

## *SCHERESADE*

by  
Cáit Donnelly

### ONE

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Erika reached out to take the paper cup of soy chai her granddaughter was holding out to her.

"Here you go, Grandma."

As soon as she had it in her grasp, Erika took a shallow, eager sip, and smiled at this child who looked so much like her. "Thank you, Jessie." Not a child, a young woman, Erika thought with pride.

She tipped the barista and picked up her shopping bags. She had no idea where she would ever wear the three pairs of shoes she had bought this morning. They were probably totally unsuitable for a woman nearly seventy, but she couldn't resist them. Her daughter claimed to have been born without the 'shoe gene,' but like Erika's green eyes and dark blonde hair, the love of shoes and shopping had merely skipped a generation. Between them, she and Jessie had accumulated almost more bags that morning than they could manage.

"Are we ready?"

As Erika started back to the door, a man rose from a table at the rear of the Starbuck's. The cup fell from her hand and burst on the floor, splattering scalding tea across her feet and ankles, splashing her pale summer skirt with reddish brown. She barely noticed. The face across the coffee shop exploded into her mind, in its path colliding with her memories of a much younger man. She hadn't seen Kurt Hausmann in more than forty years, but once, she had known every nuance of his expression, every turn of his moods. Or so she'd believed.

Her heart seemed to lurch and her chest tightened. Fractal memories, of love and terror, passion and rage, tumbled about like stones in her grandson's lapidary wheel.

"Grandma? *Oma?*" her granddaughter cried on a rising note. She steered Erika into a chair and began patting her feet and dress with napkins. "Are you all right? Oh, damn, I think that's going to blister."

Carefully Erika took a breath, then another, deeper, slower, forcing herself to regain some degree of control.

"You're white as a ghost. Is it very painful? Stupid question. It has to be. You stay here, and I'll bring the car around."

Erika nodded, still unable to speak. She flicked a frightened glance toward the door, but the man was gone. Had he seen her? Would he recognize her, after all these

years? Why did it matter so much?

The barista, a plump young woman with kind eyes, joined them, patting Erika's skirt with a damp cloth, and strewing paper towels on the spilled tea. She was murmuring something, but Erika couldn't understand what she was saying. Then Jessie was back, almost before Erika realized she had gone, and the two women helped her out into the sunshine and into the waiting car.

"Well," her son said, smiling, "not a bad job of bandaging for a lowly reporter. I think you'll live. Jessie's right, though. You're going to have a blister on the top of your foot. You really should let Jamie look at it. He's the doctor."

Erika touched his face. She hadn't spoken since they came home, and she wanted to answer the anxiety in their voices. She loved them so much, and couldn't stand to know she was the cause of their disquiet. But she was terribly afraid for them. Kurt Hausmann nurtured hatred and seemed to gather it around himself like a poisonous cloud. These precious lives were so fragile, so dear. How to make them understand?

"I know you think I had a stroke or something," she said at last. "But I saw someone today." She looked into a distance they couldn't see.

"That man in Starbuck's?" Jessie asked. "What's his name? He's been on TV a couple of times the last week or so."

"What man?" Scott asked.

"He's trying to get an injunction to stop the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial Grove up by the Greek Theater. He's one of those 'It never happened' crackpots. And he's really rabid on the subject of Franz Boehm."

"Kurt Hausmann." Erika closed her eyes for a long second. "I didn't know he was trying to stop the memorial. I wish I could say I was surprised." She waggled her bandaged foot. "Thank you, Scott, for your expert attention. But I'd like to go upstairs now. I'm very tired."

"You want an arm up, Mom?"

She gave him a tart look.

"With that foot, I mean."

Erika shook her head and rose. She knew they followed her progress up the stairs--she could feel their concern and their love. So much love surrounded her. The family she had always sought had come to her as a gift from God--and from Stanley, of course. She had a bad habit of conflating the two of them in her heart, as well as in her thoughts. She was sure they would both understand.

She closed the door to her room, and took a worn leather journal from the drawer beside the bed. Memories flooded in an overwhelming torrent, and she stood for awhile staring out at the Bay. Finally she sat down on the bed and began to look through the pages. Blocks of script alternated with photographs -- pictures of herself and Kurt, later of Stanley, one or two of Franz Boehm. A photo of herself, her pregnant

belly billowing out of her Master's robe marked with UC Berkeley Blue and Gold. Pictures of the children, a photo of the tiny office where she'd opened her first counseling practice. And her favorite picture of Stanley, grinning into the camera.

"Stanley," she said softly. At times like these she missed him more than ever.

Three years ago he had died suddenly, leaving her bereft and more alone than she would have believed possible. For forty years they had seldom been apart. She could count on her fingers the nights they hadn't spent together: when the babies were born, and twice he'd gone back East to medical conventions when the children were too small to leave even with family. Then three years ago Stanley slipped stepping from the dock onto the deck of their sailboat and broke his leg--a foolish accident. The Emergency Room sent him home with a lot of teasing and an outrageous purple cast. Later that night, a tiny piece of marrow escaped from the injured bone and lodged in his lung, and he died in her arms before the EMT's could arrive.

As the months passed, life began to move again. Paralyzing grief gave way to periods when she felt almost normal. Then the hugeness of her loss would overwhelm her. Sometimes it came as a great, crushing wave, sometimes it crept in like fog, and she hardly noticed the change until it was upon her, blanketing her world in pain. She had helped scores of clients deal with grief and depression, but she couldn't help herself.

Stanley would have drawn her out of it. With humor, logic, mock exasperation, infinite tenderness, he would have brought her back into the light.

But he wasn't there to help, of course. So she began to picture him in her mind, think of him there with her, imagining what he would say.

It was nearly eight months before she began to see that with each cycle, her despair grew fractionally shallower, her time in the world, a little longer.

That realization was the turning point, when she finally knew she could go on without him. When the smiles of her grandchildren and her children's loving concern finally helped her find her way back to them.

Erika sighed and touched the journal again. "What would you say to me now, Stanley?" she asked, forming his image in her mind.

She heard him, serious, concerned, asking the questions she knew he would ask if he were there:

*'Kurt Hausmann has been making himself scarce for nearly forty years. Do you really think it's a coincidence he's back now, just in time for this weekend's celebration? Do you think he's here to contribute to the Holocaust Memorial? Or honor the man who inspired it?'* Stanley had never believed in coincidences, and she had learned long ago to distrust them.

"No," she answered the voice from her memory, "and no."

*'So, what will you do?'*

Erika thought a minute, then she smiled and went back downstairs.

"Scott? I've decided to give you the interview you've been asking for."