

BROTHERS
OF THE ZODIAC

FIRE

~ PROLOGUE ~

MAXWELL THOMAS

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FIRST EDITION

PROLOGUE



TROY
1183 BC

I

AFTER WHAT SEEMED LIKE FOREVER, Gemini and Sagittarius separated from each other while they waited on the banks of the great city of Troy.

“You’re still here,” said Gemini.

“So are you,” noted Sagittarius. “Where did they all go?”

“I don’t know. But we’re here together.”

“Ishtar.” Sagittarius walked over to one of the wine skins and took a deep drink. “Ach.” He shivered. “Lady Ishtar must have chosen to separate us all.”

“What is all this about ‘love in another man’s eyes’ that she said?”

Sagittarius threw the wine skin aside. “Just what it means.”

“I have a wife.”

“And then, when she dies? Who will you love?”

Gemini frowned. “But I have no interest in men.”

Sagittarius sat down at the campfire. “I knew a man like you. A soldier, like you. He loved both women and men. Had a wife, but died loving his lover. Do you love your wife?”

“I haven’t seen her in ten years.”

He shrugged. “You’ll be lucky if she remembers you.”

“What about you?”

“I married a few times. But not for love.” He tilted his head. “Maybe once for love. But it’s a sad thing when the one you love dies and you can’t go with them.”

Gemini sighed. “I suppose it is.”

Sagittarius smiled, reaching down for another wine skin. “If you have no interest in men, then you’ll probably live longer.”

“What do you mean?”

Sagittarius drank from the wine skin.

“You’ll never see love in another man’s eyes.”

2

Men returned from the city with loot and women, slaves and gold. Troy burned in the distance.

Achilles was dead. Agamemnon had claimed a woman named Cassandra as a slave, who spouted prophecies that were too strange to be believed. The Greeks set the slaves to build boats for the long journey back home.

Gemini, a Greek from a different company than Sagittarius, was absorbed into Sagittarius’ unit. The Greeks had lost many men and old companies and units were

changed, added to, or completely decimated. They were two of the few that did not have prizes of war, and were looked upon as odd — possibly thieves.

Gemini seemed to sense this. Although he was of a lower rank than Sagittarius, he approached him one evening.

“We have no spoils of war,” Gemini noted. “Do you want to return to Greece?”

Sagittarius only shrugged. “I have never been East.”

“Neither have I. The Persians may accept us.”

“Or try to kill us. But we can’t die,” he said with a smile.

So, they packed their things, and, in the dead of night, began their trek eastward.

3

The man called Libra found himself in a field of clover and heather. It was night, the moon full and bright above his head. The moon wasn’t full when they attacked Troy. How much time had passed?

He stared around him, inhaling the scents. Salt water was nearby; he knew that scent all too well. But he was no longer on the beach — someplace inland, where the moonlight shined dark green everywhere.

He wasn’t in Troy, he knew that much.

The Goddess who had brought him back to life ... Ishtar? She must have brought him here. But where was *here*?

In Troy, if he headed north, he would eventually reach some semblance of civilization. He assumed that if he headed north, that it could be the same. He took a whiff of the air: a breeze carried the sea scent from the north.

His world was upside down.

Head south? Again, he sniffed the air. He thought he could smell smoke.

That's impossible, he thought. He couldn't see anything, but he walked through the field, heading south. The smell grew stronger.

He crested a hill and saw a village in the distance. He knew from marching in the Army that he wouldn't make it there until sunrise. He continued to walk through the heather, the scent of the night and the flowers seemed to be the only thing that filled his mind. Yet he still thought about Greece. He knew this wasn't Greece: it was too cold. He was heading south, away from the sea, instead of north.

Libra's mother and sisters would wonder where he had gone to. He had survived the war, the sack of the city, and now he was far away from his home. Would they hold a funeral for him? Pay for the mourners to wail and tear their hair? Would they bury an empty box as a symbol of his death?

He had walked for hours, yet he wasn't tired, which was the strangest thing. He walked from when the night was at its darkest, until he could see the morning star heralding the sun, and the sky turn dark blue as Helios' chariot graced the sky.

Libra came out of the field as a cock crowed. People stirred, as he walked down to the middle of the town square. A few men and women came out of some houses,

Brothers of the Zodiac – Fire

staring at him. He held his hands out and open in a universal gesture that he was unarmed.

“Who are you?” one man asked in a language that Libra didn’t know but understood instinctively.

Libra spoke in his native Greek, but the words came out as something else.

“The Judge.”

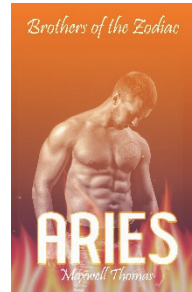
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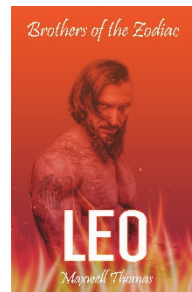


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