

Danger Beyond the Reef

May 4, 1977

8:24 AM

Athens International Airport

Athens, Greece

By the time the big plane had nosed into the gate at the Athens International Airport and the seatbelt sign had gone off, Popi had packed her carry-on items away in her small shoulder duffel then had to wait impatiently while others closer to the exit filed out. Everyone looked as bleary-eyed and exhausted as she felt.

The long, dreary flight and forced solitary time allowed her to come to terms with her relationship with Taso and her decision to quit her job. She quickly got her second wind as she realized that she was nearing her final destination. A feeling of excitement, combined with nervousness, welled up inside her at the thought of meeting her grandmother for the very first time.

Once off the plane, Popi walked quickly through the terminal to her connecting gate for the short flight to Kos, one of twelve major islands in the Dodecanese chain. She didn't have much time to waste, although she would have liked to look around the terminal so she wouldn't forget the moment she set foot on Greek soil.

Lying between the islands of Kos and Leros in the Dodecanese Archipelago along the western coast of Turkey, Kalymnos is the fourth largest of the island group known for its sponge divers (sfougarades) and traditional way of life. The island landscape in large part is made up of barren limestone cliffs, popular with climbers, along with golden beaches and lush, green valleys. Passing the smaller island of Pserimos off the starboard bow, the boat entered Kalimnou Bay, prompting passengers to move forward in preparation to disembark, anxious to meet their families and friends. The homes surrounding Pothia, the island's capital, located on the southeastern side of the 111-square-mile island, had been built in an amphitheater around the port, descending from the rocky hills in a multicolored torrent of dwellings to the shops, small hotels, restaurants, churches, and businesses below.

