresco."

Matthew pointed to a reproduction of an ancient painting on one of the walls. It showed a man leaping onto the back of a bull that was flanked by two women. The man was painted in red and the women in white.

Mason studied the fresco. "That looks as if it was even more dangerous than running with the bulls in Spain. I think I'll pass."

"Smart boy. We want to stay away from the bull ring, wherever that was, and not get transported back to that time. If we have to be transported someplace, I'd rather it be with someone like Echo."

While on Santorini, they had been transported back to the time of the Greek gods with the beautiful nymph, Echo. Unfortunately, the adventure hadn't ended well for Echo.

The boys walked on the flat stones between stone walls. They looked down at the storerooms below the floor level that still contained some of the large clay vases, called *pithoi*, used to store oil, grains, dried fish, beans, and olives. They wandered over to the edge of the ruins, and found themselves in an area devoid of other people.

Mason spotted a stone stairway leading down. "Let's take these stairs. It's shady at the bottom."

They walked down the steps that went under the stone floor. It felt good to get out of the sun. They were in a tunnel. A few feet from them the tunnel was partially blocked by loose rocks. Mason walked to the rocks. Always the explorer, he started to climb over them to see what was beyond.

"Mason, be careful." Matthew felt responsible for his younger brother.

"It's dark. I won't go any farther."

In spite of his words, Mason climbed higher until his head cleared the pile of rocks. He saw a gleam of light ahead in the tunnel. He shifted his weight forward, craned his neck to see it better, and lost his balance. He tumbled down a few feet and landed on hard-packed earth.

"Owww."

Matthew was sipping on his water bottle when he heard Mason shout. He looked along the corridor but couldn't see his brother. He ran the short distance to the barricade.

“Mason, where are you.”

He was answered by a groan from the other side of the rocks.

“Are you all right?”

After a few anxious seconds, he heard Mason’s voice.

“My knee hurts, but I can stand on it. I’ll try to climb out.”

Mason attempted to get a handhold or foothold on the rocks, but they were too slippery.

“There’s no place to grab onto. You’d better go get Mom and Dad.”

Matthew didn’t want to leave his brother alone in this creepy place. He cautiously inched his way upward until he could see over the top of the rock pile. He saw a movement in the darkness below. Mason. He reached down.

“Try to grab my hand.”

Mason reached up and found Matthew’s hand. “Are you going to pull me up?”

“Yes.”

Matthew was bigger and heavier. He should be able to get Mason out of there. They gripped each other’s wrists and Matthew pulled hard. He was making progress, inch by inch, when his foot slipped. He yelled, “Let go,” but it was too late. Mason’s weight pulled him down. He landed on top of Mason, who screamed again.

Matthew rolled off Mason, who was groaning. He, himself, was shaken up.

Mason slowly got himself into a sitting position, testing his aching body parts. “Now what are we going to do?”

“Are you all right?”

“I guess so, no thanks to you.” Mason repented of that remark. “I know you were trying to help me.”

Matthew tried to climb out, but like what had happened to Mason, the slippery rocks prevented him from doing so. He gave a snort of frustration.

“I’ll boost you up and you can go get help.”

From Mason’s position on the ground, the light he had seen farther along the tunnel looked brighter. “Let’s find out what that light is first. It may be an easy way out.”

They carefully worked their way along the tunnel in the dark, trying not to trip on the loose stones that littered the uneven floor. Matthew had to duck his head at times, as the roof became quite low. He tried not to think of the enclosed space around them. Tight places made him nervous. The lit area grew larger, until they realized it was an entrance to the tunnel. Their spirits brightened.

They reached the opening and peeked out. The scene in front of them was completely different than where they had just been. The ruins were gone. They were in a large stone courtyard, surrounded by stone walls of buildings with colorful columns in front. A number of arched openings in the walls spilled out a steady stream of people who were walking alone or in small groups across the courtyard. Some were carrying loads of produce and other things in woven baskets.

Matthew and Mason stared at the people who were mostly men. Mason spoke first. “They’re wearing some sort of bathing suit.”

“They’re called loincloths. Because of the warm climate, that’s all they need to wear. They have darker skin than we do, and that helps to protect them from the sun.”

Several women entered the courtyard, wearing long, flowing skirts in bright colors. The tops of their garments went under their breasts, leaving them exposed.

This sight brought Matthew out of his daze. They were definitely not in the twenty-first century. “We’ve been transported back in time again. This must be the Minoan civilization.”

“Cool.” Mason enjoyed these adventures.

“Not cool. If they see us, they’ll undoubtedly make us slaves. Or worse. We’ve got to get back in the tunnel.”

Matthew grabbed a reluctant Mason by the arm and turned him around. They had wandered some distance from the entrance to the tunnel. As they were about to head back toward it, several men carrying spears spotted the boys. One of the men shouted a command to the others.

Matthew saw them at the same time. He shouted, “Run!” and pulled Mason toward the tunnel.