

THE
PATMOS
DECEPTION

DAVIS BUNN



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Davis Bunn, *The Patmos Deception*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2014. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2014 by Davis Bunn

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1228-4 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-0-7642-1139-3 (trade paper)

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Kirk DouPonce, DogEared Design
Author photograph by Angel Grey

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Davis Bunn, *The Patmos Deception*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2014. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)



This story is dedicated to
Renée and Allen Johnson.

In countless ways, your love
and generosity enrich our lives.



Davis Bunn, *The Patmos Deception*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2014. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Carey Mathers arrived in Greece in a state of breathless exhaustion. She had passed through five different airports in four different countries—Dallas to Chicago to Toronto to London to Athens. For a girl who had never traveled farther than Austin, Carey thought she had managed pretty well. The reason for her roundabout trip was money. As in, Carey didn't have any and never had. Which was okay. She had never been too worried about what her grandmother called the store-bought life. But this trip was different. Her journey to Greece was all about dreams coming true.

So when the check had come from the prestigious Athens Institute for Antiquities, Carey spent days researching the cheapest possible way to arrive at her new home. The funding was supposed to cover her flight plus a week in a hotel while she found an apartment and settled in. Carey planned for the sum to go a great deal further. Nana Pat always said Carey knew how to make a nickel complain over being pinched too hard and too long.

Carey had never much liked the term *orphan*. Even as a child she had refused to be classed as one. To her ear, the word sounded too much like *alone*. And she was far from that. Soon after her father died from an early heart attack and her mother in the tragic car wreck, Carey's life became filled with grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins, some of whom she had never met before then. An animated discussion started between them at the funeral over who was going to give Carey a home, and continued until she went off to university.

Once again Carey unfolded the letter from Dr. Adriana Stephanopoulos, the Institute's vice director. It was smeared now, but that hardly mattered since Carey had read the invitation to come work in Athens so often that the words felt tattooed on her brain. She had anticipated this moment for so long, her jet lag and her headache were nothing more than a minor nuisance. She stood by the Athens airport terminal windows, mesmerized by the view. Beyond the landing strips and the tower and the main satellite building loomed the Parnitha Mountains. Their upper slopes glistened with an early October snowfall. The famous forests of Greek pines, described by poets for four thousand years, spread like emerald quilts over the lower reaches. Carey took a breath as deep and delicious as a dream come true. She was in *Greece*.

She took the train from the airport to the Athens central station, then rolled her suitcase to the taxi stand. The sky had darkened, and she was slapped by a blustery wind and accompanying rain. And it was *cold*.

Carey decided not to open her case and drag out her coat for fear of getting everything inside wet. She stood in the taxi line arguing with herself. She would have preferred to take a bus. Her thrifty nature disliked the extra expense, but the

Institute's location was just some address on a scrap of paper. She could read a little Greek, yet it was *ancient* Greek, and the spoken language was well beyond her. She would never be able to figure out the bus markings.

The taxi driver looked to be about eighty, with a three-day stubble and clothes that smelled of cigarette smoke. He stood by the taxi's rear and stared mournfully at Carey's suitcase. She got the message and lifted it into the trunk herself. She set her backpack on the rear seat and grimaced at the tobacco stench. The driver accepted her sheet of paper, squinted at the address written in Greek, said something, and shook his head. She pointed to the address and spoke one of her few Greek phrases, "I want to go there."

The driver grunted a response, which launched a coughing fit that lasted through starting the engine and setting off.

As he drove around the square fronting the station, she noticed the beggars. They didn't swarm like the ones she had seen in documentaries about Africa or the Indian subcontinent. These people held to a grim sense of place, sitting or squatting along the curb and the benches and the empty fountain. They lifted up packets of tissue or gum or single cigarettes. They were clumped together by race and culture. Africans formed a colorful mob, dressed in rainbow hues of mismatched jackets and trousers and mittens and scarves and caps. The Greeks were mostly old, with faces so seamed their eyes vanished in the folds. Then came the largest group of all, swarthy and dark-eyed and bleak. The taxi driver scowled through his side window as he waited for the light to change and pretended to spit. "*Gyftos*."

She recognized the word for Gypsy, and at the same moment she noticed the pendant dangling from his rearview mirror. It was stamped with the political symbol for Golden

Dawn, the neofascist organization that had pushed its way into parliament with the last elections. Carey huddled deeper into her seat, stared at the rain-swept world beyond her window, and grimly held on to her dream.

She was so glad to step out from the taxi that she didn't even flinch at the cost. She paid the man, ignored his frown over the lack of a tip, and hauled her case from the trunk.

She recognized the Institute immediately. The stone building matched the image on their website. The taxi had already driven away by the time she noticed the chains wrapped around the gates, locked in place.

The front drive passed through the stone pillars where she stood, swept through a front garden knee-high in weeds, and circled a dry fountain. Two of the Institute's ground-floor windows were broken, revealing internal bars. A trio of papers in transparent folders, lashed to the front gates with plastic ties, flapped in the wind.

Carey stared through the gate at the broken windows and watched her dreams trickle away with the cold, wintry rain.

Carey was shocked from her stunned immobility by a voice demanding, "What are you doing, standing here?"

Carey swung around. "I have a job—"

"Here?" The young woman gestured angrily at the locked gates. "No, no. You *had* a job. Your job is no more."

Carey turned back to the gates. Her mind simply could not take it in. "I don't understand."

"Of course you don't understand. How could you? I am Greek and I have lived here all my life, and I understand nothing." The woman was about Carey's age, small and narrow, yet strong enough to grip Carey's arm and turn her about. She grabbed the suitcase handle and wheeled it behind them. "A

generation from now, I will gather with the other old women, and we will quarrel over how this happened.”

“I can’t . . . There has to be somebody I can talk to.”

“Certainly, yes. There is me. Your name, it is Mathers, yes?”

“Carey Mathers. How did—?”

“You think you are the only person who has been hit by the lightning bolt?” She waited for an opening in the traffic, then pulled Carey across the six-lane road. “Look at the people there. See them in the doorway?”

Four young men huddled before a rusting accordion security door. They shared a cigarette and the shelter of the recessed doorway. The showroom windows to either side were shuttered as well, the steel covered with angry graffiti. “They worked for the Institute?”

“No, no, you are not thinking. The lightning bolt, it did not just strike the Institute. It is *everywhere*. It is *Greece*.”

The young men watched as the woman drew Carey into a *taverna*, the Greek version of a neighborhood restaurant. The men’s dark gazes followed her with weary disinterest.

“Here, this is good.” She steered Carey into a booth by the front window. “You can sit and look at what is no more and decide what to do. You are hungry, yes?”

“I . . . No, thank you.”

“But of course you are hungry. And tea, yes? You sit and wait.” She started away, then turned back and said, “I am Eleni.”

Only as Carey watched her depart did she realize the woman wore an apron over her jeans and sweatshirt. Her thoughts were sluggish with shock and jet lag. She looked out the rain-splattered window at the building across the street, glad that the world wept when she could not.

The woman returned with a steaming glass cup and a towel.

“You need to change into dry clothes. You must open your case here. There is not room inside the lavatory. It is back through those doors there, see?”

Carey decided it was easier to agree. No one inside the crowded taverna seemed to find her opening the large suitcase by her table to be the least bit strange. She pulled out the first top and pants she touched, as well as her down jacket. She shut the case, picked up the towel, and headed toward the doors Eleni had pointed out.

Eleni followed, saying, “Here, take the tea. No, no arguing. You must drink the warmth. Give me your pack. I will watch your things.”

Carey had scarcely locked the door when there was a knock, and Eleni passed her a comb. “You will need this.”

She turned and gazed back at the stranger in the mirror. Carey had often been called a beauty, but not today. She looked like a bedraggled rodent. A tall, sad one. Her hair, normally her best feature, was straggly and limp. The copper coloring had turned a transparent brown. Her green eyes no longer sparkled with the electric hope she had known for the five weeks since receiving the Institute’s contract. Instead, they were red-rimmed and blank. Carey stared down at the comb in one hand and the tea in the other, and swallowed against a rising sob. The strange woman’s kindness threatened to break her heart.

When she emerged, Eleni hurried over. “Better, yes?”

“A little. Maybe.”

“Yes, yes, is a very great shock. You sit. I bring food, take my break. Sit with you.”

She had scarcely settled back into the booth when Eleni brought over a brimming plate, then slipped off her apron and seated herself on the opposite bench. “You must eat. Food, it is good for such times.”

“I’m really not hungry.”

“Take one bite. You’ll see.”

Carey didn’t have the strength to argue. The shallow bowl was filled with a stew of lamb, white beans, and vegetables cooked into submission. The flavor was as startling as an unexpected embrace. Three times she had to swallow around the same sob she refused to release in the bathroom. Eleni watched with satisfaction as Carey ate. “We Greeks, we have come to understand how to cope with the great shocks. We have no choice.”

“How did you know who I was?”

“I was the director’s administrative assistant. I sat in the meeting when they decided to invite you to undertake this research project. I wrote the letter. I processed your check. You cashed it, yes?”

“I did, yes.” Carey looked around the café. “And now you’re working as a waitress. I’m so sorry—”

“What, you think this is bad?” Eleni showed genuine surprise. “Do they not know of our situation over in America?”

“Of course they do.”

“Listen to me, Mathers. For Greeks under the age of thirty, the unemployment rate is *seventy-four* percent. Do you know what they call us? The lost generation.” She flattened her hand on the table between them. “Me, I am the lucky one. Of all my friends, I am the one with a job. But enough of this. What are you to do now?”

“I don’t know.” Carey could barely get the last word out.

“You have a place to stay?”

“I rented a room in a guesthouse for a week.” She fumbled in her backpack for the information.

Eleni took the paper and inspected it. “Good, this is very good. The street, it is safe. I know this family. They are solid

people. Some places are no longer reliable. Thieves, they are terrible now. A scourge. And drugs. But some areas, they hire vigilantes. This is a good neighborhood.” She handed back the paper. “You will tell your family, yes?”

“Oh, no. I can’t.”

“You must. Your parents, they will be expecting a call, yes?”

“My grandparents. But my grandmother, she won’t understand.”

Eleni’s features were made for sunshine and laughter, full of energy and life. The somber look and the weary eyes did not suit her. “You must tell them, Mathers. Without delay, they must know what has happened.”

“My name is Carey.”

“Forgive me. I process your papers as Mathers. The work permit, that was such a difficulty. Bringing in a foreigner when so many Greeks are out of work. But the forensic research you have done, this is very needed. And rare.”

Carey stared out the window at the Institute’s locked gates. “Lot of good it’s done me.”

“That is for later,” Eleni said sternly. “Now you must call your family.”

“I was going to buy a Greek phone. I haven’t . . .” Carey watched the young woman slide her own phone across the table. “This will be awful.”

“Yes, yes, these talks, they are terrible. Better to do it now and be over.”

“You don’t understand. My grandmother—you’ve heard the expression, some people see a glass as half full and others don’t?”

“Of course. This is very Greek.”

“Well, my grandmother is like, the glass is not just half empty. It’s also laced with poison.”

Eleni smiled for the very first time. “She must meet my father. He is *exactly* like this. Which is why it is so very hard for me to live back home again.”

“Nana Pat is convinced I’m going to be kidnapped by white slavers.”

“My father wants to check my arms for needle tracks. Every night.” She shook her head. “And your father?”

“Grandfather,” Carey corrected. “Papa Grady’s favorite expression in all the world is ‘I know just the thing.’”

“He lives to make everything better, yes? Him I am liking very much. And your parents?”

“I was raised by my grandparents,” Carey replied firmly.

“So. Then you must call.” Eleni tapped the phone. “Now, please.”

There was probably an absurdity to the moment, being ordered around by a woman who had rescued her. But just then Carey could think of nothing to do save pick up the phone. “I don’t know what to say.”

“No, no, that is not the problem. You think they will blame you, yes? But this is not happening. They will be disappointed, yes, but what is the problem here? This is your fault? Did you make the Institute go bankrupt? Did you destroy my country’s economy?” She nudged the phone closer. “Call.”

Carey punched in the number with shaky fingers. She felt the tremors course through her body as the phone rang. Then the most welcome voice in the whole world answered, “Is this my baby bird?”

“Hi, Papa Grady.”

“Darling Carey, is everything all right?”

“No. Not exactly.”

“How can I help?”

It was just like him to say that. Not ask about the problem.

Rather, what could he do to help. Carey wanted to tell him how sweet those words sounded. How much it meant to have him there, as he had been since Carey's mother had died, and he promised to make the world better. For all her life.

But just as she was trying to shape the words, the squall passed, and a blade of sunlight fell upon a hill not more than a mile away. And there rose the image that had hung on her bedroom wall for almost ten years, washed clean by the storm, as fresh as a polished gemstone. The Parthenon.

She couldn't hold the sobs down any longer.