

Special Free Preview:

Dark Of Light

Third Edition

A Post-Modern
Historical Romance Novel
Of The Ancient Mysteries

© Stone Riley 2015

"Finally!

A great book about Paganism today..."

-rwm

Links on the web

This document www.stoneriley.com/dolpreview

This book's page www.stoneriley.com/dol

Author's main page ... www.stoneriley.com

My Dear Reader;

Here, hoping to seduce your curiosity, I have carefully selected sixteen pages out of the paperback, hoping after reading this you might exert whatever cost and effort are required, however vast, to get yourself a copy of the whole damn book. And why would you not? This here pastiche, on these pages following, is the brainiest classiest piece of juicy high tone titillation you will see all week. [Your results may vary.]

Best Regards, Stone Riley



2: Episode One: Bus of Fools

Suddenly, even as she spoke, Vicki realized what she was doing: the extremely stupid thing of shouting to be understood by a person of a foreign language. Here in this fellow's foreign country. "We are going to Eleusis! Is this the right bus!" How very rude. But the platform behind her, outside the open door, was certainly quite loud with the countless intermingling voices and automotive noises of a crowded city; that could be a reasonable excuse. At least they had politely waited at the back end of the queue. The map was in her hand and she was showing it to the driver, pointing at their destination; she had folded and creased it flat and tidy with their expected route on the front like Philip always had.

The man squinted hard not down into the map but up into her eyes, his eyes glinting bright beneath the bill of his official Athens transit driver's hat. Then he looked her up and down as she stood there waiting in the narrow entrance of his vehicle, he acting like she was applying at the Pearly Gates for Heaven sakes. And yes; then a consulting glance up to his saints; three figurines of the expensive hand painted sort, bountifully wreathed and heaped about with a cloud of floral decorations on a wide shelf above the windscreen, from there gazing down beneficently on his whole mobile congregation. She half expected him to next demand her passport.

Was he frowning at her boobs? He was. Vicki knew they must seem prominently on display; loose inside the dirty shirt but with the fabric quite pulled tight by the shoulder straps of her heavy pack; and too her whole chest was splashed with the shirt's bright snaky rainbow spiral pattern. And the red sweater must improve on the effect, she suddenly thought, as it was buttoned underneath like one of those bare breasted prehistoric bustiers on those statuettes from Crete; but still, they were not disproportionately large. And her bloke liked them. How could this one here dare stare at them to disapprove? The objectionable sod. If he were secretly Saint Peter, he really seemed to be a nasty incarnation.

But she was filthy. No denying that. Well, damn it, she was a hippie. Officially. She'd claimed the title on a photo postal card to Mum, first thing on arriving in the airport in London back on April first, and since then had grown to really like the newfound membership. Vicki straightened up and looked straight back at him. As she must! She was a goddess! This was her own Summer of Love, a holy honeymoon with life. Fucking underneath the stars. Fucking while the rain came down on their little square of yellow nylon sanctuary. Fucking lying, sitting, standing up, rolling on the grassy dewy ground, drunk or stoned or sober. At least once of each, at any rate. She'd even grown to like that word, speaking it right out loud whenever conversation might permit. Fuck; fuck; fuck; fuck; fuck; fuck; fuck; fuck! What would Mother say? What would Mother's friends say? And anyway, she felt a rather desperate sense that a bit of madness just might save her sanity, so why not nymphomania? As she sometimes said. And she'd left home as a virgin so to speak, officially at any rate. And the good old tower of Big Ben; that had been the photo on the postal card to Mum, looking just exactly thick and tall enough, at least privately to her, to be a suitable representation of the THING her mother, in a very private final chat, had accused her vehemently of going out to find. As though it were some treachery.

The driver frowned silently, looking up above her head at the huge pack that pressed the roof. He might want extra fare for it. She had the yellow tent and half their other stuff as well. Philip had struggled with the weight very manfully for all these weeks, with his poor wounded hip growing worse and worse until his quick lively step had grown quite halting, until she'd made him give it up just yesterday. Goddamn Viet Nam. That's what he'd shouted to the skies when she took it off his back.

She glanced around to see if there was room in here for them and all their mud stained gear. There was. The wide rear seat was empty. She must remember now to look after details like that. Taking on the larger load, she'd seemed to take the lead as well and Philip had seemed to rather sink into a sort of guilty torpor. Goddamn Viet Nam. And goddamn her loneliness too; goddamn the necessary sin that she regretted. But perhaps her man would lead her to a healing.

It seemed a long long time and many miles already since they'd found each other's eyes and flesh in that first night in London. It had been her first cheap hostel dormitory bed, a woman and man from opposite ends of the Earth, she Australian, he American, and certainly the first time that she had found herself settling down quite nude onto a cot quite deliberate of every sound and move, sitting by him, twining her legs among his legs then grasping his private part surprisingly hard while kissing him then nipping at his nose and ears and lips, herself starting in upon the sexual relations with a nude fellow who had been so patient of her reluctance, surrounded by other folks more or less equally engaged on other cots, and all of this in a dark large echoing perfumed chamber lit by a single lamp on a decorated shelf, a chamber also possessed of the great treasure of an open door through which a midnight glow and voices of all the Universe's vagabonds from every time and place seemed to ripple in with flickering shapes of colored energy. Looking back, it seemed to be the shadowed cave at a Gypsy camp in a certain large Spanish painting, a very holy

He realized a piercing stink was in his nostrils, realized that this amazing stink itself was pain. Involuntarily he gripped the edges of the cot and strained so that his head started up with his free eye open wide. It was a vial of smelling salts. A firm strong hand was on his chest urging him to lie back down again.

A black woman's face, quite dark complected, was bending close so that she filled his vision.

"Let's have a peek." she said. The bandage disappeared. The monstrous headache too. She had a gadget in her hand that shined a sharp light in his eyes. "Well this is really good;" she said; "you'll be alright. Nothing went inside. Afraid you're going back to duty though. They stitched you up real nice. When you get back to the world, just let your hair grow out long and the scar won't even show. Hey, sign up with the hippies huh? The dizziness should go away when we quit pumping you with happy juice."

This time was only three weeks in, so suddenly the joy of life awoke in him. He had been hit and yet he would be clean and whole. And neither would this unwanted circumstance rob him of the chance to prove his worth. The heavy awkward helmet that the army made him wear had saved his life. And yet this now began to seem to be the dream. It started out like this each time. Soon, he knew, he'd wish to be absolved by his own death. And beyond that would come even more. Tenderness and murder would become entangled, sex and horrid violence, and yet the joy to be alive awoke again. And with it came serenity flowing abundantly from his heart.

And with it came incredible beauty to the woman's face. Gazing on that still and radiant countenance, it was impossible to speak the wealth of its exotic loveliness. The skin was smooth as milk but dark with mystery, the soft lips amply broad for kissing, textured just like silk must be; the amber eyes were deep. He felt an urge as if impelled by all of Nature and, in this confused state, thought that in this intimate time and place the act would surely be accepted. He found the

"Oh. Alright. Whatever. Yes."

"And first of all you dance."

"Yes. I see."

The captain chuckled. "How do they say in your country? Mmm . . . you ain't seen nothing yet."

Another space of silence.

The pipe was in the captain's hands. He spoke to it again. This time he listened to it too. And then he put the stem to his lips and began to puff. Seven times he puffed, the cloud of smoke from his lips growing more voluminous each time, the herbs finally glowing up so bright they seemed to flame. He held the last puff in.

The captain somehow leaned so close that he could throw an arm round Phillip's shoulders and Phillip felt the magic power of the man pull him closer still till there was nothing in his vision but this wide-eyed face which seemed to be the skull of death and yet the great commanding and demanding force of life.

And in these eyes the vision opened.

It was some other place and he some man whom he had been before. He was in the battle, and a very different combat than he'd known. Soldiers came all rushing round to heave and shove at one another in the tumult of their rage, all in a cloud of blinding boiling dust that swirled around their every motion. The dust was caked upon his sweaty face, his vision narrowed by a missing eye.

Nearby bright metal of the soldiers' weapons flashed amid the countless screams of outraged pain and spouts of blood. A shadow glimmered so he turned his shield so that a glancing blow fell clanking on the golden armor of his leg and so he reached to jab his long and gleaming silver knife precisely through the glory seeker's throat. He was the captain of the captains and a dueling master too.



8: Episode Seven: Priestess

First came the dazzling vision as a tall little girl in which a Shining Lady had emerged and smiled and touched her brow, from the verge of a waving field of golden grain even higher than her head. She was walking through that sunny day to arduous labor braiding straw for rope to bind the sheaves. And the Lady spoke a new name she should take: Victory. She stood and sucked her booboo fingers for a long while.

Then came the creased soft face of their eldest crone, nodding, smiling an open toothless smile that grew and opened out to beam the way a flower can sometimes, who had put aside the evening's spinning at her household fire to listen to the breathless tale. The girl had run the whole way there, excused by her mother from the cleaning of the supper dishes, Mommie's voice crying after through the dark; "Hurry, little 'un!" And there the old Matron of the Hearth had scrubbed her face and hands then led her in a thankful prayer. And so she gained another treasure: a place in that month's village ritual. The wide eyed and astonished child had simply stood beside the altar holding in her calloused hands a bowl of holy water, having been very sternly charged to stand up straight and utter not one sound, and yet to meanwhile look around herself from this new vantage point.

Her mother's death was there. On a narrow bed, the dying woman took her hand and took the husband's hand and

So by the time the butler led him in to the sunny atrium where Phillipus sat at a small table, a scroll open in his hands, with half a dozen other men hovering about behind, young Phaedrus had found a new dignity that was rooted in his own experience and was therefore his own possession. He stepped right up before the king and, with nothing but an ordinary courteous salute, pulled the small square packet of the folded note from his purse and held it out. "From Mistress Elfesinia sir." That's all he said.

One of the men behind spoke up; "Your name, boy?"

"Phaedrus" he answered with scarce a glance at his fellow underling and without a "sir".

The one-eyed ugly king frowned at the bit of folded parchment and let Phaedrus wait, still holding it out. But his hand stayed steady.

There was suddenly, apparently, a mere flick of Phillipus' wrist and he had it. He held it up before his eye, turned it slowly once, began examining the seal. He laid the book he had been reading on the table and turned to give a silent glance toward one of the men behind him.

This fellow came and bowed from the waist, leaning down to examine the red wax stamp on the yellow parchment. This muscular fellow, alone in the crowd, wore along his tunic cuffs the embroidered insignia of a nobleman of Athens. "Looks right." he said.

Phillipus bade the man back to his place then held up the folded note between two fingers for all to see. He finally spoke to the lad; "What's in it?" His accent too was barbarian, stretched and slurred, scarcely Hellene at all.

"Sir, it is a note."

"Ha. You have a sense of humor boy. What does it say?"

"I don't know sir. Surely. I've only come to bring it. She did not ask for a reply."



11: Episode Nine: Up From The Human City

All seemed ready. The holy statues waited; Our Mother, Our Sister, Our Brother. There they stood in their shining vestments of silver wool and snowy linen, crowned and draped and heaped with wreaths, ensconced securely under the gauzy bit of awning on their lavishly adorned brightly painted large wheeled cart in the softly glowing autumn noon of the narrow courtyard. Their gauzy yellow roof billowed from its wreath wrapped poles in a shifting breeze that ruffled at the floral decorations too. The team of men from the Sculptors Guild stood ready in the harness, now being conducted through their customary hymn by a famous ceramics artist and export entrepreneur who had won the prize to be their captain for the day. The pair of trumpeters from the Stage Performers Guild stood to attention left and right of the gate that stood shut still.

Standing on the temple porch before the altar, Victory surveyed this crowded little place and moment which she loved so well. How many times had she been inside this scene? Only twice, actually, but the moment echoed through infinities of time. It surely always changed but always was the same. She had not seen it from the porch before. The sculptors found the lingering quavery cascade of notes that led them down to silence. The courtyard itself was very silent now and so she listened

Here was the marketplace of Athens.

These were three acres on a plain below some hills, the space below a sleeping woman's breasts, where much had happened. This was the place where human liberty was codified in law and yet where countless slaves were bought and sold and too where Socrates was given death for being free. Here Pericles first preached the full beautiful spiritual graces of the Parthenon but then called up the empty honors of a long and pointless war. Here were the luxuries of distant lands and yet the fish and meat and fruit and bowls and pitchers and knives and spoons and saws and nails and bolts of cloth and shoes and hats and little statuettes and buzzing flies of ordinary daily life, the hawkers singing out their wares and too the puppet shows and cheap refreshment stands and acrobats and instrumental bands. Here for generation after generation came the folk of every sort to simply elbow through their lives as best they might. But not today.

Today the booths were folded up and all the goods and gear were put away. Now this noon the place was packed with all the city folk awaiting deepest Mystery or possibly a call to arms against an alien king who stood there near one corner of the place within a small square of alien armored guards. Resentful rumors rippled out from those near the growling soldiers, whispers that their presence here itself was blasphemy, subsiding in the worried hush of those who wanted peace at least today.

And now, bursting in upon the only open corner of this space, right down upon the spot where that king and his startled soldiers stood, here rushed a goddess and a god quite visibly incarnate in the flesh amid a joyous festival of dancing whores, pressed on by the many hundreds more who came behind.

It's fair to say the marketplace of Athens had not seen the like of this in quite a while.

it was a test of sturdy pride, and other arguments of greater philosophical refinement too were made.

A team of Athens' famous comic prostitutes stood up there on the knolls to left and right above the far end of the narrow bridge to mock the folk who tried to hurry past below. The folk came on across just three or four abreast and somewhat slowed by fear of stumbling in the press. That's all it was. And yet to have one of the vulgar beings point at you and screech and make some motion of the most obscene insulting kind – and then to know that the least small protest on your part, your least small hinted expression of outrage or disgust, would be greeted by your fellows on the march, and even for the next year in the city, as a weakness in your character instead of strength – this brought disorienting turmoil to the proud Hellenic heart. They tried to hide and tried to brazen through and tried to spy upon their neighbors. And they thought about it.

For Phillipus it was hard. And yet it took him one step further on. As he came hurrying by between the narrow high railings, feeling all the thousands coming on behind but slowed by those ahead, looking up, he saw one of the women definitely looking down at him, even pointing. Then she clearly signed that he let other men fuck him in his missing eye. That's what her pantomime had meant, with no mistake.

He wanted first, of course, to storm the little hill and strangle her; the others too but that one in particular. He truly thought upon it. This perpetration stained the honor of his wound. His honor was the only beauty that he had. And was he not the conqueror of Athens? Was he not a lion hiding here among this drove of sheep? Such a homicide was justified simply in the name of sanity; whatever ancient priest had dreamed this up was mad and so too were the nation who sustained this abominable custom for all these years.

Just past the bridge he stood at a little spot beside the road while others hurried on to get shut of the place as quickly as they could. He wiped the road dust from his sweaty face

Outside the courtyard wall, he was sitting alone back behind the others, deep in tortured thought, awaiting what he did not know. Perhaps awaiting hope. At last a shadow came and stood beside his lonely bench. Awakened, he looked up.

There stood the Matron of the Agrai Temple.

Standing there with folded arms across her previously violated breasts, scarcely taller than his height though he was sitting, Diotoma spoke to him between clinched teeth with winter in her breath; "King, they're closing shop."

"What?"

"Have you come to buy or just to look?"

"Ma'am . . ." he said. And then he said; "I must apologize for what I did."

Icy stony silence.

"Ma'am;" he said; "I dishonored myself yesterday." He waited, looking in her face, hoping for the mercy of some reply. He finally added; "I fondly pray that I did not dishonor you."

And so she answered; "King, as far as I'm concerned you may as well eat donkey shit and die. I'd like to see you hung up by the thumbs and flayed with whips. I really would. I'd love to watch; I'd pay to see the show. Someday maybe I shall hear that you have died in slavery. Know what I'd do? I would go to my altar and give thanks for revenge. But still, I live by my temple's book and in that book it says that you are free to make this march if you can find the juice in your liver to do it."

"Ma'am . . . I do apologize. I do."

"Go fuck yourself."

"Ahh . . ." he sighed, looking at his empty hands.

She demanded; "Are you going in there to try the oath? I'm the hostess here so I guess I've got to ask. You're the last

drapes that made the walls? And why? Was he, Petronus, now supposed to understand the trick and play along?

Eldress Eurycleia tugged his sleeve. She gestured with her sparkling eyes that they should leave.

Petronus looked again; the Mistress was not here.

Old Eurycleia tugged again.

What were instructions? Show no surprise no matter how she's posed herself. Well, that was good. Conduct Phillipus in then leave them till she calls or claps. Well, that was easily done. He grasped Phillipus by the shoulders from behind and shoved. The fellow took one stumbling step. Petronus let him go and saw him sinking to the ground when the limping leg gave way, as the Eldress let the purple curtain fall.

Although she now really grasped a handful of his saffron sleeve and pulled, Petronus could not help but stand a moment more and listen. In that moment as he stood, a fresher wind came in above the wall so that the apple's leaves were rustling audibly. And yet inside of that Petronus seemed to hear another sound: a subtle hiss.

From the Earth, Phillipus, once a king – once, of all unlikely things, a conqueror – raised his dirty face to look about the empty room of rippling midnight curtains and an ivy covered wall. There was the empty chair, its cushions still pressed where the magnificent body once had been. He was alone now after all the weary journey with much more still ahead, once again now waiting for he knew not what. For hope? At least the Mistress gave this leafy tree to give its shade while a pilgrim waited. Slumping, leaning on one hand, he dropped his gaze and saw his other empty hand was dirty, wiped it on his dirty garment, realizing now belatedly that unclean hands had touched the sacred things. Should he apologize for that?

Thinking that the walls were curtains and people were certainly listening while he waited, he thought; "Should I beg out loud?"



15: Episode Twelve Point Five: Also The Dancing Ground Again

There was a moment when she knew her marriage bed and all of that would never be. Or rather when she knew that if all that were never done then still her priesthood would be worth the lack of it. Or rather when she first with conscious judgment chose her priesthood absolutely past all that, regardless what might be. It was so hard for boys to take a girl like her but by that time, that afternoon of choice, her dearest childhood chum already had a husband and a newborn.

A stitching bee. She was home for the holiday. Old Auntie Kettle plucked a random fussy little child from underfoot, examined it and knowingly declared "Oh, he wants to eat!" And with a glance about the little yard where they were sitting at the work she then of course thrust the hungry child into the bosom of the only healthy milking woman present. Of course, and yet . . .

Sixteen herself, her infant then days old, scarcely yet a week of life between she and the tiny one she loved above all else, and it her first, and never yet another child had she yet put to tit, and sleeping unsuspecting of this breach, this betrayal of a holy trust, this fracturing of sacred love, it sleeping unsuspecting nearby in a shady basket cradled with dainty flowers.

Old aunties know their work. There was a choice to make – community or selfishness – and now was time to get it made.

The young mother's face was blanched in horror and she stared.

And the priestess girl, the closest friend, the cousin tried and true, the intimate of bygone times, now come home for the holiday, was sitting just beside with mouth agape, astonished at the shock of such an ordinary thing. And her own tits were yearning to give suck. And yet she understood it all intensely without jealousy.

No spite and yet suddenly the tears burst out in panicked grief that such a life as this, of such surpassing beauty as this was, would not be hers. Where would her Goddess take her? Was she a stranger here already? The temple's early years – the years they gave the girls and boys who would apprentice back into the village rites – were almost done and no one thought that she would leave Elfesus. So could she ever again be home in this loved and dreaded village yard, this place of utmost courage? Was she a stranger here already?

Here was, in fact, the tragic fact that had and has informed great tragic song and poetry across that culture-world from Ur to Ireland. To live where they were living, with the means of living that were then in hand, humans must compromise continually between competing demands which were, despite the contraries of those demands, so doubtlessly innate to human nature or else so innate in the way that they perforce must live, as to be both, contrary though they were, doubtlessly sacred. These people danced a labyrinth with every step.

And then she understood that understanding this so well – that seeing this eternal tragic majesty of human life so well – was more than human heart could bear at such close reach. She was not made to be one of the aunties here where every instant of your life demanded so much acquiescence to the Fates. And this was just the very thing the village boys all



16: Episode Thirteen: Into The Hills

So up into the hills of whispering pines they found the moonlit shadowed path and climbed the gentle slopes, she in the lead with Mother's basket tall and straight upon her head. She called up strength and set a pace the tall girl would have liked. Petronus strode within arm's reach to right and Diotoma to her left. The path was wide enough and smooth and very firm with countless dark or glittering pebbles under foot, trod down tight into the soil by countless shoes before and later. The place was very beautiful indeed and full of its own soul.

She felt Phillipus close behind her. Before, this one thought himself a king and conqueror like so many others but he had now consciously risen to a place among the beggars in their very dirty shirts. She felt in him the mingled ecstasy and grief that is the very essence of human life's joyous tragedy, and felt him gazing round and felt him feel himself – with every breath of fragrant forest breeze and every step – now opening gradually more and more to the others there and to the stars and land. In fact, this place was somehow redolent to him of another forest, other land in different time. He used the crutch much more freely now, as a walking stick.

Presently, when he seemed settled well into this aspect of his proper work, Victory turned her head enough to show a profile of her face and cast a thought to catch his eye then beckoned with an upraised hand. Seeing this, Petronus



17: Episode Fourteen: The Nun's Tale

"It's easily done." young Phaedrus said when Phillipus of Macedon came stammering, trying unsuccessfully to speak his business, there by the tallest flaming torches in the valley while the mob of mischievous costumed children were just then swooping down the dark slope that lay ahead, arriving for their ghostly fete, a stadia before Elfesis Hill. Phaedrus was straining not to be terse, rather ticking off in his mind the fellow's undeniable virtues. He did seem like a better fellow now. And this unwelcome duty was, apparently, a good thing for the temple and the city. And for the Lady. Really now, who else was of sufficient rank out in the world to provide suitably for the Lady's children? "She's waiting for you."

"But he needs clean clothes, definitely," Petronus said, "and more washing too, especially his hair."

So down to the little brook that flows beside that place and with a rag and borrowed robe a little bit snug they quickly got the bridegroom, so to speak, as ready as they could. All of this, of course, was just exactly to her plan.

"Is there still time?" Phillipus asked. At the moment he was standing in the moonlit stream with silver sparkling droplets falling round, rough hands handling his person roughly, looking down at someone's gleaming nakedness. He discovered that he did not care at all about the various scars. He did hear a fearful tremor in his voice when those words