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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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Children of Byzantium  
Short Stories

Katherine Vlassie

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Children of Byzantium  
Short Stories

Katherine Vlassie

Eleni is the central character in this series of linked short stories. The opening story begins in the early years of the century in a Greek village with Eleni's betrothal to the Greek-Canadian who has returned to his homeland to claim a bride. The stories follow Eleni through the years as she and her family try to find a way to reconcile their vision of the new world with their memories of the old.

Immigrants search for paradise in the new world, much the way poets sought perfection in the world of Byzantium. Yet neither poet nor immigrant can leave the old world behind.

"You will find no new lands, you will find no other seas  
The city will follow you."

Cavafy

CHILDREN OF BYZANTIUM

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### A GARDEN WITH FLOWERS

Eleni was fifteen the summer Costa arrived back in the town he'd left as a boy to seek his future in the new world. He was thirty-one and looking for a wife to take back to the place Eleni knew only as ameriki, the far-off land that had claimed so many of her townspeople. His visit was all the women and girls talked about those lush August days, each one eager to see who would have the good fortune to be chosen for that wonderful life across the seas.

It was a Sunday when Eleni first saw Costa. She and her three sisters were taking a late afternoon stroll, as they and most of the townspeople did on hot summer Sundays. Eleni was wearing her first grown-up outfit. Her mama had sewn the white cotton petticoat and blouse, while an aunt had woven and dyed the material for the overskirt in a bright sky blue; under the watchful eyes of another aunt, Eleni had carefully threaded the floral designs of poppy red onto the skirt and bordered it with ribbons of gold.

and blue. Since her sisters weren't old enough to cover their heads in public or to wear embroidered skirts, Eleni felt very special in her new clothes.

Arms linked, chattering, their chaperoning parents a few steps behind, the girls made their way up and down the main street. The leisurely walk always took the same path, up to the park where the band played under the shade of the pine trees and children chased balls around the fragrant daphne bushes, then back down to the whitewashed church by the sea where each knew one day she would be married. Though the boys and girls of the town always walked in separate groups, and anxious parents were never more than a few steps behind, the youngsters managed to make contact with their eyes, sometimes even whispering as they passed. Occasionally a note would find its way into a willing hand. But that day the girls were too preoccupied with watching for the amerikano to pay any attention to the local boys.

Eleni was eager for a glimpse of the stranger in the sparkling white suit, gaily striped shirt and straw hat that everyone was talking about. Her girlfriends, who'd already seen him, had pronounced him very good looking with his dark wavy hair and handsome mustache. They were all curious about the amerikano who dressed like a foreigner, but who was Greek like them.

The townspeople were used to foreigners. No one could understand why, but every summer a few of them would disembark from small boats, books in hand, and point to a

picture of the ruined marble pillars of the ancient temple. The older boys would act as guides, leading the newcomers along the well-worn path through the olive grove and up the hill to the plateau overlooking the sea, later imitating the excited exclamations of the visitors as they tramped over the stumps of marble. None of the men ever seemed comfortable in their stiff-collared shirts and tight pants, and the townspeople wondered why they didn't wear loose blouson tops and pantaloons.

But this stranger was different; he was one of them; one who'd gone off to the new world and done well for himself. Some of the townspeople said they remembered the boy Costa; hadn't he played in the band on Sunday afternoons? worked for his Uncle Stephano in the taverna? run off to ameriki with his cousins when they were mere lads?

When he finally appeared in the distance, Eleni looked his way, and saw that indeed he did cut a handsome figure in his white suit; she especially liked the way he wore his straw hat on the back of his head so that his sleek black hair shone in the sunlight. As he came closer she lowered her eyes, for she knew it was not proper for a young girl to look directly into a man's face in public, but her sisters nudged her so hard she started to giggle. In the end she had to turn the other way. When they got home her sisters squealed in delight as they pronounced that the amerikano had stared at her quite openly as he'd passed, not once but



twice.

A few days later her mama called her into the house from the back garden where she was playing with her sisters. Eleni expected to be told to take a message to one of her aunts down the road or to help with the meal, but when she rushed in, laughing, hair dishevelled, she saw the table set with the special blue-embroidered cloth, the good glasses, and a plate of loukoumi, the sugar-dusted sweets reserved for guests. Costa was seated next to her papa.

She had always known that one day her parents would choose a husband for her, but when she was told of their decision she was shocked, for she hadn't realized it might happen so quickly or that it might mean going far away from her family. Laughing and teasing with her sisters about going to ameriki as a bride had been in fun; she'd never expected anything like that to really happen.

After Costa left, Eleni approached her mama with her fears. "Foolish child!" her mama cried. "A fine man wants to marry you!" Her sisters talked of nothing but the glorious life she would have in far-away ameriki. Her aunts beamed when they were summoned and told of her good fortune. "He didn't even ask for a dowry," her mama announced proudly.

Eleni's papa took her aside later that evening. "You know I would never send you away except for your own good," he told her. "Costa is a fine man." She had heard her parents' night-whispers, knew about the difficulty of

finding dowry money for so many daughters, knew as well that it was rare to find a man who would marry without a dowry, even if he didn't need one; it was a matter of pride to be able to say you had received so many gold lira or so many stremata of land. "He's a fine man," her papa said once more, and she believed him, and tried not to think of how much she would miss her family.

The next afternoon, the good embroidered cloth on the table along with bowls of sweets and glasses of liqueur, the family in their best clothes, Costa came calling once again. Almost immediately he took a gold ring with a tiny sparkling stone out of a blue velvet box and placed it on Eleni's finger. "This is how engagements are formalized in my new country," he said to them all. "Your new country," he added, turning to Eleni who gazed at the ring in awe. As far as she knew, a plain gold band served both as a sign of the betrothal and to bind the couple in marriage; only the very wealthy wore rings with precious stones.

After the engagement, Eleni and Costa strolled together in the park, or sat in seaside cafes, but always in the midst of family, parents, aunts and uncles, and, of course, her younger sisters. Eleni's initial fears of leaving home subsided with time, and she soon found herself dreaming of the romantic adventure awaiting her in fabled ameriki as the wife of a handsome, wealthy older man who would treat her like a princess.

There were dinners at relatives', toasts to the future

of the happy couple, talk of the wonderful new life Eleni would have in the place Costa called kanada. Since they were never alone, Eleni didn't have a chance to ask him the many questions that were bubbling inside her, but she knew there would be time enough for talk after they were husband and wife.

Then suddenly Costa had to leave Greece. His business required that he return quickly, Eleni's papa told her after Costa was gone, but arrangements would be made for her to join him. She asked her mama why they couldn't have been married in the church by the sea and travelled to ameriki together. "Your Papa knows what he's doing," was all her mama said. Later, when Eleni heard talk of war in far-off Europe, she understood that somehow the war had changed everything.

After Costa had gone, Eleni and her mama, aunts and sisters spent their days gathered around the table preparing Eleni's trousseau. Petticoats and blouses were sewn, along with colourful overskirts; lace-trimmed sheets with matching pillow slips and embroidered tablecloths were brought out of the trunk and freshly washed and ironed before being repacked for the trip.

In the meantime, Costa's letters began arriving. Whenever a new one came, Eleni would slip it into her pocket and rush out into the garden; she'd sit in the furthest corner under the peach tree, and drink in the words from her betrothed, shivering as she read about how he

dreamed of her at night and how he was counting the hours until they could be together as man and wife. He also wrote about the European war that had begun soon after he'd arrived home, explained how it was slowing down arrangements for her passage. She didn't like to think about a war far away. It had nothing to do with her in Greece and Costa in ameriki. For Eleni, who'd never been further than the few kilometers it took to reach her grandmother's inland village, Europe was as foreign as ameriki, or even distant Athens. Instead of war, she thought about Costa and how one day soon he'd say in person all the words on the pages of his letters. She tied them together with a slip of white ribbon and hid them away from the prying fingers of her little sisters.

It was the following summer before arrangements were completed for her passage. Eleni was told she could take only one suitcase and a satchel. The lovely clothes and beautiful linens her mama and aunts had been carefully pressing and folding into the trunk had to be left behind. Because of the war, everyone said.

So with what few things could be packed, she kissed her sisters, hugged them tightly, assured her mama she'd be fine, and climbed onto the carriage with her papa for the day-long ride to the port of Piraeus, where he would see her safely aboard the ship that would take her to ameriki, to the place Costa called kanada.

From his jacket pocket, her papa took the stiff piece of paper with the foreign lettering and showed it to her as they rode: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. One of the clerks in the office, whose ability with the European alphabet was better than his, had inked it onto the paper along with Eleni's name. Costa had sent instructions that such a card was to be made and pinned onto Eleni's cloak. She was never to remove the card or lose it, since, once off the boat, it would be the only way she could be identified and put on the right train. Eleni's papa had wondered why Costa would not meet the boat himself, but had been told by the all-knowing clerk that Winnipeg was a long way from the sea.

"You understand about the train?" her papa asked as the carriage rumbled along the dusty coastal road high above the sea.

"Oh, yes, Papa," she assured him. "It'll be so exciting! First a boat, then a train! I might even get to ride one of those new horseless carriages. Do you think Costa might have one? I don't really mind if he doesn't. But he will have a fine house and a garden with flowers and fruit trees, just like ours!"

Eleni stepped down off the train, her satchel clutched in her arms. Unsure which way to go, she looked back up at the train man who'd almost pushed her off. He was

motioning her to join the people moving toward a flight of stairs. As he'd passed her on the train a few minutes earlier, he'd pointed to the card pinned to her cloak, dirty now and curled up at the edges. "Winnipeg," he'd said and gestured out the window. She'd jumped up, followed him and clustered with the others around the door waiting for the train to stop.

She should have taken a few minutes to tidy up, fix her hair that had come loose under her kerchief. What if Costa saw her looking so unkempt and said no, this isn't the Eleni I chose, I don't want her, send her back? Costa wouldn't do that. He was a good man. Her parents had entrusted her to him. She held her head high, still clutching the satchel close to her; it was all she had left from home.

Her large case with its beautiful trousseau was gone. It had disappeared from under her bunk, along with her few gold coins. They had been sewn by her mama into the bodice of a winter blouse, well-hidden by folds of material and embroidery. Eleni had shown her new outfits to her cabin mates and had been pleased when they'd complimented her on the lovely material, the exquisite design. But the loss of her clothes and money, the frightening seasickness, the unexpected chill when she'd stepped onto land, the stuffiness and foul smells on the train, were all but forgotten as she stood on the crowded, noisy platform and looked around expectantly for Costa.

She couldn't see beyond the throng of jabbering,

shoving bodies that now surrounded her. One hand clutching the satchel, the other holding the kerchief fast to her head, she let herself be carried along, praying that Costa would appear to rescue her. She stumbled down the stairs. At the bottom, in the madhouse of foreign words screaming past, arms grabbing sobbing forms, no one reached for her. She wanted to rush back up the stairs, tell the train man he'd made a mistake, ask him to please take her to the kanada where her betrothed was waiting, a garden of flowers in his arms.

A man touched her shoulder. She tried to shake him off. He persevered. "Eleni," he said. "Ela."

"Costa," she whispered, refusing to move, yet relieved to be able to speak Greek again. "I'm waiting for Costa."

"Ne," he nodded. "Costa." He tried to take her satchel. She held firm. "Ela," he said again. Come. She found her voice, told the gruff-voiced man she wouldn't leave without Costa. "I will take you to him," the man said. "I am his cousin, Alekos."

Costa had written about his cousins and business partners, Alekos and Pavlo, yet she hadn't expected one of them to meet her. She wanted to ask why Costa had not come but she didn't dare speak so openly to a man, even if he was a cousin. Instead, she handed this Alekos her satchel, pulled her cloak more tightly about her, and followed him as he weaved through the crowds.

Outside the station, on the street, she was startled by

the drabness of darkly dressed people and tall grey buildings, so different from the light colours of her town. Carts and carriages stirred up dust as they clattered by, drivers calling out angrily in their harsh language. In the middle of the wide road, noisy little trains clanged along. One of those horseless carriages she'd heard about rumbled and rattled into view, spewing black smoke as it passed. It was not only dirty in this place she'd come to, it was also painfully loud. And this peculiar man, Alekos, didn't even walk beside her; he lunged ahead on the planked walkway, turning every few steps to touch his hand to his hat as if in greeting before going on. He stopped suddenly beside one of those clanging trains, turned and scooped her up onto it. They sat side by side while the train jangled along, stopping and starting in jerking fits, while more of those grim-faced people in their sombre clothes climbed on and off.

Alekos said nothing during their long ride. Then he got up. "Ela," he said, yanking her by the arm. She scrambled off behind him. He took her arm again and, dodging carts and people, they zigzagged across the road. They went along another planked walkway, lined with more of those dark buildings. More grim-faced people shuffled by. He paused at a doorway, led her inside, up a narrow dark staircase, down an equally dark hallway, stopping finally at a door that opened to reveal a smiling face.

"Ela, paidi mou, ela." Come, my child, come. A woman



urged her inside, and Eleni almost burst into tears at the sound of those warm words and the welcoming smile. It was the first time since she'd left her papa at the port of Piraeus that Eleni felt safe. She wasn't sure what it was about the woman; she was quite a bit older, certainly not as old as her mama, one of her younger aunts perhaps, but different.

Alekos rushed away with hardly a word. The woman introduced herself as Matina, his wife, and asked Eleni if she wanted food first or to wash up. Eleni, who'd eaten only bread and dried figs since she'd gotten off the boat four days earlier, was ravenous, but ashamed to be seen so dirty. Most of all she wanted to ask about Costa. But her throat was dry and all she could do was shake her head. Matina seemed to understand, helped her off with her cloak and her kerchief, told her to rest on the couch, then disappeared into another room.

Eleni felt comfortable enough, but it was so dark and drab in the small room. She didn't want to be critical, the woman had been so nice, but except for the heavy red curtains and reddish, almost black, walls, everything was brown. There wasn't a touch of sunny brightness anywhere. She was glad it wasn't her house.

"Come and wash now," the woman said from the doorway. She handed Eleni soap and a towel, and led her to a large bowl of steaming water sitting on the counter of the kitchen.

"Thank you, Kyria Matina," Eleni said.

"We're not so formal here. Call me Matina."

Eleni couldn't address this woman—she had just met in such an intimate manner, but not wanting to offend she said nothing. She concentrated on rolling up her sleeves and giving herself a good washing, then she sat down to a bowl of soup that tasted as good as the best of her mama's.

"Costa will be here soon," Matina said, as Eleni ate.

"You understand what happened?" Eleni shook her head.

"Alekos didn't tell you?" Her voice rose. "Ah, that fool!" Eleni put down her spoon, looked up in alarm. "No, no, it's nothing," Matina said, urging her to continue eating.

"Costa had already left for the market when they notified us the train would be early, so Alekos went to meet you, and Pavlo went to find Costa." She smiled, patted Eleni's shoulder. "He'll be here soon, don't you worry. That idiot husband of mine," she went on. "I'll bet he hardly said a word to you all the way here, you poor little thing."

Costa was coming. He would take her away to their home with the garden. It would be light and airy like her house in Greece, only much bigger. After all, he was a rich amerikano.

After Eleni had eaten as much as she could, Matina took her into a bedroom. She almost cried when she saw herself in the glass. Matina shushed her, brushed the dirt off her dark-blue travelling skirt and made her put on a fresh blouse she took from a cupboard. She combed the tangles out

of Eleni's hair, puffed it into a high bun, and refused to let her cover it with the kerchief. "Only peasant women wear such things in Canada," she said.

Eleni felt practically naked without her head covering and wondered what Costa would say, but then she remembered his foreign dress and the ring he'd given her and realized he'd probably expect her to become an amerikana in her ways.

When Costa rushed in, breathless, apologetic, his cousins flanking him, she was shocked to see he no longer wore his stunning white suit and straw hat. He was grey and rumpled, like his cousins, all three of them dark and sombre like their new country.

Eleni waited for Costa to say he would take her away from these tiny, dark rooms to their sunny home with the garden, but he said nothing about leaving, and she spent the night in the small bedroom next to that of Matina and Alekos. Costa and Pavlo slept on the couch in the other room, the one they called the living room. At first she believed this would be the arrangement only until the wedding, but as time passed she realized that this apartment was to be her new home. Once they were married, Costa would give up his place on the couch and join her in the bedroom.

Plans for the wedding took place around her. She explained shyly about losing her clothes and her few lira, hoping Costa would offer to buy her a new wedding dress.

"You can wear my green crepe," Matina offered instead.

"We'll have to take it in a bit at the waist, but it'll be

fine." She patted Eleni's hand and went on to talk about the Priest from the Russian Church who would come to the apartment to perform the ceremony. Eleni didn't know which shocked her most, the fact that she would not be married in a church, or that the service that was to bind her to Costa for life would be in a foreign tongue. It seemed to Eleni that she understood nothing of this new country.

She was never alone with Costa. Except for the day of her arrival, when he had stayed with her and Matina, he was gone all day. One of the men had to get to the market early to buy the fruits and vegetables for their little store downstairs, while the others cleaned and set up the displays. All of them worked long into the evening, and when they came upstairs for their supper they were too tired to do more than eat and smoke before falling into bed. It was only on Sundays that Costa had the time to take Eleni out, and someone else always came with them.

They took walks along tree-shaded streets where Eleni saw huge houses with wide verandahs and enormous gardens, larger than anything she'd ever seen in Greece. Costa explained how most houses in Canada were made of trees that were chopped down and turned into something he called wood. The larger houses, mansions owned by the wealthiest people in the city he told her, were made of something else called brick. She couldn't understand why rich people who could build any kind of houses they wanted made them drab brown or murky red. Her whitewashed house would have shutters,

blue and clear like the summer sky, and pots of flowers in every window. She wanted to tell Costa that, and so many other things, but she knew she had to wait until they were married before she could speak openly to him.

The day of her wedding, Eleni put on Matina's green dress, her own black shoes, and the tiny hat of black net and feathers she and Matina had made together. She tried not to think of the white dress with the pale blue and rose embroidery she would've worn at home, of her sisters in their colourful outfits, her parents walking her to the church by the sea where she'd always dreamed of being married, the dancing and singing that would go on into the summer night under the fruit trees in their garden. She tried to remember that she'd been sent away for her own good, that the husband her papa had chosen for her was a fine man. He was; he treated her kindly, they all did. She should be grateful. But all she could think about was how much she missed her mama and her sisters. And this place, this kanada she'd come to, was not the ameriki she'd dreamed about.

She came out of the room, uncomfortable in her strange wedding outfit, and joined the others waiting for the Priest to arrive for the ceremony. They all sat stiffly around the table, each holding a glass of brandy bought especially for the occasion. Pavlo, boyish and shy, stood up and made a toast to the bride while Costa handed her a bouquet of yellow and white flowers. Eleni's eyes

filled with tears at the gesture, and after the ceremony she took one of the white buds from the centre of the arrangement to press later between Costa's letters.

There was a special dinner with more toasts and candied almonds to sweeten the union. As the evening progressed, and the good wishes grew to include many children, Costa squeezed Eleni's hand, hidden beneath the hanging folds of the tablecloth. It was the first time he'd ever touched her, except to take her arm crossing the street. Then Alekos, usually the quiet one, stood up, and in his gruff voice, which up to then had frightened Eleni, made a warm declaration of welcome. He topped off his words with a kiss on her cheek that caused Eleni to blush. The others laughed, and Matina said it was time to get the old boy to bed. Pavlo wished them all well and disappeared into the night.

Costa took Eleni into their room, and she waited for him to become the Costa of her letters, whisper his words of love, explain why they'd been staying with the others all this time, and tell her he would soon take her to their very own house with its garden of flowers and fruit trees. But it wasn't like that at all; she cried out in pain and Costa shushed her, reminding her of the others in the next room. Those were the only words he spoke to her. After, he stroked her forehead for a moment, turned away, and fell asleep, while she lay quietly in the dark and wept softly.

The next morning Costa left very early to pick up

fresh fruit and vegetables from the market, and Eleni wrote a letter to her family in Greece telling them how happy she was and how wonderful her new life would be.

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## THE FIR TREE

The wind began to whirl the snow around Eleni's face. She shivered and drew the woolen shawl more tightly around her head. Wiggling her toes inside her galoshes to make sure she still could, she continued along the street of beautiful houses. She was almost at her favourite. It was set back toward the river and had a wide driveway circling the spacious grounds. Sometimes she saw carriages pulling out, and once a motorcar passed her as it entered, but she was never close enough to catch even a glimpse of the ladies and gentlemen as they rode by. Inside the house lived a sixteen year old, just like her, but a xeni, a tall, fair Canadian, who spoke the language of the country with ease. Dressed in sweeping gowns of embroidered silks, she'd spend her days eating loukoumi and sipping drinks out of sparkling long-stemmed glasses. Her husband would come home early in the afternoons, resplendent in his officer's uniform. She'd offer him sweets and a liqueur. They'd sit together on the



couch in front of the window overlooking the snow-covered garden with its magnificent, tall trees.

The evergreens that abounded in the grounds of the huge houses fascinated Eleni. They were the only growing things in this strange new land she'd come to that hadn't crumpled up and turned brown with the passing of summer. Even when the snow had begun falling, they had kept their bloom. "Isn't it a miracle, Costa," she'd said excitedly to her husband, "how the cold doesn't change them?"

A stinging blast of frigid air whipped across Eleni's face. She pulled the shawl down over her forehead and sunk her chin deep into the collar of her coat. The snow swirled about her in gusts now. Even though she hadn't reached her favourite spot, she knew it was time to turn back. Soon it would be impossible to see. She'd learned, in the few months she'd been in Winnipeg, how quickly the prairie wind could take fire. She bent her head against the cold, turned away from the beautiful houses, and started for home. Costa, with his cousins, Alekos and Pavlos, would be hungry after a long day in the store downstairs. She only hoped there wouldn't be any mention of war tonight. It seemed that was all the men talked about these days.

At the apartment, Matina was in the kitchen grinding the meat for keftedes, the meat balls they were having for supper. Eleni quickly shed her outdoor clothes, put on warm slippers and an apron, and began to chop up the onions.

"I'm going to try asking Costa once more to teach me

English," Eleni said, determined that this time she would convince him.

"We're Greeks in this house," Matina said, mimicking Costa. "If you want to learn," she said, reverting back to her own voice, "you'll have to do it on your own, like me."

"No," Eleni said emphatically. She knew Matina did things behind Alekos' back all the time, but she refused to be that kind of wife.

Matina shrugged and started mixing an egg into the ground meat. Eleni wiped away onion tears and kept chopping.

The men were tired over dinner and hardly spoke, but it was later, when Eleni and Matina were in the kitchen washing up, that they heard Alekos.

"We're not at war!"

"Canada is." Pavlo's voice was unusually harsh.

"But not Greece!"

"We're Canadians, Alekos."

It was the first time Eleni ever heard Pavlo talk back to his brother. Even Matina seemed shocked, motioning Eleni to stop washing so they could listen.

"The Canadian Army is asking for volunteers to make up another Division."

"We need you at the store!"

The argument carried on even after Eleni and Costa went to their room for the night. Then doors slammed and there was silence.

"Do you think Pavlo is right?" Eleni whispered in the dark.

"It's not our quarrel," Costa said, and she didn't know if he meant the one between the brothers or the war itself, but his tone was abrupt enough to tell her he didn't want to talk about it. He was probably upset that Pavlo had spoken so rudely to Alekos; it was unlike him. But surely Costa knew that Pavlo would never defy his brother. After all, Alekos was the eldest. She thought about what Pavlo had said, that they were Canadians -- she didn't feel Canadian. Canadians were the ladies who walked along the street with an air of belonging, who wore their clothes with an easy grace, who spoke openly to shopkeepers. Eleni sighed and curled up on her side of the bed. This wasn't the time to bring up her concern about learning English.

A few nights later, when they were getting ready for bed and Costa seemed in a good mood, she mentioned it.

"We all speak Greek here," he said. "What do you need to know English for?"

"What about when I go out on my own?" she asked.

"Elenaki mou," he said, using her name in the endearing manner; his voice sounded more like her papa's though.

"It's dangerous to wander about by yourself. This is Canada, not Greece."

"I walk to the river and along the street of beautiful houses every day," she pointed out.

"Only a short distance, and in a safe neighbourhood."

"What about shopping?" She was beginning to feel the futility of a discussion they'd had many times before.

He smiled and put his arm around her shoulders. "Don't I look after you, Elenaki? Why are you so worried?"

It was useless. Still, she couldn't be like Matina and teach herself to read by picking up the newspaper whenever the men were away. No matter how much she liked Matina, Eleni knew it was wrong of a wife to defy her husband.

Eleni continued her walks and tried not to daydream about what she couldn't have. Costa was a good man, she reminded herself, even if the life he'd offered her in Canada was not what she'd expected when she'd left Greece, but some days she missed home and her family so much she became ill. On top of everything else, in the last few days she'd begun to feel unusually drowsy in the afternoons.

"No walk today?" Matina asked.

"I'm tired. I think I'll lie down instead."

"Last night you were falling asleep over your supper," Matina said. "Anything else peculiar happening?"

"I miss my family," Eleni said. "I guess that's why I've been feeling sick."

"What kind of sick?"

"My stomach. I want to throw up, but I can't."

"In the mornings, especially?"

"How did you know? Did this happen to you when you first came to Canada?"

Matina ignored Eleni's questions, asking instead a few of her own.

"Many women would like what you have," Matina said finally.

"How can you say that?" Much as she liked Matina, there were times Eleni made no sense out of things she said.

"Because you're going to have a baby, you foolish child."

Eleni drew herself up. "Oh no, not me. No baby. Costa agreed," she said with assurance.

"Agreed to what?"

Eleni knew she wasn't supposed to talk to her husband about such personal things, but she also knew what happened when girls got married -- before the year was out the first baby would arrive -- and she wanted to make sure it didn't happen to her, so far from her mama. Matina was the only woman she knew, but Matina didn't have babies, she wouldn't be any help. No. Eleni definitely wasn't going to have a baby all by herself in this frozen country.

"Costa agreed to what?" Matina asked again.

"No baby," Eleni said, really too embarrassed to say more. She couldn't tell Matina how one night lying side by side in their bed, she'd had the courage to finally speak to Costa about her fears. She hadn't actually been able to say the word "baby" to him, that was talk only for women, but she'd told him how much she missed her mama and how she couldn't manage certain things alone. He'd been kind,

telling her not to worry, assuring her he knew how hard it was for her to be away from her mama and her sisters. He'd even said that when there was extra money, after the war, they'd go and visit.

She turned back to Matina. "I told Costa," she said finally, "and he understood. So you see, no baby."

Matina said nothing more, but that evening she and Alekos disappeared into their room right after supper, and then Alekos came back out and took Costa aside. Pavlo sat off in a corner reading the English newspaper he brought home every night. Eleni busied herself with the dishes and wondered what was going on.

In bed that night, Costa touched her on the shoulder the way he did those times he would reach for her in the special way. She waited, but he didn't move. "Eleni," he said finally. His voice was gentle, but it was the tone he would use when he'd admonish her not to go too far on her walks, or when he'd remind her to write her parents. She wondered what she'd done this time. "Elenaki," he said, his voice more gentle, and this time he gathered her in his arms. She was relieved and waited for him to start that other, but all he did was hold her. Then he spoke. "It's God's will," he said, and she caught her breath. People always talked about God's will when someone died or when babies came.

She pulled away from him. "You promised, Costa!" she cried. "You promised!"

"Elenaki." He reached for her but she drew even farther away.

"I can't, not here, all alone," she cried, the fear of having a baby forced upon her overriding the fear of upsetting her husband. "You can't make me! I won't!"

"It's out of my hands," Costa said.

Eleni refused to listen. "I know you're my husband and I must obey you," she said, firm in her resolve, "and I will in everything else, but please, Costa, not this." She couldn't say anymore. She was starting to cry. "Please," she sobbed. "No baby."

Costa sighed, reached for her once more. "Come to sleep now, moro mou." Little one.

"Please, Costa," she begged.

"How can I explain?" He seemed to be talking to someone else. Then he turned back to her. "Tomorrow," he said reassuringly. "It'll be better tomorrow." She took comfort from the words, certain now that she'd convinced him and that in the morning everything would be fine.

But she felt that same awful sickness the next day when she awoke. It was late and Costa was gone. She groaned as she got up, her insides queasy. "Panagia mou, have pity on me," she pleaded with the Virgin. "I can't manage without my mama. Please, Panagia, don't give me a baby. Not so soon. Look at Matina, she's a good wife, and you haven't given her babies yet. I'll be a good wife too, I promise, Panagia mou, I promise."

All her fervent supplications did was make her even more nauseous, and she was sure now that even the Virgin had forsaken her. She dragged the chamber pot out from under the bed, hunched over it, and tried to get rid of whatever it was that was tormenting her, but, as every other morning, nothing came out.

Utterly miserable, she pulled on her robe, went inside and slumped onto the couch. Matina came and sat beside her. "Costa didn't explain, did he?"

"Explain what?"

"I didn't think so." She took Eleni's hand and placed it over her abdomen. "You have a baby growing in there."

"There's no baby!"

"You'll feel it soon. It'll grow and start to move and kick."

"It can't be," Eleni insisted.

"You can thank Costa that it is."

Eleni groaned in confusion. First Costa had agreed to no babies. Then he'd told her it was God's will. Now Matina was saying it was his fault. "I prayed to the Virgin," Eleni said, struggling with her thoughts.

"Come here, you silly thing." Matina gathered her up, smoothed back her hair. "I have some explaining to do."

So Matina told her and Eleni sat listening in disbelief. All those nights with Costa, when he knew yet went ahead anyway. It was his fault. His. She'd never let him near her again. Never. No matter what the marriage



vows said. But it was too late now. She really was going to have a baby. In early summer, Matina explained. How did she know so much?

"You're lucky," Matina said, dragging her up out of her dark thoughts. "Some wives want babies and can't have them."

"They can have mine," she snapped.

That night, when Costa reached for her in bed, she turned away; it was the first time she'd ever done that.

The next afternoon, even though she really wanted to sleep, she willed herself out of the house, but instead of her usual walk along the street of beautiful houses she went down to the river itself, frozen solid, right out onto the centre. She stood there, willing it to crack open and swallow her up, but it didn't. Of course it wouldn't. Everything was against her in this frozen country. Costa had tricked her, over and over, whispering softly in the night, all so he could make her have a baby. She hated him, hated them all, and most of all she hated the baby.

Eleni survived the winter and morning sickness. She watched the snow melt and green grass reappear and the frozen river turn to the murky black she remembered from the time before the snow had begun falling. In time, she stopped being angry with Costa and tried to be happy about

the new life growing inside her, the way her Papa instructed in those long letters from home, but she could never get as enthusiastic as everyone else in their little household.

Pavlo seemed especially taken with the idea of a baby, constantly asking Eleni how she felt, if she was tired, helping her carry things. Eleni was relieved that there was no more talk of him joining the army. He was spending most of his free time away from the apartment and Matina said he probably had a new girl friend, but Eleni thought he looked too sad for that.

Now that the worst of winter was over and all she had to contend with was mud and slush, Eleni took longer and longer walks. There wasn't much else to do. Matina pushed her away if she got near a broom or mop. Eleni didn't mind. She was getting too awkward to bend easily; either her belly got in the way or her back ached. Even sewing and embroidery tired her. The only time she forgot about her condition was when she was out walking. The gardens of the beautiful houses were turning green again, and at her favourite was a tiny new fir tree.

One day, Pavlo surprised Eleni by arriving home with a funny bright-red contraption he called a sled. "For your walks," he said, and went on to explain how it would glide along on top of the snow as she pulled. "You put the baby inside," he explained.

"But the baby will come in summer," she said puzzled, and not sure why.

"And after that, winter." He smiled, but his eyes were as sad as ever.

When she mentioned the strangeness of the gift to Costa, he shrugged and said the thing would probably come in handy.

"But winter is so far away, Costa."

"It'll be here soon enough."

The baby started its life early one June morning. Eleni cried out in pain for her Mama. Over and over she called, but only Matina was there, crooning words that didn't help, and a strange old woman who hollered angrily at Eleni.

"Push!" the old woman yelled as she spread Eleni's legs apart.

Eleni didn't understand the English word, but she grasped the meaning from the gestures.

"I can't!" She clutched at Matina. "Tell her I can't!" The old woman frightened Eleni. She didn't know what was happening to her, why there was such pain, or why this horrid woman was in her bedroom screaming words at her she didn't understand. "Tell her to go away," Eleni pleaded with Matina.

"Soon," Matina murmured, holding Eleni's hands tightly in hers. "It'll be over soon." Eleni screamed

and cried for her mama. "Courage, Elenaki," Matina soothed. "Courage."

She had no courage, she moaned to Matina, yet somehow, in spite of her fears, and midst her cries, the baby managed to get born. With its screech of arrival, Eleni's pains stopped as suddenly as they had begun, and she fell back onto the drenched pillows in disbelief. The terrible old woman grinned, patted Eleni on the arm and disappeared out the door.

Eleni watched in wonder as Matina cleaned the infant and brought it over to the bed. "She's so beautiful, Elenaki," Matina said placing the tiny bundle in the crook of Eleni's arm. It was strange holding a baby, her baby, her daughter. She squinted at the funny-looking wrinkled little thing. Its eyes were slit shut, but its tiny mouth sucked at the air, and she wondered if it was hungry.

Eleni expected Costa to be disappointed that it was a girl, but he seemed genuinely pleased when he was allowed into the bedroom to peek at the scrunched up little face. He kissed them each on the forehead and suggested they name the baby Angeliki after Eleni's mother.

Eleni wasn't sure if she could really love the tiny creature that clawed at her breasts and howled through the night. Yet as the days passed there would be moments when she'd feel overwhelmingly protective of the little thing. The strange mixture of feelings frightened her and she

prayed to the Virgin for guidance, for she knew mothers were supposed to love their children all the time.

When the forty-day period of confinement was over and mother and baby were allowed out of the house, Eleni dressed them both and hurried out into the fresh summer day. She stopped to see Costa at the store downstairs and watched proudly as his customers put aside their beans and carrots to tickle the pink-wrapped bundle. Eleni didn't understand the foreign words, but she knew from the way the ladies looked at Angeliki that they were saying nice things about her baby.

After their visit, Eleni wheeled the baby carriage along the old familiar road, explaining to her daughter as they went about how sad she'd felt at first in this strange land, and how frightened she'd been at the thought of having a baby. "It's not so bad now, Angeliki," she said. "Except at night when you don't let me sleep."

As they neared the river, Eleni told her daughter about the wide boulevard of mansions, with gardens as large as open fields. "Almost as beautiful as ours," she said, and went on to describe the garden at the back of the house in Greece where she and her sisters had played. "We'd pick fruit from our very own trees," she said. "Peaches and figs in summer, oranges in winter." She smiled in remembrance. "We'd cut sprigs of sweet-smelling jasmine to twine in our hair." She went on to tell her daughter how she and her sisters liked to walk down to the sea. "Sparkling blue and

clear," she explained, "not like the black of this river, Angeliki. It's ugly here." She whispered this, as if someone might overhear, though she knew that even if anyone did her words would be as foreign to them as theirs were to her. "The language they speak isn't ugly though. I like the sound of it. But your Papa says I don't need to know englezika." Eleni leaned over the carriage. "When you get big, we can learn together. It'll be our secret."

Eleni stopped when she reached her favourite house, picked up Angeliki and held her so she could see the little fir tree in front of the large window. "A happy young mother with a beautiful little baby lives in that house," she began. "A beautiful baby, just like you." Angeliki squirmed a little as Eleni continued, then quickly fell asleep. When she finished the story, Eleni kissed her baby's fuzzy little head and put her back into the carriage. She covered her with the light blanket, smiled down at her, and started for home.

As she turned off the tree-lined boulevard and onto the stretch of road leading to the apartment, Eleni noticed a man in uniform watching her. She averted her eyes. There were many soldiers on the streets these days, and she didn't like the way some of them just stood there and stared. She kept her eyes down as she passed.

"Eleni."

She stopped, startled at the sound of her name.

"It's me."

She turned back in alarm. "Oh, Pavlo, no!"

"I had to do this, Eleni. No one understands, but I had to." He paused. "I thought you might."

"I don't!" she cried. "What does this war far away have to do with us? With you!"

"It'll be all right," he said. "I'll be back before you know it,"

"Have you told Alekos?"

He shook his head. "I'm going now to say goodbye."

"You mustn't," she insisted. "Alekos will be upset."

"I couldn't leave without saying goodbye."

"That's not what I meant!"

"I know, Elenaki."

"I'll miss you." That wasn't what she meant to say either. In her shock and confusion, her words were coming out all wrong. "We'll all miss you."

"Will you write to me?"

She nodded. Tears were nearing the surface. She mustn't cry. What would Pavlo think of her?

But he didn't seem to notice. He was leaning over the carriage. Angeliki had woken up. He picked her up and cradled her in his arms. Then they walked home together, Pavlo holding a gurgling Angeliki while Eleni wheeled the carriage.

The warm fall days quickly turned cold and Eleni knew it was time for another long winter. She dug out her galoshes and heavy outer wear, found some good warm clothing for Angeliki, and got out the bright red sled Pavlo had given her. He'd said he'd probably be back in time to pull her a few times himself before the winter was out, but he'd been gone over two months now and they hadn't even heard from him.

No one talked about it, but they were all worried. The men pored over the daily newspapers. They were looking for news of Pavlo's division, Matina explained, as she scanned the pages herself. Eleni had stopped asking Costa a long time before to let her learn English but sometimes she picked up the paper and stared at it as if it would somehow give up its secret world to her. It never did, and she'd end up throwing it down in disgust. All she wanted was to find out about Pavlo; he was family now, her cousin, and he was in danger.

Her baby and her chores kept Eleni busy, but every day, as soon as Angeliki woke from her nap, Eleni left what she was doing and took her for a walk. They always took the same path, down the road to the river and then along the street of beautiful houses. The day it finally snowed, Eleni bundled Angeliki up, and threw on her own coat and galoshes. With Angeliki under one arm, she struggled to get a grasp on the sled.

"You're crazy," Matina said, picking up the sled.



She carried it down the stairs.

"Thanks!"

"Be careful."

"We'll be fine!"

She stopped off at the store downstairs since Costa liked showing off his daughter, and he warned her not to go far now that the snow had started.

"Only as far as ..." she began.

"I know." He smiled at her. "The street of beautiful houses."

She looked shyly at her husband. They hardly spoke to each other these days. In the evenings, when he was home, she'd be scrubbing baby cloths and undershirts in the washtub and hanging them by the stove to dry. Most of the time, when she'd fall into bed exhausted, he'd be fast asleep. The few times he'd reach for her would be quick and silent. In the mornings, she'd be up before everyone to iron what she'd washed the night before, since nothing ever dried completely in the cold apartment. Sometimes, especially in the early-morning darkness, she'd yearn for those days before a baby had become a part of her life, but when she was free from work and Angeliki was asleep in her cradle or awake and following Eleni with her eyes and gurgling, she'd be filled with such exquisite love for her tiny baby it was almost painful.

When she began feeling ill in the mornings again, she didn't need Matina to tell her the reason. She prayed to

the Virgin and tried to feel happy, but all she could think about was having to look after Angeliki when she felt so sick. And next year there would be another little one.

Costa warned Eleni to look after herself and the little lives she was responsible for and not to be so foolish as to insist on taking Angeliki out every day. He didn't need to worry; Eleni's walks became fewer and shorter; some mornings she could barely struggle out of bed.

The only bright spot in their lives was that letters from Pavlo had begun arriving. They were few, and brief, and told them nothing about where he was or what he was doing. All they knew with any certainty was that on the day a particular letter had been written he'd been safe. They hung onto their hope and waited anxiously for the mail.

One evening Angeliki became feverish and cranky. While Eleni made sweetened camomile tea to soothe her tummy, [ Matina tried an alcohol rub, but nothing they did stopped the crying, and they had to walk her all night. The next day she couldn't keep her food down. They tried every remedy they could think of, camphor rubs, poultices, castor oil, but nothing helped. Finally a doctor was called.

He advised alcohol rubs to get the fever down, but his stern manner frightened Eleni. If she had been at home, she cried, her mama would have called old Marigo to chant and burn special leaves and get rid of the evil spirits that had entered her baby's little body. Couldn't Costa find

someone here to do that, she begged? But Costa did nothing.

She and Matina took turns walking the feverish baby, rubbing her little tummy with alcohol, rocking her in the cradle, but nothing seemed to make any difference. When she began turning her little head away even from the bit of camomile tea they'd been able to get inside her, Eleni became frantic. It was her fault; she hadn't wanted a baby; she'd taken her out in the cold and made her sick.

"Panagia," she prayed to the Virgin. "Please make my baby well. I'll be good. I'll never complain again. I'll be a good wife. I'll write my parents every week. I'll have all the babies you want me to have and I'll never take them out in the cold, only please, please, Panagia, make my Angeliki well."

The doctor came again, but nothing changed. Eleni heard the familiar words "God's will" from Costa's lips but refused to consider what they meant. Everyone tiptoed around her as if she was the one who was ill. Costa urged her to lie down, but she refused. It was her fault her little baby was so sick, hers. She was bad. She needed to tell Costa that, and to ask his forgiveness, but she couldn't even look at his face for fear of the condemnation she would see there.

Matina coaxed her into bed finally, and she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. When she awoke, it was to daylight streaming in the window, to silence, and to an empty cradle. She wanted to believe her baby was in the

other room with Matina, happy and smiling, but she knew better.

She struggled out of bed, trying to ignore the rising feeling of nausea. She put her hand over her abdomen. "Forgive me, Panagia. I promise this time I'll be a good mother."

In the living room, Costa and Matina were alone, sitting side by side on the couch.

"My baby," she said.

"I'm sorry, Eleni," Matina whispered, rising to her.

Costa held his head in his hands.

"You took her away," Eleni cried to him. "You thought I didn't want her and you took her away. But I do want her. I love her. Please bring my baby back. Please, Costa." Even as she was saying the words she knew how foolish they were. Her baby was dead. It was God's will. Not even Costa could change that.

"We thought it would be easier for you this way," Matina said.

Eleni sank onto a chair, nausea overcoming her again, only she didn't know if it was from this new baby or from the awful thing they were doing to her.

"I want to see my baby," she whispered. She needed to hold her one last time, tell her she'd be going to Heaven where Panagia would watch over her and where she'd be safe. Most of all she needed to tell her she loved her and didn't mean it when she had those terrible thoughts.

"She's gone," Matina cried. "Don't you understand!"

She hadn't meant to let her baby get cold and sick, but every time she'd try to speak, to tell them, they'd shush her. It was her fault though, and they knew it, that was why they wouldn't let her see her baby one last time to say goodbye.

They wouldn't let her go to the funeral either, insisting it was to keep her from getting upset in her condition, but she knew it was her punishment. No one would tell her where her little baby was buried, and she didn't know how to find out on her own. That too was her punishment.

Every day during the spring and summer and even into fall, while the new life grew inside her and she mourned the old, Eleni walked along the tree-lined street of beautiful houses. She'd think of Pavlo and the way Angeliki had settled happily in his arms on that last day he'd held her and she'd pray for him still far away. She would pause, each time, in front of the house of the happy young woman and gaze at the small fir tree. She liked to imagine her baby resting in just such a garden with an evergreen to shade her. In time, what she imagined she came to believe. She never told Costa, but when the war was over and Pavlo came home, she took him there one day and showed him the spot.

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## GOD'S WILL

The children ran up as soon as they heard the knocking. "Get away," Eleni said. The boys, recognizing the irritation in their mother's tone, drew back, but Angela toddled even closer to the drafty kitchen door. "Stephano!" Eleni cried, and the boy grabbed his little sister by the straps of her overalls. She shrieked and squirmed but he held fast while Eleni opened the door. Matina was in the porch, stamping her feet and brushing the snow off her baby's blanket.

"Come in quickly."

"You undress Irini," Matina said, handing Eleni the baby. "I'll take my things off out here."

"Come in, for heaven's sakes," Eleni said. "You're letting in the cold."

"Everything's wet."

"It doesn't matter!" Eleni cried. "Come in!"

Matina pushed off her galoshes and hurried inside.

Angela was still screaming her indignation at being kept prisoner by her brother. The other two boys stood silently in a corner of the kitchen. Matina threw off her coat and scooped up her little niece. Angela gurgled her pleasure at being rescued, while Stephano ran to his brothers. Eleni started to undress Irini.

Between the two of them, the women managed to keep Angela entertained while they untangled Irini from mitts, scarf, cap, coat, overshoes, and leggings. Matina hung the lot, along with her own wet things, on the clothes line Eleni had strung up behind the stove. Before long, the two babies were crawling happily toward the corner of the kitchen to see what Angela's brothers were doing.

Eleni poured water into the briki for Turkish coffee, added sugar and powdered coffee, and put it on the stove to heat.

"Mama, she's taking my soldier! ... let your sister play with you! ... it's mine! ... get away! ... be nice to your cousin!"

Eleni took a bowl of koulourakia from the cupboard and Matina offered cookies all around. Full mouths were quiet for a moment.

"Mine! ... NO! ... gimme! ... MAMA!"

Matina tried to shush them with more koulourakia while Eleni poured the foaming coffee into tiny demitasse cups and set them on the table.

"Gimme! ... NO! ... mine! ... MAMA!"

"Out!" Eleni screamed. "Get out!"

The noise from the corner of the kitchen stopped and three little boys scrambled up and through the swinging door into the dining room. The babies started to cry in earnest. Eleni covered her face with her hands.

Matina took the babies into the living room and sang to them until they were tired enough to be put to sleep.

"The boys are playing quietly now," Matina said when she came back into the kitchen.

Eleni was still sitting at the kitchen table as though she'd been glued to the chair. "After two years," she said. "I suppose it was meant to happen."

"Ah, Elenaki." Matina shook her head, gathered up the younger woman who had been her dearest friend for so long and held her close. "We'll do something, don't you worry."

"I won't swallow foul-tasting powders! Or stick sharp needles inside me!" Eleni shuddered even at the thought of what some women did to stop babies from being born. She'd always been too frightened to interfere with a life once God had decided to start it inside her.

Matina smoothed back Eleni's hair. "None of those things," she said. "I've heard of a doctor who does it. Some of the women ..."

"Oh, Matina, I can't!" Her cry was muffled in Matina's embrace.

Matina pushed her away. "What are you going to do then! Keep having them, one after another, year after



year!"

"What if Costa finds out?"

"Well what if he does? He's not the one who has babies underfoot all day. Who does he think does the mountain of laundry those little babies make? And all the cooking and feeding and dressing? Look at you. You're exhausted. He should think about you!"

"Oh, Matina, don't say that. He does think about me. Costa's a good husband."

"If he's such a good husband, why ... oh, never mind." She pulled Eleni close again.

Eleni shivered in Matina's arms. She couldn't think straight. She had been so certain all these years that babies came into this world or left it as a result of the will of God, and that even if a person didn't understand why God gave babies to some women and not to others, it was something that was never questioned. You prayed and hoped, and then left it up to God. Eleni, not wanting to bother God directly, had turned to the Virgin. She felt certain another woman would better understand.

"I don't know what to do," she cried to Matina.

"Let me get the name of the doctor," Matina said.

"It's safe when a proper doctor does it," she went on, more gently now. "A doctor wouldn't do something that wasn't right."

"Do you really think ...?"

"You can't go on like this," Elenaki," Matina said

finally.

As the days passed, Eleni considered all the women who didn't think it was wrong to interfere with God's will, women who took matters into their own hands. She wasn't sure if she had such courage. But she didn't think she had the courage for another baby either. Whichever way her thoughts took her, she was in turmoil. What would Costa say if she were to do this terrible thing? Could she trust the doctor? What if he told Costa? Every night she'd fall into bed exhausted, and all she could see in her life, year after year, was another baby, another baby, another baby.

By the time Matina came by to tell her she had the name of a doctor, she was too worn out to protest. She prayed to the Virgin to forgive her.

The day it was to happen, Matina took her baby and went to Eleni's to wait for Kyria Voula. It was from her daughter, Xanthi, that she'd learned about the doctor, and between them they'd made the arrangements. Xanthi had contacted the doctor; Kyria Voula would look after the children; Matina would go along with Eleni. It would all be done during the morning, when the men were at their busiest and less apt to come home unexpectedly.

"What if someone finds out?" Eleni was bouncing a cranky Angela on her lap.

"Xanthi won't tell anyone. Neither will her mother. I promise you."

Pavlo and Timotheos ran in, demanding cookies. Matina handed them each two and shooed them away. In anticipation, she handed one to Irini, crawling around her feet, and another to Angela.

"Costa might come home," Eleni said, shifting Angela to a more comfortable position. "Or call."

"Kyria Voula will tell him we've gone to Eatons."

"Costa didn't give me any money to go shopping!"


"Oh, stop worrying. We're only looking. Anyway, men don't pay attention to such things."

"I'm scared, Matina."

"I promise you it'll be all right."

The children ran screaming when they heard someone at the front door. Angela squirmed off Eleni to go and find out what was happening. Irini followed along behind.

Kyria Voula discarded coat, scarf, galoshes, and quickly took over the children. She dug candies out of her apron pockets, handed them all around, then she picked up Irini in one arm, Angela in the other, and started for the kitchen, three curious little boys eagerly following. "Go on now," she said, turning to the women. "We'll be fine." The children put out their hands for more candies. "You'll have to sing me some songs first. What songs do you know? Let's see now," she began, "how about . . .," and waved Eleni and Matina out the door.



Matina dragged Eleni along the walk. "Come on," she said, still buttoning up her coat. "The old woman knows what she's doing."

"I didn't tell her about Angela's teeth," Eleni said as she pulled her hat down more snugly over her ears.

"She's raised enough children. She'll figure it out for herself."

"I suppose you're right."

She shivered and Matina took her arm. They huddled together against the wind as they walked the two blocks to Portage Avenue. It was too cold for conversation, but once on the street-car, Matina talked continually. Eleni knew it was meant to get her mind off what she was about to do, but she couldn't concentrate on what Matina was saying. Her thoughts ran to her children, at home with Kyria Voula, a nice woman, but not family. What if she didn't know how to look after the children properly? Eleni rarely left them with anyone other than Matina.

On the street again, the two women held onto each other as they manouvered along some fresh tracks, keeping clear of horse droppings steaming up from the snow. Matina pointed to a run-down block of suites, and they made their way inside.

Eleni hesitated. "This is an awful place."

"It's warm at least," Matina said, loosening her coat.

"Do you think it'll take long?"

"Not long at all. Now come on. It's upstairs. Let's

go." She took Eleni's hand and they climbed to the second floor. Matina knocked at a door in the darkened hallway, opened it and drew a reluctant Eleni in with her. A pair of men's overshoes were on a mat by the side of the door, and a man's overcoat hung on a peg on the wall. They took off their own galoshes, hung up their coats, and stood silently in the hallway. Matina opened her purse and took out some bills.

"I never thought about money," Eleni said startled.

"Never mind," Matina said. She clamped her purse shut, the bills folded now and in her hand. "I knew you wouldn't have any."

"Where did you get it?"

"I put some aside every week from the housekeeping money," Matina said. "And when I need a new pair of shoes or a dress, I tell Alekos it costs more than it does, and I keep the rest. That way I always have a little extra on hand. I'm sure you'd never do such a thing," she added.

She wouldn't even try. If she were ever to hide something from Costa, she was sure it would show. She had no idea how she was going to hide this thing from him.

A man appeared from out of the darkness then, a big, blond man. "Which one of you is it today?"

Matina handed him the folded bills and pointed to Eleni.

"Come along. I don't have much time."

Matina nudged Eleni and she started to follow the

strange man down the hallway. She thought Matina was behind her but when a door closed, she realized she was alone with him. She'd never been alone in a room with any man but her husband.

He motioned her to the table in the centre of the room. "Remove whatever you have on underneath," he said pointing at her waist, "and lie down." She didn't understand all his English, but she knew what he wanted her to do, and she couldn't, wouldn't, take her clothes off in front of this man, even if he was a doctor. "I've helped a number of you Greek ladies," he told her as he removed his jacket. He hung it on the back of the chair. "Come along now, my dear. We don't have much time."

She edged her way to the side of the table, too frightened to do more.

He rolled up his sleeves. "Don't worry. I've done this many times." She tried not to look at him, but she'd never seen such a big man, and so pale. He was washing his hands now. "Pull down your underthings, that's a good girl." His voice was showing impatience. She recognized the tone, Costa's tone sometimes.

She wanted to ask him what he was going to do, if it would hurt, but she didn't have the English words. She wished Matina was with her.

"I really must insist we hurry right along. Unless you've changed your mind. There would be no refund, you understand. I risk a great deal coming here, helping you

ladies."

"I sorry." she said in halting English. "Thank you." She stared straight ahead at a spot on the cream-coloured wall, slipped her panties off without raising her dress, and rolled her stockings down below her knees. She shoved the undergarment into her pocket, and got up onto the table. She squinted up at the bulb over her head and clenched her fists by her sides.

"Lift your skirts, my dear." She looked at what he was motioning her to do and she lifted her dress up to the tops of her knees. "Higher, please." He pointed to her hips. Trembling, she yanked it up. "That's good. Now bend your legs." She stifled a scream when he grabbed her knees and pushed them up. "Apart, my dear. Spread your legs apart." His voice grew louder. "How you ladies expect me to do my job when you won't cooperate." His hands were flat on her thighs now spreading her legs, exposing her.

She wanted to kick his hands away, to pull down her skirts, to cover herself and her shame that this man who wasn't her husband was looking at her, touching her, putting his fingers in her most private parts. Instead, remembering what she was here for, she held her breath, squeezed her eyes shut and prayed to the Virgin.

A clanking sound frightened her. She froze at the feel of something cold and metally. It was going inside her, that long metal prong, like a huge knitting needle, thrusting deep into her womb. It would break her open,

her insides would pour out, her life would be over. She held her breath, her eyes and fists as tight as she could make them, and waited. But all she felt was a prick and the cold thing being yanked out.

She opened her eyes. The doctor was at the sink, washing his hands. "You can get up now," he said. "Go home. You'll have a miscarriage."

Eleni pulled her dress down, praying fervently to the Virgin, thanking Her that she hadn't died and that whatever it was the doctor had to do was finished and she could go home. She'd understood that much of his English words.

She got off the table flushed and shaking. The doctor was rolling down his shirt sleeves. He put his jacket back on, picked up his pocket watch, glanced at it. "You're a healthy young woman," he said tucking the watch into his vest pocket. "You'll be fine." He came over and patted her shoulder. She shrank from his touch. He didn't seem to notice. "Come and see me any time." Then he left her alone in the room.

She stood as though paralyzed, uncertain of what to do next.

"Are you all right?" She looked up, relieved to hear Matina's familiar voice.

"He said I can go home."

"We'll go. How do you feel?"

"There was no pain," Eleni said. "I thought there would be pain." She pulled her panties out of her pocket.



and Matina held her steady while she slipped them on and pulled up her stockings.

"Sit in this chair for a minute," Matina said."

Eleni hung onto her. "I want to go home."

"We'll take a taxi."

"The money," Eleni began.

"I have enough."

Matina helped her with her coat and boots, and took her downstairs. "I'll go out and find a taxi."

"Don't leave me here!"

"You can't walk through all that snow!"

"I won't stay here alone!"

"All right! All right! We'll take it slowly."

Eleni walked as fast as she could, but she was still unsteady on her feet. By the time Matina found a taxi, they were both shivering from the cold.

"Are you all right?" Matina asked as they got in.

"I'm fine," Eleni said.

At practically every corner she asked again.

"Fine," Eleni repeated over and over. "Fine." She couldn't talk about the shame of having a stranger touch her in a place that was only for her husband, not even with Matina. All she wanted was to forget.

When they reached the house, Matina helped her with her coat and galoshes. Kyria Voula came out of the kitchen. The house was unusually quiet.

"How are the children?" Eleni and Matina asked, almost

in unison.

"The boys are playing in the kitchen, and the little ones are sleeping. How do you feel?" she asked Eleni.

"Fine, thank you."

"All the same, you'd better lie down."

"I'm fine," she said. "You've been very kind, Kyria Voula, but I can manage now. You'll want to be getting home."

"I'm not going anywhere," she said. "You'd better lie down."

"I have to get Costa his supper." Her husband would never forgive her if he found out that a man, even a doctor, had touched her. He'd never forgive her.

"There's plenty of time before supper," Matina said.

Eleni shook her head. It didn't matter. She had to fix her husband's meal, like a good wife.

"I'll make tea," Matina said.

The old woman shook her head. "Something stronger."

"I think there's some mavrodafni in the cupboard," Matina said.

Eleni insisted she was fine, she didn't need strong wine or tea or to lie down, but neither woman paid any attention. Matina took her upstairs, put her to bed and covered her. Kyria Voula brought up a large glass of the sweet wine, forced Eleni to drink it, and told Matina to stay with her. "Don't worry about the children," she said as she left, closing the door behind her.

Eleni tried to relax, but she couldn't stop thinking of Costa and what he would say if he knew what had gone on in that dark place. She explained to the Virgin why she had let a stranger touch her, that he was a doctor, and doctors were good people and very smart, and asked Her to please understand.

Matina wouldn't let Eleni get out of bed when the babies woke up. She took them both down to the kitchen for something to eat, and Kyria Voula went upstairs with another glass of mavrodafni for Eleni.

"No more, please," Eleni said when the woman tried to get her to swallow some of the wine.

"It'll help."

"But I'm fine. It didn't even hurt. I'm just a little tired."

"You'll start feeling something soon."

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"I didn't understand his English," Eleni said, ashamed to have to admit this.

"You'll feel cramps," Kyria Voula said, "then the baby will expel itself. It'll be like an apovoli."

"Can you tell me in English?"

"Miscarriage," she said, struggling with the unfamiliar English."

"That's the word he used." Eleni started to sit up.

"Rest, little one, rest," Kyria Voula said, gently

pushing her back down.

"I thought what he did in that room got rid of it." She couldn't refer to it as a baby. It hadn't been with her long enough for that. She put her hand to her belly. "You mean it's still there?"

"It'll be over soon. You'll see. Then everything will be fine."

Eleni felt like such a fool. She wouldn't have minded so much if it had been Matina she was admitting her ignorance to. She was used to Matina. Kyria Voula was kind and always helpful to the younger women, but she wasn't family.

The cramping started just as Matina had gone down to help Kyria Voula with the children's dinner. Eleni went into the bathroom. If she was going to start bleeding she didn't want to soil the bed.

"Are you all right?" Matina barged right in, not even knocking. Eleni was sitting on the toilet.

"Close the door, for heaven's sake."

"Has it started?"

"I don't know. I felt cramps and thought I should sit here."

"Are you bleeding?"

"I'm scared to look."

"Can't you feel?"

"Oh, leave me alone, Matina." She started to cry.

"Stop yelling at me."

"Are you just going to sit there?"

"Go away." She sniffled. Matina handed her a clean handkerchief. She waved it away.

"How about using some rags and lying down on the bed? We'll put a towel under you. That way you won't make a mess."

"What if there's a lot of blood?" She grabbed Matina. "I'm scared."

"I know, Elenáki, I know." Matina stroked her hair. "But it'll be all right. You'll see."

One especially strong cramp made Eleni wince and she hung onto the sides of the toilet with both hands. It stopped and she took a deep breath.

Kyria Voula appeared at the door with some rags. "Put these on," she told Eleni, "and go back to bed."

"No! I'll stay here." Another cramp started and she cried out.

"Come on, Elenáki. You'll feel better if you lie down."

"The children will have to use the bathroom," Kyria Voula pointed out.

The cramps were getting stronger. She had no strength left to argue and let them help her into bed. Kyria Voula whispered instructions to Matina and went back down to the

children. The cramps were coming more often now, each one stronger than the last. "It's like having a baby," Eleni gasped. Matina crooned to her and lay cool cloths on her forehead.

When she began to feel only mild discomfort, the way she always felt the first day of her monthlies, Eleni knew the worst was over.

Matina washed her and changed her, then she pulled the curtains shut and instructed her to go to sleep. Eleni didn't want to sleep. She wanted to blot out what she'd done, to get up and tend to the children, to Costa's supper, but she was so tired, and it felt so good to be pampered. She curled up in the bed and did as she was told. It was just for today, she reminded herself, just for today.

She prayed quietly to the Virgin, asking Her forgiveness if this thing that she had done was not pleasing to Her, and for the strength to face up to Costa and to her responsibilities as a wife and mother. "I love my children, Panagia, but I couldn't manage any more. You understand, don't You?"

She dozed off, lost herself in dreams, woke up dazed, slept again. Once when she opened her eyes, Costa was sitting by the side of the bed. He smiled at her and took her hands. "Matina told me what happened, Elenaki mou," he said. Eleni didn't know how to answer. He was being so kind. "It was God's will," he said, lifting her hands to kiss them, and in that gesture she believed that he'd

forgiven her, and she fell into a peaceful sleep.

The next day Matina said they'd told Costa she'd had a miscarriage and needed to spend a few days in bed.

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## CHILDREN OF BYZANTIUM

Of all the family Pavlo alone was still single. He liked it that way. On Sundays he'd have dinner at Alekos' and Matina's and play with his niece, or at Costa's and Eleni's where he'd be surrounded by their four.

No one had even mentioned marriage to him those first few years after he'd come back from the war. With what he'd been through, they'd understood that he'd want to have a little fun, but, as Matina pointed out to Eleni, the war had been over for some time now. Alekos agreed. It was one of the few things they didn't argue about.

"Why should I get married?" Pavlo said one day. They were all at Costa's and Eleni's. The men were finishing their coffee at the dining room table while the women cleared away the dishes and the children played on the living room carpet. "Your wives invite me over for delicious meals, and I have your children to entertain me."

"You need a wife of your own," Matina said. "It's not



natural."

"More newcomers have arrived from Turkey," Alekos said.

"You want to marry me off to a Turk?" Pavlo raised his eyebrows in mock horror.

"You know what I'm talking about," Alekos said. They all knew. It was an old story. Greeks had lived for centuries, from the time of Byzantium, in what the modern world called Turkey, but what every Greek knew in his heart was Greece. The city of Constantinople was its centre. No matter that the Turks had taken its largest, most elegant Church and turned it into a Mosque, or that they had changed the name of the city to Istanbul: every Greek knew it as Constantinoupoli, after the first Christian Byzantine Emperor. It was Greek culture that had given the city its flavour and Greek commercial skills that had made it a thriving centre. Greeks had even given it its modern name, Istanbul evolving from the Greek expression is tin poli, going to the city. During centuries of Turkish oppression, the Patriarch, Head of the Greek Orthodox Church throughout the world, remained firmly housed in Constantinople

It was from this Holy place that Turks had been trying to oust Greeks since the earliest days of the Ottoman Empire. Every few years another decree would be passed and more Greeks would be stripped of property and forced to leave their country. It was happening again now.

Stories of atrocities seeped out mainly as a result of letters from Greece, Canadian newspapers showing little

interest in the goings-on of the Eastern Mediterranean now now that the Great War was over. As well, news was passed on from individuals who arrived daily from Greek settlements they'd fled along the Turkish coast. Some had been able to buy their way out, while others had been forced to row away in the night to nearby Greek islands.

The handful of Greeks who now lived in Winnipeg, remembering the fear and confusion of their own arrivals, and looking forward to seeing more of their own kind, greeted the newcomers eagerly. Men helped with jobs and places to live, while women offered clothing and food. All of them looked forward to a growing sense of community, the feeling that they were no longer isolated individuals or families who didn't fit into the Canadian world. Although a few men had married xenes, foreign women, and had drifted away from the rest, most of them had no Canadian contacts outside their work. They preferred it that way.

"I could find myself a pretty little Canadian, an engleza, to marry," Pavlo said, trying to joke his way out of the discussion the way he usually did.

"Don't talk nonsense," Alekos said, serious as always when it came to the subject of his brother and marriage. "An engleza wouldn't fit in here. She'd make fun of our food, our songs, our way of speaking. Have you forgotten how it was when we first came here," he reminded his younger brother, "being called 'dirty Greek' and other names we didn't understand at first?"

The others were silent. Most of the time they didn't talk about it, but they knew what Alekos meant. Even now they were aware of whispers and could sense the unspoken criticism whenever they passed their englezi neighbours. Matina and Eleni always made sure they and their families wore nothing but clean, freshly-pressed clothing outside the house. The children played in the safety of their own enclosed back yards, far from jeering englezakia. The men knew too that those same ladies who shopped at their store and called out gaily "how's the family, Alec?" or "my what a handsome arrangements, Paul," would accept being spoken to only in a deferential manner. "Thank you, they are well, Mrs. Armstrong" or "thank you, Mrs. Johnson. What can I get for you today?"

A recent Sunday, while the families had been walking in the Public Park, they had seen Mrs. MacKenzie, one of their oldest customers. The men had been about to doff their hats in greeting, but she, no more than a few feet away, had swept by them as if they didn't even exist. The next morning, in the shop, it had been "my, what lovely peaches, Alec" and he'd smiled his cool, businessman's smile and replied "one pound or two, Mrs. MacKenzie?"

Pavlo pushed away his unfinished coffee and escaped into the living room. He sank onto the floor, grabbing at children as he fell. Delighted at the diversion, they jumped all over him, pulling him every which way, until he lay back exhausted, begging for mercy.

"Stop playing the fool, Pavlo." Alekos settled into an armchair and took out his tobacco pouch.

"You need your own wife and children," Matina said once more. She put down an empty platter she'd just picked up and took a chair near Alekos.

Eleni joined Costa on the couch. "Your life will be better with a family of your own" he said.

Pavlo sighed, dug his way around children for a cigarette. They, sensing unspoken adult rules they didn't understand, slid off him, edged away and followed each other out of the room and up the stairs. Pavlo got up from the floor, brushed off his pants, and took the other armchair. "You've found someone. I suppose I should have expected it." He lit a cigarette and waited.

"Do you recall meeting Vasili?" Alekos asked. "He arrived from Constantinople last month." Pavlo did. The man had come to the store, spent time in the back with Alekos and been given help with lodgings and work. He had dropped in a few times since then. "Vasili has two sisters," Alekos said.

"Ah. I have a choice then!"

"Will you take this seriously!" Alekos rolled and unrolled his cigarette paper around the tobacco, which kept falling loose.

"I spoke to him myself, Pavlo," Costa put in. "He seems like a nice sort."

"That's all very well, but have you met the sisters?"

"They arrive next week."

"So. I have a week of freedom."

"Don't you want to get married, Pavlo?" Eleni asked.

"Someday," he said, not looking at her. "Not now." He shifted in his chair, took out another cigarette.

"Someday?" Matina said. "You're over thirty. Soon no one will want you."

"Costa was over thirty," Pavlo said, "and he did very well for himself."

"And I suppose you think Alekos didn't!"

"That's not what I meant!"

"Stop it, you two." Alekos' voice cut into their squabbling. "All we ask, Pavlo, is that you meet the family. You may find you like the young lady."

"I thought there were two."

"The oldest has already been spoken for," Costa said.

"In Brandon."

Up to now Pavlo had been able to joke his way out of these marriage discussions, but this time they seemed more determined. He'd have to go through with the meeting, though he knew it would be a waste of time.

Matina set the dining table with her blue embroidered cloth, a bowl of yellow and white chrysanthemums, and her good china. She added long-stemmed glasses and a decanter

of the red wine Alekos and Costa made every fall. Platters of baklava and Greek shortbread covered the sideboard, along with the new demitasse cups for Turkish coffee.

Alekos, dressed in his best suit and tie, welcomed Pavlo into the kitchen and handed him a glass of wine. "From the special barrel," he said, touching his brother's glass with his own. "For a special occasion." Pavlo downed his glass in one gulp. Alekos poured him another. By the time Costa and Eleni arrived the bottle was half empty. Eleni smiled at Pavlo and disappeared into the dining room where Matina was still fussing over the table. Alekos filled a glass for Costa and they started talking about the difficulties the new immigrants from Asia Minor were having. It didn't take them long to mention Vasili and his sisters.

Pavlo, who up to now had stayed out of the conversation, spoke up. "Did he tell you how they got away?"

Alekos and Costa exchanged glances. "The parents sold whatever they had to buy passage money," Alekos said. "They knew if the Turks captured Vasili he'd end up in the army and they'd never see him again. As for the girls, you know very well what would've happened to them at the hands of Turkish soldiers."

"We all have our sad tales." Matina was standing in the doorway.

"Stop it, Matina." Alekos' voice was sharp.

"I wish you two wouldn't quarrel on my account," Pavlo said.

"We're not quarreling." Matina went over to her husband and perched on the edge of his chair. He, in turn, put an arm around her waist. "You see?" She quickly disentangled herself and went into the back pantry.

Pavlo was used to the harsh words that flew between Alekos and Matina, and he knew that was all they were, words, but still he hated hearing them. It had begun to bother him after he'd come home from the war. Being over there had changed him in ways he couldn't talk about. Watching men die around him day after day while he waited for his own death hadn't been the worst of it. It had been the whimpering and the crying during the night: fearful men, himself included, huddling like babies, ashamed, yet unable to be brave.

When it had ended and he'd come home, he'd immediately told Alekos and Costa he wanted to sell flowers in the store, along with the fruits and vegetables. They'd thought it strange, but humoured him, and had been surprised at his success. He'd started staying out late, partying every night. None of it had been enough. In the early morning hours he'd wake up sweating, startled by a dream he couldn't remember; the bed would be wet, and it would be like those times he'd lost control in the trenches. Ashamed, he'd try to hide the sheet, but Matina would grab it from him and shush him, gently, the way she'd done when he'd been a

child.

What she didn't know, what no one knew, was that he still had an occasional accident. It was why he never let a girl stay the night, and why he'd vowed never to marry. He couldn't confide that to anyone, not even to Matina, who at times was more like his mother than his brother's wife.

She'd been on the boat with him, Alekos, and Costa, and at the end of the voyage they'd gone on to Winnipeg together. Pavlo, a young ten year old, had accepted Matina without reservation, never questioning how she had come to be part of their lives.

When she'd had a baby after so many years, Alekos had turned into a crazy man. He'd filled the apartment with flowers and waltzed the newborn infant around in his arms all night. For days he'd stayed closeted in their bedroom with his wife and baby.

They'd gone back to their old bickering ways soon after Matina was up and around, and then, the small apartment overflowing with children, and money coming in more steadily, the two couples had decided it was time to separate, each moving into a new home.

And now they were insisting it was time Pavlo did the same -- married, had children, settled into his own family life.

Alekos was pouring the last of the wine when Matina rushed in. "They're here," she said. "Coming up the walk." The men all looked up at her. "We can't let them find you



in the kitchen!" she cried. "Costa: get inside with your wife. Alekos: answer the door."

"And me?" Pavlo asked. "Should I stand on my head?"

"Just behave yourself," she said, pushing him into the living room.

Thanks to the moving pictures, they were all aware of the new flapper look, but none of the Greek women had had the nerve to cut her hair or wear her skirts more than a few inches above the ankle, and there were muffled gasps of surprise from Eleni and Matina when the young women appeared with bobbed hair and dresses cut almost to their knees. Even stranger, they both wore hats with such heavy veils it was impossible to make out their features.

Pavlo was curious about the veils and watched as Maria, who turned out to be the oldest and engaged, pushed hers up when it came time to sit at the table. Anna, the one they'd chosen for him, barely moved it higher than her mouth. All he could see was her lips pinched tight, probably from trying to balance that foolish veil on the tip of her nose. He wondered if beneath it she was as pretty as Eleni. Not that it would make any difference. A good meal, and a chance to drink the wine Alekos' kept for holidays, was all he expected out of this evening.

Eleni and Matina were up and down constantly, urging food and drink on everyone, at the same time joining in the reminiscences about the old country: songs remembered from childhood; favourite foods impossible to find in Canada --

fresh figs, goat's cheese, real olive oil; the smell of the sea, of pine groves, of Church on Easter Sunday. For the newcomers, these were recent memories, but for the rest of them, so long in Canada, when they spoke of the past it was as though out of a dream.

Pavlo, who could think only of the horror of the lives they'd all left behind, found it hard to join in, and spent his time watching the girl, Anna, who hardly said a word. Most of the time she kept her head bowed. She barely touched her food.

The others went on to talk about life in Canada: the huge Eaton store that sold everything; the black Ford cars that even people like them could afford; the parties the small Greek Community, held on Sunday night; the Greek School on Saturdays where the children could learn their language. There was no church though, Matina told them.

"Not enough of us," Alekos explained.

"Where do you have your gatherings, your Greek school classes?" Maria asked.

"At people's homes," Matina said.

"Maria finished her studies at the English College in Constantinople," Vasili said. "Perhaps she could teach the children in Brandon."

"There are even fewer Greeks there than in Winnipeg," Costa said about the nearby prairie town. "Hardly any children."

Matina turned to Anna. "Did you study English?" The

girl nodded. Pavlo looked at her with interest. The Greeks he knew, except for the school teacher who had gone to high school in Greece and worked as a clerk in a shop, were like himself and his brother, men who'd had little, if any, schooling in Greece. Their women were from the same sort of background. Now here were these Greeks from Turkey who could afford to send even their daughters away to school.

"Anna's studies were interrupted by the troubles," Vasili explained.

"Vasili was to have started at the University this year," Maria said. "Perhaps he can go here." They all looked at the young man, whom they knew worked as a dishwasher at a Greek restaurant downtown, and wondered what sort of foolish dreams these three harboured. No one of their kind ever considered such a thing as schooling. They were too busy working to earn a living. University was for the likes of the MacKenzies and Armstrongs who shopped in their store, not for them.

Pavlo was fascinated nonetheless. He wanted to ask them to speak in English, to see whether they'd sound like Canadians or more like the British he'd heard overseas, but he knew how Alekos felt about English being spoken in his home.

When they were gone, he expected Alekos to be critical of those educated young ladies, so much above them, but all Alekos wanted to know was what Pavlo thought of Anna.

"That heavy veil was out of place," Matina said, before

Pavlo had a chance to open his mouth. "Hanging down all over her face like that."

"It might be fashionable where she comes from," Alekos said.

"She was hiding something," Matina said.

"What are you on about now!" Alekos accused her.

Matina scowled at her husband, picked up two of the tiny demitasse cups and disappeared into the kitchen. Eleni followed her.

"Well?" Alekos prodded his brother.

"Couldn't we try a little Canadian-style courting?" Pavlo asked, trying one last time to turn it all into a joke.

Alekos was having none of it. "You know that isn't how things are done."

"In Greece, Alekos. This is Canada. And that family speaks English. They're different from us, educated. Maybe they're more like Canadians than Greeks." He got up and began pacing. "What do you think, Costa?"

"Greeks are Greeks," Costa said. "No matter where they come from."

"And we must band together against the foreigners," Pavlo muttered.

"In business you can be Paul and speak English, but in your home you are Greek," his brother replied.

Pavlo knew it was useless to try to talk to Alekos once he got that rigid look on his face.

A few days later Pavlo was in his car on his way to Matina's. She'd refused to tell him what she wanted, but had insisted he be there at two sharp. He checked his watch and stepped harder on the gas pedal. She probably wanted to question him about the girl, and that might be a good thing, force him to admit openly to his fears. Matina would find something to say to Alekos.

She was waiting for him at the front door when he pulled up, waved at him to stay where he was, and ran down the walk. "Turn right at Portage Avenue," she said as she got in. "I'll direct you from there."

"Matina, what's all this about?"

"The sister's fiancé is in town for the afternoon and they're going shopping for furniture. The brother is at work." Pavlo made no sense out of what Matina was saying.

"The sister never let her get a word out," Matina said.

"Didn't you notice?"

"She might just be naturally quiet," Pavlo said.

"Oof, you're as bad as your brother sometimes."

He should've stopped the car right then, told Matina they were all wasting their time. She'd understand. Yet he was curious. He wanted to see the girl again, find out what she really looked like, and what, if anything, lay behind the veil. A brief visit wouldn't do any harm.

At the boarding house the girl opened the door to their knock, but drew back when she saw Pavlo, and he realized she'd been expecting only Matina. She covered her confusion quickly and invited them both into the tiny sitting room. Pavlo watched her as she rushed about, holding out a plate of sweets, then glasses of liqueur, finally sitting down. She wasn't beautiful, but she had nice features, certainly nothing that needed to be hidden. In fact, she was every bit as pretty as Eleni.

"Pavlo wasn't busy this afternoon, so he came with me," Matina said. "I hope you don't mind."

The girl shook her head, held her hands firmly on her lap. She glanced from one to the other, then down at the floor. Pavlo felt sorry for her. "Would you like to go for a drive?" he asked, not knowing he was going to say the words until they were out of his mouth.

She jumped up, ran from the room, Matina following, and Pavlo sat in dismay. That was the sort of thing he'd say to a Canadian girl. He should have known better. He'd probably offended her.

A long time seemed to pass. He couldn't imagine what they were doing in there. Finally they came back in, Matina with her arm around the younger girl's shoulder. "Anna has something to tell you," Matina prodded.

"I can't ... you said ..." The girl was flushed. She looked as though she was about to bolt again.

"Can't you ever leave people alone, Matina!" She was

really pushing things, first dragging him here against his will, then trying to force the poor girl to speak when she obviously didn't want to.

"Matina has been very kind," Anna said, confusing Pavlo even more. Matina smiled, disappeared through a door, and he was left alone with the girl.

She sat down across from him. "I can't marry you," she said, blurting out the words. "I'm sorry. My brother arranged everything. My sister said not to speak. But I must."

Pavlo wasn't prepared for this. He had thought he was the one to make the decision. It hadn't occurred to him that the girl might not want to marry him.

"You must tell my brother you do not wish this marriage," she said. "it is the best way."

"I should have a reason," Pavlo replied.

"I am not pretty enough."

"You are very pretty."

She pursed her lips, frowned. "You can make something up," she said.

She was intriguing him now. "Tell me why you don't want to marry me." He couldn't believe what he was saying. Until a few minutes ago, he had been the one trying to think of a way out. Now he was acting as though he wanted her.

She stared at him. "I can't," she said, jumped up and was out the door again, conferring with Matina no doubt about what to say next, how to let him down. She was

probably on the look-out for a wealthy educated man to give her what she'd been used to in the old country. An ignorant shop-keeper wasn't good enough for her. A simple Greek wasn't good enough for her. By the time Matina came back, he'd worked himself into a state that hovered between irritation and out and out anger.

"Anna can't marry you, or any man, she says, because of something that happened on the ship. She thinks she's not worthy of a husband." Matina paused. "Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"She should have thought of that before," he said.

"Not after."

"You don't understand." Matina pushed hard at his chest. He staggered for a moment, caught himself.

"What's gotten into you?"

"She didn't go willingly," Matina cried. "She was forced."

"So she says," he snapped. He might not know about educated Greek girls from Turkey, but he knew about women. He'd known enough of those.

"I believe her," Matina said quietly.

"Then you're a fool."

"So was your brother."

She stood silently for a moment while the impact of what she was telling him sunk in. On the boat, she'd been alone, then later she'd come with them, as though she belonged. And neither she nor Alekos had ever talked about



her past.

"Your brother believed me. He treated me with respect and with love," she said. "I was frightened and alone, and when he offered to marry me, I never thought of refusing because of what some other man had done. I suppose I was such a child I didn't know that some people would say it was my fault." She put on her coat, her hat, her gloves, and stood in front of him. "Are you coming?"

He waved her away.

His brother, who made so much of his Greekness, had done what no Greek man would ever be expected to do: he'd married a girl who'd been touched by someone else. Not only that, he'd put up with her sharp tongue all these years. Pavlo knew if he were ever to marry -- and of course he couldn't, but if he did -- it would be to a simple girl, a nice girl, a girl like Eleni. A man should settle for nothing less in a wife. Even if it wasn't the girl's fault. No, he could never do what Alekos had done.

She came out then. It was curious how she looked no different, after what he'd learned about her.

She stood in the doorway. "I'm sorry," she said.

"It's not your fault." He hadn't meant to say that. Her story had nothing to do with him. He'd be away as soon he could politely leave. He'd say that he couldn't keep Matina waiting: she's probably sitting in the car, he'd say. He stood up, put on his coat, wrapped his scarf around his neck, picked up his hat, fingered it round and round the

brim, then sat down again.

"Tell me about the college you went to in Constantinople," he said.

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## A BIT OF MAGIC

"I told Alekos I could look for a job," Matina said. "You can imagine how he reacted to that."

Eleni lay down her sewing. "Even if he allowed it," she said thoughtfully, "what would you do?"

"I don't know!" Matina sank back on the couch, bit at the edge of a fingernail. "Maybe Anna has the answer in those cups of hers." She turned to her sister-in-law who was coming into the living room with a tray of Turkish coffee.

Eleni pushed aside a pile of English magazines and children's books to make room on the coffee table.

"I offered to help out," Anna said. She set down the tray and handed around the coffee. "Pavlo refused to discuss it."

"He's right?" Eleni said. "You have small children to worry about."

Matina put down her coffee. "Whereas you and I,

Eleni, with ours at school all day, have plenty of time."

She twisted a strand of hair around her finger. "There must be something we're good for," she said, "something we can do. Even without Anna's education."

"Costa says things will get better soon," Eleni said.

"How long have they all been saying that!" Matina cried.

At the beginning, the depression had been just a word to explain why they couldn't have the little extras they'd become used to over the years, but lately it had started to touch them in places they understood. Darning underwear and socks that were almost threadbare, layering newspaper inside shoes that were worn thin at the soles, frequent meals of fasolada, the bean soup they all knew from earlier years in Greece, were daily reminders of the poverty they'd thought was behind them.

"Alekos complains every day about the rich customers at the store, with their maids and big cars, who won't pay their bills," Matina said. "When I ask him why he keeps selling to them, he says they owe so much he has to or they'll never pay up."

"I don't understand," Eleni said. She put down her coffee, picked up her sewing again.

"Do you think I do? We fight about it all the time. That and everything else."

Matina couldn't sit still, fidgeting with her coffee cup, turning it round and round in her fingers, watching

Eleni calmly darning one of her son's undershirts for the dozenth time, Anna quietly sipping her coffee. Their complacency exasperated her. She was angry with Alekos much of the time as well, the way he'd criticize her whenever she tried to talk to him about money or the possibility of her taking a job; what could she do, he'd say sarcastically, except go out and clean houses; or else he'd turn pompous and announce that he would never allow his wife to work.

"Turn over your cup," Anna said to Matina. "I'll have time to read at least one before Mike wakes up."

"All right. All right." She finished up the coffee, put the cup upside down on the saucer, turned it three times, made a wish, shook the cup to make sure the grounds were well drained, and handed it over.

Anna placed the cup on the palm of one hand and rotated it slowly with the fingers of the other, all the while staring down at the blackened shapes formed by the coffee. For all her scoffing, Matina couldn't help but get caught up in the aura of mystery created by her sister-in-law as she gazed solemnly into the turning cup. It was all nonsense, of course. Matina knew exactly what was coming next. Anna would stop the turning and point dramatically at the cup, as if, all at once, it was magically made clear to her and she could actually gaze beyond the coffee and into the future.

"Enough theatrics," Matina said. "Get on with it."

"Wait," Anna said sharply. "I have to be sure."

Matina let out a sigh, waited as long as she could. "Do you see a job or money in there?" she asked finally.

Anna pointed. "There, at the side. Do you see the bird? It's almost at the rim."

"All I see," Matina said staring in at the tiny cup, "is the big clump of grounds at the bottom. Doesn't that mean worry?"

"Yes, but see how the worry disappears? The bird is taking it away."

"Tell me more nice things," Matina said, settling in.

"I tell you only what the cup says."

Anna found letters and good omens, prophesied much activity, and said Matina's wish would come true. "I see you all dressed up," she said at one point. "A masquerade."

"Oh, good, a party."

Anna shook her head very slowly. "You'll be the only one in costume."

Mike's cries broke into their mood. Anna put down the cup, smiled normally once again, and went to get her son.

Matina was too restless to go straight home after she and Eleni left Anna's. She went walking instead, down one residential street and up another until she was practically lost. She realized where she was when she reached a cluster

of small shops. In the days when they'd had their car, they'd sometimes driven through the area. She paused to admire an exquisite white crêpe evening gown at Belle's French Fashions and an enormous bouquet of deep red roses that filled the window of McClary's Flower Shop, but walked quickly by the display of imported foods at Smith and Son. A group of ladies in fur capes and feather hats walking out of Morgan's Restaurant and Tea Room across the street caught her attention. When they disappeared, laughing, around the corner, she crossed over. She was curious to see inside, but heavy curtains covered the windows. A sign by the door read: "Tea-Cup Reading by Madame Rosa: Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 2 - 4".

All the way home, Matina thought about what she'd stumbled across, and told herself that if she were superstitious she'd take it as an omen. Still, she hardly slept that night, and the next morning, as soon as Alekos had gone to work and Irini to school, she left for Eleni's. On the way, she stopped at the grocery store and bought a small packet of tea.

"English tea," she explained to Eleni.

"How do you make it?"

"Like camomili, I imagine."

Eleni put a heaping spoonful of the tea into a saucepan, added cold water and put it on the stove. When it came to a boil, she turned the heat down, added some honey, and let the mixture simmer.

"Don't use that," Matina said as Eleni took the strainer out of the cutlery drawer.

"What's gotten into you?" Eleni asked.

"Make sure lots of leaves get into the cups," Matina said. Eleni poured as instructed and they watched the leaves settle at the bottom of each cup.

"Are you going to tell me what you're up to?" Eleni asked as they waited for the tea to cool down enough to drink.

"We're going to tell fortunes," Matina said.

"We need coffee grounds for that."

"The englezi read tea leaves. They even have shops where you can go to drink tea and then have a Madame somebody or other tell your fortune." She looked impatiently at Eleni. "You've seen them in passing."

"You didn't go inside one!"

"Oh, don't look so worried."

"I am worried. You've been acting very strangely lately. I wouldn't put it past you to go into one of those places just to make Alekos angry." They both knew how their husbands felt about women going into restaurants or tea rooms unaccompanied -- it was something only xenes, foreigners, did.

"Drink," Matina said, handing her the cup.

"Fine. We won't talk about it. I'd just like to know what you're up to." She sipped the tea, made a face, and pushed her cup away. "The englezi have no taste," she



said.

"Don't be fussy." Matina drank and winced. They tried adding more honey but in the end had to throw out the bitter stuff in order to get at the leaves.

They clumped together in Matina's cup, but spread themselves around in Eleni's. "There, you see, they make different patterns," Matina cried happily. "Let's find letters and trips and bird and things now."

"You've gone crazy, Matina," Eleni said finally.

"No, listen, I have a wonderful idea, and you're going to help me." It seemed reasonable, she explained to Eleni, that if telling fortunes was as easy as Anna seemed to make it, and if the englezi offered tea cup reading in their stores, why not dress up in a costume, read tea cups in a restaurant, and get paid for it?

"You intend to turn yourself into a gyftisa, a gypsy, and go out among strangers!" Eleni cried. "What will Alekos say?"

"You don't think I'd tell him!"

For every sensible argument Eleni could think of against the wild scheme, Matina had an answer: no one would ever find out; the children needed new clothes; Christmas was coming; but most important of all, they needed the money.

Eleni gave up trying to talk sense to Matina, peered at the leaves stuck to the bottom of her cup and handed it over. "All right, Madam Gyftisa, what do you see?"

Matina laughed and hugged Eleni. "I see a secret admirer, a mysterious stranger, sudden wealth, good luck in the form of, ah, let's see now, what is it, ah, it's getting clearer, yes, that's it ... the letter M!" She paused dramatically, looked up. "The letter M," she went on most solemnly, "will be important to you. A person who's name begins with that initial will bring you great wealth." She put down the cup. "How's that?"

"How will you say all those things in English?"

"I'll be the mysterious lady from the mysterious east, like in the moving pictures. They all speak funny English, too."

"You'll need a special outfit, then, mysterious lady."

"That's where you come in, Elenaki." Matina smiled sweetly. "You're so good at sewing."

After a week of practising her fortune-telling on Anna and standing still for Eleni who sewed and fitted the costume for the mysterious lady of the east, Madame Zolta was ready to make her appearance.

"What does it mean?" Eleni asked.

"Zolta? I don't know. Nothing. It sounds oriental. Better than Madame Rosa. Very dull."

"You won't be dull in that outfit." Eleni surveyed her handiwork. Bits and pieces of materials from worn out

dresses and panels from curtains that had strangely lost some of their fulness had been worked into an ensemble that resembled nothing less than the most spectacular Hollywood Arabian Nights outfit.

Matina twirled around Eleni's living room bedecked in a pair of emerald-green Turkish-like balloon pants and a jewel-encrusted black velvet vest with flouncing red sleeves. A long scarf of black chiffon turbanned her head then draped around the lower part of her face.

"We need to make up the eyes," Eleni said, scanning her creation. "And we forgot shoes."

They rummaged in closets and trunks until Eleni found a pair of purple Chinese slippers embroidered with black and silver thread.

"Perfect," Matina cried.

They made up the eyes, lining them heavily in black, then Eleni held out the dark red velvet cloak that had once been Matina's hall curtains, and Matina stepped inside.

Once Madame Zolta was outfitted to their satisfaction, Matina decided an all-black turbanned outfit would be perfect for Madame's servant.

"Oh, no! Not me!"

"Elenaki?"

"Don't Elenaki me. I said I'd help with the sewing, that's all!"

"No one will recognize us."

"I can't go into a strange place full of foreigners."

"We'll be together. I'll do the talking."

"What if Costa finds out?"

"How could he find out? Our own mothers wouldn't recognize us in such outfits!"

Eleni crossed herself. "May the Virgin forgive me." }

Matina jumped up and kissed her.

Madame Zolta, swathed in her red velvet cloak and heavily veiled, walked into Morgan's Restaurant and Tea Room the following Thursday afternoon at two o'clock sharp. She was accompanied by her maid, cloaked and turbaned in black. The maid carried a small black satchel.

Madame asked to speak to Mr. Morgan. He seemed a bit taken aback when he saw the pair, but he sat them down at a table in the rear of the dimly-lit restaurant.

"I already got a dame who tells fortunes," he said.

Matina shrugged out of her cloak the way she'd been practicing and lowered her eyelids. "I am coming two days only," she said in her best Greta Garbo voice. "Tuesday. Thursday."

Morgan pulled a cigar out of his inside coat pocket and twirled it in his fingers. "Tea cup reading every day," he said thoughtfully. Matina held her breath. Eleni stared at the table top. He snipped off the end of the cigar, put it to his lips, licked it around then took it out again.

"Yeah, well, I guess it wouldn't hurt. Tell ya what, ladies, we'll give it a try. Two cents a cup." Matina nodded. Eleni sat as though frozen. "What's your names?"

"Madame Zolta," Matina answered grandly, then gestured toward Eleni. "My maid-servant."

"I only pay for one."

"My servant attends me."

"Sure, okay ladies, whatever you like." He shoved his cigar back in his pocket. "You can start today," he said and left them at the table.

Matina nudged Eleni, who was clasping the satchel. "Take out the cloths," she whispered. Eleni opened the bag and took out a piece of green embroidered material fringed in black. She spread it over the table top. Then she took out a small square of pale rose silk and covered the table lamp with that. She closed the satchel, put it at her feet, and the two women waited in silence.

In a matter of minutes, Morgan was back at their side. "What the ... what's this?"

"I will tell the fortunes now," Madame Zolta said. "I have prepared."

"Not here lady. You gotta go table to table. And get rid of those." He pointed at the pieces of material covering his lamp and his table.

"Madame Zolta cannot be without special cloths," Matina said, "carried in special bag by maid-servant." She tried to assume the look she'd seen on Anna's face whenever she

was getting into the mood to read cups.

Morgan walked away muttering. They saw him go and speak to the three waitresses clustered at the front, shrug and settle himself behind the counter.

Matina waited nervously, fingering the fringes of the tablecloth, afraid someone would recognize her, worried that she'd get confused during a reading. Eleni sat in silence. The two women watched for customers, but all they saw coming in from the autumn cold were zevgarakia, couples who slid into the dark, high-backed booths lining the side walls of the restaurant. The round centre tables with petal-like lamps hanging overhead seemed to be reserved for the few ladies who came in.

The afternoon was almost over before two elderly ladies, one in a green jersey and matching hat, the other in a mauve print with a black hat, walked up to Madame Zolta's table, overturned teacups in hand. Eleni jumped up and took her place behind Matina as they had practiced, and Matina gave each of the ladies what she hoped was a good afternoon's worth of heavily-accented fortunes.

With their four pennies between them, they trudged home later that afternoon.

"It'll be better next time, you'll see," Matina said.

"I was so nervous. I'm glad the place is dark."

"Don't worry. We don't know any of those people. They're mostly rich ladies anyway."

"What about the zevgarakia?"

"They're too busy with each other to notice us."

The following Tuesday, the sign outside the Tea Room included a note about Madame Zolta, and that day the two women went home with two nickels between them.

"You see, it's working!" Matina cried.

Eleni was still nervous.

In only a few weeks ladies were lining up awaiting their turns to have the fascinating Madame Zolta look into their futures. Soon Morgan began advertising her as Clairevoyante Extraordinaire. He suggested she begin reading daily.

"Madame Rosa?" Matina asked.

"There's plenty for two." Morgan said fingering his unlit cigar.

"We will share?" Matina asked. Morgan nodded "Not the two cents," she added.

"Don't worry lady. You'll get your full cut."

"Madame Rosa, she go to tables?"

"Yeah."

"I go to tables." Matina was feeling more comfortable now as Madame Zolta; each day it became easier to make up pretty stories for the well-dressed ladies who sat across from her in the soft lights of the Tea Room.

On the way home, she explained Morgan's offer to Eleni.

who'd only understood a few of his English words. "You don't have to come and play servant any more," Matina said.

"I don't mind," she said, but she did mind and they both knew it. Matina was her dearest friend, and the extra moneyp made a difference, but as much as she tried she couldn't stop worrying about Costa, certain that he'd come home one night with an accusation she would be unable to deny.

"I know you hate it, Elenaki." Matina linked their arms. "It's all right."

"I don't want to leave you alone."

"Servant must obey," Matina said in her Madame Zolta voice, and refused to discuss it further.

By the time winter set in, Madame Zolta had been at Morgan's Restaurant and Tea Room long enough so that all the children, Matina's, Eleni's and Anna's, had new woolen vests underwear and socks. Their husbands didn't notice, nor did they realize that fresh yarn rather than old was being knit into sweaters, mitts and scarves. It was amazing, they were told, how one little soup bone could make such a meaty soup.

Husbands, Matina claimed, were easily fooled. It was a Sunday evening and they were in Anna's kitchen finishing up the dinner dishes. Eleni wondered if it might not be a good idea to tell them the truth.



"You can't mean that," Matina said. She stopped wiping a glass and stared at Eleni.

"They might find it amusing, you turning yourself into a gypsy and telling fortunes," Eleni said. "They know how you like to dress up."

Often, at parties, Matina would disappear, only to come back outfitted in some outlandish costume and start to perform. Sometimes she'd dance, other times she'd mimic what she'd seen in the moving pictures. Alekos was one of the first to laugh at her antics.

"You talk as though it's the same thing!" Matina snapped. "You know they have no sense of humour when it comes to their wives doing anything other than being their wives."

"She's right," Anna said.

"Not Pavlo," Eleni said. "He's always been so, I don't know, modern, I think."

"He is when we're alone, at home, and with the children. But Pavlo won't go against his brother."

"And we all know how stubborn my dear Alekos is."

"That's why I admire you, Matina," Anna said.

"You admire me?" Matina sank onto a chair. "You, with all your schooling?"

Anna threw her washcloth into the sink. "You're the one who had the courage to go out and do something that had to be done," she said. "You're never afraid, Matina. That's a wonderful trait."

In all the years they'd known her, Anna had never spoken so passionately. Eleni was silent as she put the dishes away in the cupboard. Even Matina, rarely at a loss for words, didn't know what to say. Her only refuge was her role. "I'm not afraid to make a fool of myself," she said with a laugh, "if that's something to be proud of."

Money was slowly piling up at home, well-hidden among the linens where no one but Matina probed. Every time she'd add a few coins or bills to her collection she'd think about how good the holidays would be this year. She'd find a way to explain the extra money to Alekos. The few dollars she made were nothing compared to the huge bills he had to contend with, but she found comfort in the fact that she was helping in some small way by not having to ask for everyday things. It was even getting easier with him now; he was still preoccupied with business, but there were fewer fights.

In the meantime, it gave her pleasure to appear at the Tea Room in her Arabian Nights costume, being sought out by well-dressed ladies. Her early fears of stumbling over her English, or of making the same speech more than once to the englezes, who all looked alike, never happened. In time it even became easier for her to vary the stories. It was as though, from the time she'd begun donning her strange

apparel, her imagination had been given free rein, and tales of mysterious strangers, of adoring lovers and jealous dark-haired women, were easily woven out of the patterns she saw in the cups.

It amazed Matina, who hated the cold and went out in winter only when it was absolutely necessary, that so many ladies would brave the blustery weather merely to have their fortunes told. The couples who favoured the darkened booths didn't seem daunted by the cold either. Each time she glanced over at them, huddling together, oblivious to everything but each other, a wave of nostalgia for the early days with Alekos overcame her, but she quickly dismissed the past and returned to the important business of spinning tales.

On one especially bitter and windy day not one lady was waiting for Madame Zolta when she walked in, something that hadn't happened since the first few times. Matina sat at her back table telling herself it had finally turned cold enough to keep even her most loyal customers away, while arguing back that they may well have tired of her and her silly stories, until she realized that what was really bothering her was that she didn't want to stop appearing as Madame Zolta. It was no longer just the money they sorely needed that drew her to the Tea Room, or even the excitement of being someone else for a few hours every day, it was being admired and sought out by these englezes who, with all their riches, still needed someone like her to weave a bit

of magic into their lives.

To get her mind off these confusing thoughts, she concentrated on the couples. They were mostly young, but an older man with a youngish girlfriend caught her eye. The man had his back to her and a hat covered his head, but she could tell he was old from the way he hunched his back. The girl was pretty in a modern sort of way with her short, sleek hairdo, and a hat perched on the side of her head. She held a cigarette casually between enameled finger nails. Matina wondered about the man's wife; he surely had a wife; she was probably at home tending to the children, if she wasn't in another Tea Room hearing about a mythical secret admirer.

A few ladies mercifully appeared, shaking the snow off their fur collars as they came in, and soon the room was filled with the aroma of brewing tea. Matina quickly dismissed both her fears of being forgotten and the casual love-affairs around her, concentrating instead on her paying clients. She flowed from table to table collecting her tickets, offering dreams of romance to warm up the day.

She was at a table with three ladies, tea cup in hand, when laughter intruded from behind. She turned at the infectious sound. It was the modern girl with the older man. He stood up then and turned, and for a moment, for a brief moment, even in her shock, she saw clearly how youthful the girl's laughter made him.

Then in an instant he was an old man again, an ugly

old man, and she wanted to rush up and strike out at his gloating, leering, disgusting face, and tear at the girl, at her grinning young face, and at his, his stupid, stubborn, hateful old man's face, that was hers, hers for over thirty years, since they were children, lovers, poor together and happy, that pitiful aging man, no different from other aging men, yet she'd thought he was, more fool she, aging woman spinning dreams for other foolish women.

Matina never went back to the Tea Room. She burned the costume and refused to talk about any of it with Anna or Eleni. At Christmas the house was filled with the fragrance of roasting birds and honey-soaked delicacies, and at New Year's St. Basil left many presents for the children. When Alekos asked how she managed it all, she told him she'd been saving up and went on to talk of other things.

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## ARRANGEMENTS

Angela switched her weight to one leg.

"Stand straight," Eleni said. "I have to get this hem even."

Angela squirmed, then planted her feet more firmly on the stool. From where she was standing she could look out the kitchen window at the lilac bushes in the back yard. They were in full bloom now, just in time for the wedding. Irene was having what she'd always wanted, lilac-coloured bridesmaid dresses with a slightly darker shade for Angela as maid of-honour; when it was her turn, Angela's attendants would all wear the same shade of cornflower blue and carry yellow daffodils:

"Turn," Eleni told her daughter. "Slowly."

Angela did as she was told.

"This should be your wedding dress I'm fitting," Eleni said as she smoothed the folds of taffeta. "Not a bridesmaid's dress."

"Maid-of-honour, Mama"

"Still not the bride."

"Oh, Mama, don't start."

"Dont, 'oh, Mama' me. You show no interest, no interest at all."

"When I meet the right man ..."

"The right man!" She was so fussy, this one wasn't right, that one; it wasn't as though there were many available men to choose from; Eleni couldn't seem to make her daughter understand. "Your Papa knows what's best, like my Papa did, but do you listen!"

"That was in the olden days, Mama," Angela said. "When marriages were arranged."

"No one forced me to marry your Papa," Eleni said.

"But I listened to my parents, and they were right. Your Papa is a good man."

"I know, Mama."

Eleni put in the last pin, then stood up and looked critically at her daughter. "I don't know why you let Irini talk you into wearing purple. It drains you of colour."

"It's lilac, Mama."

"We'll have to put a little rouge on your cheeks."

"Papa won't like it." When she was sixteen, Angela had appeared at the dinner table one Sunday night wearing powder and lip rouge and he'd made her go upstairs and wash it off. Her brothers had laughed and said it didn't matter how much guck she put on her face she was still a sourpuss. She

hated them. Except for Steve. Even though he teased sometimes, he was never as bad as Paul and Tim, who seemed to take great pleasure in making her life miserable.

"We'll use very little. He won't notice."

"She's driving me crazy." Irene shifted the phone to her other ear.

"Mine's no better," Angela said.

"You're not the one walking down the aisle next week."

"Don't rub it in. I get enough of that here. You should hear my mother: Irini is a whole year younger than you and she's getting married. When I was your age I had fifteen kids."

"All I hear from mine is how lucky I am."

"You are. Once you and George are married you won't have to listen to all that."

"Are you kidding? She'll be over every day, telling me what to do!"

"Not at night though," Angela whispered.

"Listen, I have to go. I'm supposed to be setting the table."

"What're you wearing tonight?"

"Don't know. Don't care."

This wasn't exactly true. Irene knew exactly what she was wearing; she just didn't want to talk about it, or



anything else." Her mother had picked out the dress and the jewelry, much the way she had picked out possible husbands, with an eye for what she thought suited her daughter.

Though her mother had been parading eligible young -- and sometimes not so young -- Greek men through their dining-room battlefield steadily since her sixteenth birthday two years earlier, George had been the first to show any serious interest. The others had taken their meals, talked with her father, praised her mother's cooking, and hardly paid any attention to her. George, who'd been invited over with his parents and some of their relatives, had seemed as uncomfortable as she. When he'd called the next day and asked her to a movie -- her first date -- she'd been amazed, her mother ecstatic.

"Let's go out," Irene said.

"I thought you were helping your mother."

"All I have to do is finish setting the table.

Everything else has been ready for ages." She shifted the phone again. "Come on, Angie."

"Harmon's?"

"Okay."

Matina had been cooking for three days. Chickens were ready for roasting along with artichokes; fish had been poached and boned for the first course; homemade bread was

cooling on the kitchen counter, while cheese, olives, pickles and the ingredients for two kinds of salad were in the refrigerator.

She came out of the kitchen and surveyed the dining room. Melomacarena and baklava were set out on the buffet for dessert, along with bottles of sweet mavrodafni for the ladies and the stronger metaxa brandy for the men. A decanter of Alekos' home-made wine was at one end of the lace-covered dining table. Irene had set the silver and china out nicely. At least she'd been able to handle that much. She wasn't much use for anything else these days.

In the living room, pink carnations would fill the crystal vase on the coffee table to match the candles already in place on the mantelpiece. "Irimi!" Matina cried.

Irene ran into the room.

"I told you to fill the candy dishes!"

She hadn't, but Irene knew better than to argue these days. As if her mother hadn't been bad enough before, from the moment the engagement had been formalized she'd been in a constant frenzy about some arrangement or other: should the reception be at their house, or at Aunt Eleni's with its larger living room; carnations might make better centerpieces than the lilacs Irene preferred which were pretty and fragrant but shed; the boubounieres, the frothy tulle and ribbon-bedecked clusters of candied almonds that were given to each guest to signify a sweet union, hadn't been made yet because the almonds still hadn't arrived from

Toronto, and the wedding was only days away.

Irene dutifully filled the silver candy dishes with pink and white mints, then, when her mother had checked the arrangement and found it acceptable, murmured something about Angie needing to see her and ran out the door.

Carefully balancing the platter of dolmadakia she'd made early in the day, Eleni climbed the steps onto Matina's back porch. She called out and Matina opened the screen door, took the platter and set it on the warming ledge of the stove.

"They're perfect," she said peeking under the cloth covering the vine-wrapped rice balls. "Sit down, we'll have coffee."

"You have things to do."

Matina shrugged. "Everything's ready."

"For a few minutes, then."

Matina got out the briki and filled it with water, then added coffee and sugar, while Eleni took demitasse cups out of the cupboard. They had been doing this for so many years either in Eleni's kitchen or Matina's, it was practically automatic. To the chagrin of their daughters, their mothers scorned the modern coffee machines and continued to make coffee the old fashioned Greek way.

"I finished Angela's dress," Eleni said. "All it

needs is a good pressing."

Matina watched over the briki for the coffee to foam up and, when it did, poured it into the cups Eleni held for her. Since Matina hardly said a word or answered any of the questions Eleni put to her about the last-minute preparations for the wedding, Eleni wondered why Matina had even wanted her to stay.

"Alekos thinks I've pushed Irini into this wedding," Matina said finally. "He says she's still young."

"At eighteen? You and I were younger."

"Do you think I've pushed her?"

"He's a fine young man," Eleni said. The boy came from a good family; his father had one of the finest flower shops in the city and everyone knew the boy would take over the business one day; Irini would have a good life. Their match was the envy of every Greek mother in Winnipeg. "Irini is lucky."

"My daughter doesn't seem to think so. All she does is mope around the house."

"These young girls expect too much." Eleni had had enough conversations with her own daughter to know that.

"What am I going to do?"

"Does Irene say she doesn't want to marry him?"

"She doesn't say anything!" Matina said sharply. "On top of everything else, now Alekos says George might be anxious to have the wedding so he won't be called up."

"What are you talking about?"

"The war."

"What war?"

"The war everyone expects before the summer is out."

Matina's voice was getting the edge of impatience it always got when she brought up things she knew Eleni was ignorant of.

"Even if there is a war," Eleni said, "what does that have to do with Irene getting married? I was married during a war. I even came across the ocean in the middle of it. Don't you remember?"

"Of course I remember," Matina said sharply. "You wore my green dress. Yours was stolen on the boat because you're so naive you trust everyone."

"Do you want to tell me about the wedding or not?"

"I'm sorry." Matina pushed her sleeves up, rubbed her hands together, looked at her bitten fingernails; she should be giving herself a manicure instead of sitting here talking about things that weren't going to change. The boy was marrying her daughter because he cared for her, not to get out of going to war. Alekos and his notions. "I'm being stupid. It's nerves."

Eleni was beginning to get exasperated. It was enough she had to put up with Angela pouting around the house, hardly helping with all the baking and sewing Eleni was doing for her cousin's wedding. Look at her now, off somewhere with Irini, neither one caring about all the work their mothers were doing for them. "Even if there is a

war," Eleni said, " I don't see what it has to do with Irini's wedding. And I don't know what you mean about being called up."

"It doesn't matter." Matina shook her head. "It's nothing. Just nerves," she said again.

They finished their coffee almost in silence, each woman with her own thoughts, Matina trying to put her husband's words out of her mind and to convince herself that her daughter was indeed fortunate to be marrying such a good boy. Eleni relieved that Matina had gotten over whatever had put her into such a state earlier.

It was after she left that Eleni began to wonder about what Matina had said. It was nonsense, of course, this notion of an impending war. Costa would have told her. There was never talk of war in any of the conversations she'd heard between him and his sons. Her sons. Stephano. Paul. Tim. She'd managed to get used to the English way of saying the younger boys' names, but the English word, Steve, didn't sound like Stephano. Her Stephano. Her eldest. The one they'd take from her first. She was being foolish. It would never come to that. It couldn't. And even if there was a war, her boys wouldn't have to go. No one would force them. Alekos was wrong to worry Matina that way, the wedding only days away and so much still to be done.

"Arrangements," Irene said.

"Mothers," Angela said.

They climbed onto a pair of counter stools at Harmon's Drug Store. Albert snapped his fingers in their direction.

"What'll it be, ladies? A super-duper colossal banana split? A hot fudge cherry blossom supreme? "

"Strawberry soda."

"Caramel sundae."

"Predictably boring, as usual." Albert sighed and dipped into his vats of ice cream to concoct their orders.

"I thought you were on a diet."

"I thought you were."

"We won't be able to do this after you're married."

"I guess not."

"Maybe sometimes."

"Yeah."

The drug store was busy as it always was on a warm summer afternoon. In the midst of finger-waved ladies in floral prints searching the shelves for the latest in patent medicines, of gentlemen in seersucker suits requesting packets of digestive salts or cigarettes, Bing Crosby crooned from the radio on the shelf over the counter and Albert did his soda-jerk act, imitating the patter he'd picked up from the movies. Outside, newsboys cried, "paper, paper, getcherpaper."

"Do you believe in fate?" Irene stirred her soda.

"Sure. If I sit here long enough, Clark Gable will

come in and sit next to me."

"I'm serious."

"Robert Taylor?"

"Angie!"

Angela licked the caramel from her spoon. "Why're you so grumpy? You're getting married, you're supposed to be happy."

"I am happy."

"Sure."

"I am!"

"Did you and George have a fight?"

Irene pushed her soda glass, still half full, away from her. "We never fight. George is a gentleman."

"Not on your wedding night, I hope," Angela whispered.

Irene reddened. "You're awful."

"Are you scared?"

"Keep your voice down." Irene glanced around. The stools on either side of them were empty, but Albert was lurking nearby.

"Are you?" Angela hissed.

"Yes. No. I don't know!"

"I would be."

"Even if it was Clark Gable?"

"I'd die if it was Clark Gable!"

Angela giggled. Irene punched her in the arm. Albert glanced over from the milk shake machine and gave them his Mickey Rooney grin; it was one of his favourites.



Irene was mortified. "Do you think he heard?"

"What do you care? You're getting married!"

"Yeah," she sputtered, which sent the two of them into paroxysms of laughter, in the midst of which they slipped off the stools, grabbed each other and stumbled giggling to the door.

Albert's "hey!" got their attention and they turned back, shamefacedly digging a pair of dimes out of slacks pockets. "Thank you, ladies," he said, giving them a mock salute.

This time, to the smooth accompaniment of Glenn Miller, they made a more graceful exit. They ignored the newsboy waving his sheaf of black-bannered papers in their direction, linked arms, and stepped off the curb. Weaving around the few cars that rumbled along Portage Avenue, they waited briefly for a street-car to clang by on one of the pair of centre tracks, then quickly passed the rest of the way across.

They took the long way home.

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## BROTHERS

Paul was the last person anyone would have expected to turn twenty-one and serious at the same time. But that was before he met Jennie. He was in Officers Training School in Regina and the one thing he did not want to do on his rare time off was spend it with friends of his parents and listen to them reminisce about the good old days in Greece. Not only would he be bored, but surely a daughter or two of marriagable age would be paraded for his benefit; he'd have to be polite; they'd interpret that as interest; all for a real Greek meal after months of dyspeptic English mess food. He weighed the odds, considered the possible complications, thought longingly of his mother's home cooking, and accepted the invitation.

When Jennie opened the door to let him in, the girlfriends back home in Winnipeg, the good lookers he'd already met in Regina, and all the swell girls waiting for him in England, dissolved into that one sweet face. His firm

resolve, something about being too young to settle down, all those great girls out there, he couldn't quite remember, crumbled even as she smiled.

"He's too young to get married, Costa!" Eleni cried to her husband.

"You were worried he wouldn't find a Greek girl," Costa accused. "Now he's found one, you complain!"

"He's just a boy," Eleni cried. It wasn't what she'd meant to say. How could she explain to her husband? Her sons were pulling away from her and there was nothing she could do. Steve had enlisted as soon as war was declared. Paul would soon follow him overseas. What did this war far away have to do with them, she'd cried to her husband, to each of her sons in turn! None of their words of wisdom offered her solace. Her only comfort was that Tim was too young to join up.

After months of classroom training and the odd weekend in London, Steve was posted to the north of England. There, living in a hut with no water and no toilet, he began his final training session, hour after hour of trial runs in the air, followed by short periods of rest lying on his cot listening to the relentless rain outside. Other than the mail from home, there was nothing to look forward to except the next leave, and the knowledge that one day soon he'd put all his training to good use.

It hadn't been what he'd expected when he'd signed up. Growing up in the depression, while his younger brothers had talked cars, Steve had dreamed of flying. Inspired by the careers of aviators like Lindberg and Amelia Earhart, he'd yearned to soar to the heavens, to be transported higher even than the clouds. And to travel. He'd always dreamed of travelling. But helping his father and uncles with the family business after the difficult years had taken precedence. Then the war had started. Oh, he'd felt some stirrings of patriotic fervour as he'd thought about joining up, but just as strong had been the realization that this would be the only chance he'd ever have to satisfy any of his dreams. In the end, the Air Force had been his way out.

The wedding was in Regina just after Paul finished training, and for his sake, in spite of the war and Steve's absence, they were determined to make it a festive affair. Every one of his family drove in from Winnipeg. Tim, his brother's best man, was at the wheel of the family Packard, his father next to him, while his mother and sister, Angela, who would be one of Jennie's bridesmaids, sat in the back. Aunt Matina drove their Buick, Uncle Alekos snoozing next to her, their daughter Irene and her baby in the back seat; Irene's husband, George, was somewhere in Italy with the Canadian Army. Uncle Paul, with Aunt Anna, Helen and Mike, followed in their green Chevy.

After the ceremony, the families, relatives and friends

gathered at the bride's house for a real Greek celebration. Rugs were rolled up, furniture pushed against the walls, and the phonograph turned on. Jennie and Paul led the circle of dancers in the traditional sirtó, clapping and whirling around the living room with such enthusiasm that even the old folks joined in. Tim snapped pictures to send to Steve.

Reading Steve's letters, it was easy to have the impression that he was in England studying, and spending his holidays visiting the sites in London. He wrote about visits to Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, mentioned the Greek restaurants he'd discovered in London, the Greek Church, even a place called a Greek House where he'd go and meet other Greeks from the various Commonwealth countries who had been posted to England. His requests for news from home and the latest magazines sounded like the cries of a homesick schoolboy. The only clue that Steve was in the Service came from the Armed Forces Airograms that were often resealed with an Opened by Examiner sticker. Some letters looked even more official, for they had been turned into tiny photocopies, about a quarter the size of a regular letter.

"To save space in transport," Costa explained to Eleni who questioned the tiny replicas of her son's writing. But even Costa couldn't figure out how the Air Force could take a photograph of a letter and at the same time make it smaller.

A few weeks after he and Jennie were married, Paul received his overseas orders.

"You lucky stiff," Tim said.

"Take good care of my wife," Paul told him, "and don't get any ideas."

Jennie was to stay with Paul's parents while he was away. They both knew it would only be for a few months and he felt better having his family all together. Like his brother, he would finish his training in England then fly missions over Europe. They might even be in the same crew, he told his parents reassuringly.

The family stood together in the front hall, just as they had a year earlier with Steve. Eleni held her son tightly, then went and stood by the living room window. She pulled the curtain gently across and watched her boy in his dark blue uniform and officer's hat stride proudly down the front walk, his lovely young wife on his arm. Paul turned and waved before he helped Jennie into the car. Costa squeezed Eleni's shoulder. She held a handkerchief to her mouth and stifled a cry.

Paul was shocked to see the change in his brother. Steve's once boyish face was drawn and haggard; it reminded Paul of their dad's when they were kids during the early years of the depression.

"I've just come from six weeks of round the clock

flying," Steve said when he saw the look on Paul's face. "I'll be prettier after a good night's sleep." The smile he aimed at his brother was set firmly around his mouth; it didn't reach as far as his eyes.

"What about time off?" Paul asked.

"They give it to us in a lump, nine days at the end." Steve took a leather pouch out of his jacket pocket, unzipped it and proceeded to fill a pipe that suddenly emerged from another pocket.

Paul had never seen Steve smoke anything but cigarettes. "All you need is a tweed jacket, Professor," he cracked.

Steve packed the tobacco into his pipe. "What do you say to a night out on the town," he said, ignoring the remark. "A few drinks, some dancing, pretty girls."

"Hey, I'm married!"

"I promise not to tell your wife."

"This is my big brother talking?"

"Things are different here."

"What would I tell Jennie?"

Steve struck a match. "You don't tell her what's really going on do you?"

"There's nothing for me to tell. I've just started training, remember?"

"Right."

Paul thought he'd seen everything, but his brother turned cynical was hard to swallow. He himself was a new

man as a result of his marriage, and nothing would spoil that. War or no war he intended to stay faithful -- a concept that was new to him, but one that he was determined to honour. Still, he'd be safe with his own brother, and maybe with a few drinks under his belt Steve would loosen up and relax.

As it turned out, Steve got roaring drunk, and the two girls they were dancing with helped Paul get him into a taxi, waved goodnight, and that was their big night on the town. The next morning Steve didn't remember a thing.

Paul wrote home about meeting Steve, yet even to Jennie he never mentioned the change in his brother. He wrote instead about the places he'd seen in London, about how much fun it was to try Greek restaurants -- although the food wasn't as good as his mother's -- about Greek Church on Easter with Steve, about sightseeing with him whenever their leaves coincided. Paul was anxious to finish his training and get into the thick of things, but he didn't write about that.

In his letters, Steve told about how good it was to see his brother, occasionally mentioned what he called his work, and always asked anxiously for news from home. What he really wanted to say was how scared he was all the time, yet how when it was time to suit up it came as a kind of relief, because he knew he'd be too busy to think about what he did night after night up in that sky he'd come to hate. He



wanted to tell them how, back in his own bed after a mission, he'd tally up the number of his fellows who hadn't made it back, and he'd see again the awful brightness in that black sky when one of their planes had been hit. He wanted to tell them that even when he finally slept, explosive bursts of light would waken him and he'd hear screaming in his head and it would be the terrified screams of his buddies burning alive in flaming planes, and those cries would be mingled with the dying gasps of men and women and children that he was bombarding night after night after night.

It was impossible to write such things to his family, to anyone, or even talk openly about his fears, his anger. Desperate now to obliterate the horrors of the world around him, and yearning for some connections with a life he barely remembered, he began searching his mind for memories of home, the sharp clear Prairie sky, his mother's fragrant lilac bushes, summer swims with laughing girls, snow angels, crocuses, dreams mingled with remembrances to push out the darkness.

He began to write things down, scribbling words and scratching them out, then filling sheets he'd immediately scrunch up in embarrassment, finally buying a notebook which he hid in his kit. Putting his feelings onto paper, even the act of writing itself, offered him some solace, and soon he needed a thicker notebook.

When the brothers met again, Steve told Paul about the journals he was keeping.

"If anything happens to me, I want you to destroy them."

"Hey, come on. Nothing's going to happen to either of us."

"I mean it, Paul. There's stuff I've written I don't want mom and pop to read. And you know they send back all personal effects."

"Okay. Okay. If you promise not to tell Jennie about our nights out."

Paul knew Steve was serious, but he couldn't talk seriously now. He'd just gotten his posting, been assigned to a crew, and after this leave he too would be up in the skies over Europe. He'd been too long in England not to know how dangerous it would be, with losses piling up and crews being reformed daily. It was getting hard to keep writing cheery letters home.

Back at base that night, Paul found a packet of letters from Jennie. He tore off his jacket and tie and settled in for a good read. Barely into the first letter, he let out a whoop, jumped up and hollered until his barrack mates started throwing pillows and then boots at him.

"Hey, hey, stop, wait, listen to this!" he yelled. "I'm going to be a daddy!"

He tried to contact Steve, to tell him the good news, but he couldn't get a line. All he could manage was a drink

with his buddies who shoved him around good-naturedly.

Later, when he settled down, he read the rest of Jennie's letters. By now, he figured, she'd be well along. The baby would be born in the fall. Maybe he'd be lucky, and it would all be over by then. He fell asleep dreaming of his homecoming, the hero's welcome, the banners flying, Jennie and their son, it had to be a son, waiting for him at the station.

The telegram read missing in action. Costa said that meant there was hope. Eleni shook her head, cried out to the Virgin and took refuge in her room. Paul wrote reassuringly that there was a good chance Steve had been picked up and was safe. Six months later the telegram read presumed dead. Within a year shiny medals, engraved documents, even a condolence letter signed by King George verified the Red Cross report that Steve's plane had been shot down over France. There had been no survivors.

Costa asked Madame Bourget who ran the dress shop across the street from the store to translate a letter he'd just received from France. The letter turned out to be from a woman who had been tending the grave of his son. The woman explained that the flyers who had gone down with the aeroplane in the tragic accident had been buried with full honours in the hill overlooking their tiny village. She was writing, she said, with hope that it would offer

comfort to the family of the brave young aviator to know that their son was being cared for in his final resting place. She herself took fresh flowers to the grave every Sunday.


Costa didn't tell Eleni about the letter. She had broken down so terribly with each telegram that, by the time final word had been received and they had learned for certain that Steve was dead, Costa had been afraid for her health. He thought this new revelation, the letter from France, would only cause her more pain.

When Paul came home, he had his brother's notebooks. Steve's other things had been shipped home earlier along with his pipe and tobacco pouch, his torn Air Force identification bracelet, his Air Force writing packet and pen, photographs of grinning Air Force officers, of waving girls astride bicycles, of laughing girls in two-piece bathing suits, of family at picnics and at Christmas, and an aerogram that had arrived too late and had been stamped Return to Sender.

Unable either to read or to destroy what his brother had written, Paul had stuffed the notebooks into the bottom of his bag. They'd stayed there, undisturbed, until he came home, but even then he couldn't bring himself to look at them. He hid them, far away from everyone's eyes, including Jennie's. Years later, when the memories of that time had softened and he could look with compassion at

photographs of a pair of eager young Flight Officers, he took out the journals. As he worked his way through the thick notebooks of familiar old writing, he realized, for the first time, how little he'd known his brother.

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## A PROPER GOODBYE

Eleni was on her knees in the garden when the phone started ringing. She was kneading the earth around the freshly-planted eggplant seeds and trying to decide whether to cook chicken for the dinner on Sunday or a nice leg of lamb. The grandchildren always asked for chicken, but Costa liked lamb on a festive occasion. Her sons would want to cook outdoors on that contraption they'd bought her the summer before. They'd thought she was being difficult when she'd refused to go near the thing. Would they have understood if she'd told them that in Greece they'd had no choice but to cook in an outdoor oven that had to be watched every minute because in summer it heated so quickly the food burned, while in winter it needed to be fed a continual supply of twigs so the heat wouldn't give out, and that having her own lovely indoor stove which could be regulated by the switch of a knob meant a sort of freedom to her?

Costa understood. As well as the stove, he'd bought her a huge refrigerator that made its own ice and needed to be defrosted only once a week, and a washing machine that rumbled quietly in the corner as it filled and emptied itself and even wrung the clothes out so all she had to do was hang them up to dry. He was a good man, her Costa. She'd make the lamb. After all, the family dinner was for his birthday. They'd already had his annual Name Day party for family and friends, but the children liked the Canadian custom of celebrating birthdays.

Her Stephano would've been thirty-four now. And the baby, the one she barely remembered -- there hadn't even been time to photograph her before God took her away -- would've been thirty-five. It was hard to mourn an infant she'd known for only a few months so long ago, but with Stephano it was different. She'd asked Costa over and over to find out where their son was so they could visit, take flowers, but all he'd say was it was better left alone.

The feeling that she'd let her children down wouldn't leave Eleni, not with two of them gone and Angela over thirty and still unmarried. It was something she could never put into words. All she could do was pray to the Virgin, asking forgiveness for she knew not what. Yet even with all her prayers, the deaths of two of her children continued to hang like a cloud over the happiness her others gave her, and the goodness of her...

husband.

The phone was still ringing. Didn't Angela realize it might be her Papa? He liked to go to the store every day -- to keep an eye on things, he'd say -- but he'd often tire quickly and call Angela to pick him up.

Eleni sighed, rocked back on her knees. She'd better go in and see what was going on. Anyway, there was nothing more to be done in the garden for now. The eggplant was being stubborn as usual. Unlike the zucchini that blossomed beautifully year after year, nothing seemed to work with the eggplant. She'd tried different mixes of soils, different patches of garden for a little more sunlight or a little less, but the result was always the same: leathery lumps the size of walnuts. The worse thing was they seemed to lie there, contentedly nestling among the dark green leaves, mocking her.

The phone finally stopped ringing as she got up off her knees. She rubbed the loose dirt from her hands, went to the side of the house, turned on the hose and washed her hands. When she came around the corner, shaking her dripping hands, Angela was standing on the porch steps.

"Who was on the phone?"

Angela reached out to her mother.

"Did you answer?"

Angela took her mother's hands.

"You'll get all wet." Eleni was getting impatient.

Angela put her arms around her mother, drew her close.



Eleni stiffened, then quickly pulled away, saw her daughter's eyes brimming with tears. "Your Papa?" she whispered.

Angela nodded. "I'll take you, Mama."

Eleni rushed into the house, grabbed a light coat to cover her old housedress and ran out the front door. Angela was waiting for her in the car.

The drove in silence. Eleni pulled her coat tight around her. She shouldn't have let Costa go this morning. Some days, when he seemed more tired than others, she would get after him to stay home. Not that he would. But she'd try. This morning though, he had seemed almost his old self, joking with her as she'd helped him pick out a tie. He'd probably done too much at the store, tried to help out when he should've just sat quietly and let his sons do the work.

"Why didn't you answer the phone right away?"

"I was taking the koulourakia out of the oven -- I was afraid they'd burn if I left them to answer the phone."

"Burnt cookies are more important than your Papa!"

"I'm sorry, Mama."

"I didn't ... oh, never mind." She couldn't sit still, couldn't move, it was taking forever. Costa had never been sick, apart from the recent tiredness, and that had only started after the trip to Greece.

Visiting their homeland after so many years had been difficult for both of them. Their parents had been dead for

years, and the relatives and friends they'd met after so long had been unrecognizable. The stern, middle-aged women who'd said they were her sisters had nothing in common with the laughing children she'd left behind. For Costa it had been worse; he'd found one of his brothers dying, another a sickly old man, and three of his aging sisters swathed in widow's black.

After a few days, Eleni had grown accustomed to her adult sisters and to being back in Greece, but Costa had been on edge no matter what they did or who they saw. When he'd suggested she take her sisters on a holiday to Rhodes, she hadn't wanted to leave him, but he'd insisted, saying it would give him a chance to visit some of the people and places from his youth that would have no meaning for her. Whatever past he'd relived while she was gone had done nothing but bring him sorrow, and she'd always regretted leaving him alone that time.

"Can't you go faster?" Eleni said. Angela was always so careful.

"We'll be there in a minute, Mama."

Eleni smoothed down her hair. She had to look nice for Costa. "Why are you going this way?"

"He's not at the store, Mama."

When Eleni saw they were turning into the entrance of the Miseracordia, her breath caught in her throat. She'd only been to the hospital to visit others, never for anyone in her family, except the grandchildren, but childbirth was

different. Her sons were walking quickly toward the car. Why weren't they with their papa?

Paul held the car door open and Tim helped her out. They huddled around her on the sidewalk in front of the entrance, but neither one spoke. Then she looked at their faces. She clutched at the lapels of her coat, pulling it even tighter around her throat. She knew what they couldn't tell her. "I want to see him."

"Mama, he's ..."

"I know. I want to see him."

They led her to a room and she saw her husband lying on a cot, his head turned to one side, his mouth slightly open as if he was asleep. His tie had been pulled away, and his shirt collar unbuttoned. In their bedroom that morning, he'd held out two ties to Eleni, and she'd picked the grey striped one, teasing him about how distinguished he looked in his new light-grey summer suit. They never talked about how tired he seemed so much of the time, how haggard. He didn't look haggard any longer, lying as though asleep, the care finally gone from his face.

Eleni had never seen death before. She'd known it, but she'd never seen it. Her Stephano had died far away in a strange place. As for the baby, one day she was there, sick and crying, and the next she was gone. She used to think sometimes that if only she'd known some English she might have been able to find out where they'd taken her dead baby and where her son had been buried. But Costa had

always said it wasn't necessary for her to know more than a few words of English to do the shopping. He looked after everything else, didn't he? He did. He had. He'd looked after her from the time she'd come to him as a bride of sixteen.

She reached a hand to him. Her sons tried to hold her back, but she pushed them away. His cheek was warm, soft; he'd shaved in the morning before Angela had driven him downtown. She'd had his usual cornflakes with sliced peaches ready for him in the kitchen when he'd come downstairs and a second cup of coffee for Eleni. He hadn't seemed tired at all. They'd talked about the dinner on Sunday and how he was looking forward to seeing the grandchildren. Eleni stroked his face, rearranged his tie so that it was resting nicely on his shirt, leaned over and kissed his brow. Then she sat down beside him. She began to whisper. Soon strong hands lifted her and led her away.

After, at home, a glass of brandy in her hand, at her lips, the worried looks and hushed voices of family, friends, Priest, drew in closer and closer until she gasped out in suffocation. Even Matina, who'd been her first friend when she'd come to Canada, and was still the person she felt closest to, could say nothing to appease her. She ran out of the room, upstairs, threw off her clothes. Her old chenille bathrobe felt good. She started for the bathroom. Angela was waiting in the hall. "Let me help, Mama, please."

"I'm going to have a bath."

"Don't lock the door, Mama." Angela was clenching her hands, a habit she'd acquired lately.

"I'm going to have a bath!"

"In case you need anything." Angela never raised her voice from that whining tone. It was enough to drive a person crazy.

"Fine. I'll leave the door wide open so you can all come and watch!"

She slammed the door shut, locked it, and turned the faucets on full force. She poured a handful of bath salts into the water and tossed in some bubble bath capsules -- gifts from tiny grandchildren at Christmas -- lowered herself into the water, let the tub fill, turned off the faucets, lay back and closed her eyes.

People came and went, walking up to the casket, crossing themselves, whispering words to Eleni sitting stiffly between her two sons in the dark-panelled room.

Costa was laid out on ivory-satin inside a dark mahogany box, baskets of white lilies on either side. His hair was neatly combed. He had on his good black suit and black tie. She'd wanted to dress him herself, but her sons had said it wasn't allowed. And so strangers had tended to his final needs, the way they had for her son. She closed her eyes to the image of Stephano and tried to focus

on Costa as she'd seen him earlier on that last day, helping him on with his tie, or at breakfast. She shouldn't have let him go out, he was tired, but she'd been thinking about her gardening, and so had paid him little attention. She liked her garden, liked the feel of the house when the men were gone, only she and Angela quietly going about their work, sometimes not talking for hours.

"We should go now, Mama." Paul, sombre, like his father, squeezed her hand. Tim, on the other side, had his arm linked through hers. Their wives sat across from them.

"Where's your sister?"

"Right here, Mama." Angela leaned across Tim.

"Go now, all of you. I want to talk to your Papa."

Ignoring the whispers, nudges, looks of concern, Eleni insisted on her time alone with her husband. Matina paused on her way out. "I'll be fine," Eleni assured her.

The Priest grasped her hands. "Think of your children now, Kyria Eleni," he said. "Zoi se mas, life to the living."

The living, always the living. But the dead lingered on. She would have liked to have explained to the Priest that she'd never properly said her goodbyes to the dead -- her parents in Greece, her infant child buried in an unknown cemetery right here in this city, her son somewhere in Europe -- but he'd only murmur men's words of faith that meant nothing to her. It was to the Virgin she prayed nightly, the Virgin who offered her solace.

"I'd like to stay here with Costa a little longer, Pater."

He left her finally to join the others. They would all wait for her so they could go to the house together. Once there, Paul and Tim would preside over bottles of liquor and their wives would be in the kitchen with Angela preparing coffee and filling plates with paximadia, the crisp biscuits always served at times like these. Eleni knew she was holding everyone up, but she couldn't leave, not yet. She needed to say a proper goodbye to Costa and this was their last chance to be alone.

She tried looking down at him, at the stiff, white figure in the casket, surrounded by floral tributes from family and friends, the prayers of the Priest still fresh in the air, but all Eleni could see was her son, her Stephano, dead alone in a foreign land with no one to mourn him, no one to take flowers to his grave, no one to brush away the leaves in autumn, the snow in winter, "Not even a headstone," she whispered, "nothing to mark the place."

She started to cry. "It's not right. Those people who sent him to war should've been able to find him for us." She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "It's not right, Costa, not right." She fumbled in her pocket for a handkerchief, blew her nose. "Remember how tall he was, Costa, how handsome? He had your eyes, always smiling. Remember his letters, the way he described the places he visited? Such beautiful words, Costa. Like poems."

The room was getting very warm. Eleni took off her coat, pushed the veiled hat off her head. She searched in her purse for a clean handkerchief. "Forgive me, Costa. I shouldn't be telling you these things, upsetting you." She wiped her eyes, paused to collect her thoughts. "You were a good husband, Costa. That's what I started to say. My prayers go with you." She crossed herself. "Keep his soul safe, Panagia. Amen."

Eleni sat quietly, letting the silent tears flow, not knowing any more whether she was crying for a lost son or a dead husband. For a moment, she wished someone was with her, someone who would help her understand. But who? Even Matina could do nothing now. For all her kindness, she hadn't been able to help when Stephano had been taken from her, or the first tiny baby. Like everyone else, she'd hover, shush her when she'd try to speak, murmur condolences, talk about God's will. It was better this way, at least for a little while.

She sat for a long time; then, when she couldn't bear either the silence or her own thoughts any longer and was getting ready to face the others, a voice intruded. "Oh, Eleni, Eleni." Both the voice and the ample body that almost covered hers in an embrace were instantly recognizable.

Tasia was one of the oldest of what the children called the old-timers. Since her own husband had been dead for years and she'd had no children of her own, everyone



else's life was Tasia's concern. Out of respect, no one excluded her from any occasion, be it wedding, christening, name-day celebration, even funeral.

"Paidi mou, my child," old Tasia cried. "My dear, my child," she crooned. "Such a loss. Such a fine man."

As wearisome as Tasia was even at the best of times, Eleni was relieved to see her now, for the old woman's lament would force Eleni to concentrate on mourning Costa instead of indulging her own confused thoughts.

"Ah," Tasia wailed. "Such a loss, such a terrible loss ... a fine man ... a good man." Eleni let herself drift away from the words, searching her cluttered mind for memories, happy memories, while Tasia droned on -- "good man ... well loved ... pillar of the community" -- but all her memories were shrouded in pain. She tried to think about Costa and the way he'd been before he'd taken her to Greece and had begun looking ill, but that always took her to Stephano and the awful day the first telegram arrived.

She didn't want to think about Stephano any more today. It wasn't fair to Costa. She needed to grieve for Costa, pray for his soul. "So brave ... at his age ... honour his son." Tasia's words were slowly coming into focus. "Poor boy, ... taken so young ... honour his son ... brave man ... travel so far ... honour his son."

Eleni grabbed the old woman, stared her full in the face.

"My dear, you mustn't blame yourself," Tasia said. "It was right of him to go. Take comfort, my child, take comfort. Costa did the right thing."

"Right?" Eleni echoed.

"At his age, and ill, to travel so far to honour his son." Tasia was patting her hand, smiling through tears.

"Stephano will rest now."

Eleni jerked away. "Leave me. Go now. Please. Go."

She heard the soft intake of breath, the abrupt closing of a door, and she was alone with the cruel words the old woman had thrown in her face. Unbelievable words.

They horrified her. Costa had known where Stephano was; worse, he'd gone there without her. No. He wouldn't have done that. It was a mistake, Tasia was wrong, she'd misunderstood, was repeating malicious gossip.

Eleni shivered. She huddled back into her coat. Costa had never been a cruel man. He would not have denied her a final goodbye to her son. But the seed the old woman had planted wouldn't be rooted out, and Eleni's thoughts flew to the early years when their first baby had died and Costa had taken her away in the night. Perhaps Costa had been right to try and protect her; she had been a very young bride then and the baby a mere infant. But Stephano? She'd raised him to manhood. Surely Costa would've seen the difference!

Suddenly her children were surrounding her. "Tell me the truth," she cried. Pavlo bowed his head. "You can't look me in the face," she accused.

"Papa didn't want you to know," he mumbled.

Eleni grasped her son's lapels. "It's true? You mean it's true? Everyone knew? Even that old crone?" She clutched at him, gasping in anger. "Your Papa went to the grave? Did you go too? Did you? And me? What about me?"

"Mama, don't." Tim was holding her arms. "It's not Paul's fault. Papa made us promise."

She pushed them both away. "Why?" she screamed at them. "Why?" She turned on her husband. "Why?" She tore her hands through her hair. "Why?"

"He didn't want to upset you," Paul said.

"Like you are now," Tim added.

"He wanted to spare you, Mama, to protect you," Paul added.

"Protect? Upset? How could you, Costa! How could you!" She screamed and cried and Matina came, tried to hold her, shush her, but she wouldn't be stopped. Propriety meant nothing to her now. Neither the words nor the feelings of others mattered any longer. Nothing mattered except this betrayal. She clutched Matina's arm. "Did you know?" she demanded.

Matina shook her head.

"I want to talk to your Papa," she cried to her sons.

"But, Mama ..."

"Now."

"Mama, please ..."

"Alone."

"Eleni ..."

"I have to."

Whispers, nudges, looks of concern; all of them smugly thinking they knew what was best for her. Like Costa. But she'd have it out with him when the others were gone. She took the glass of water someone handed her, but refused the tiny pills probably meant to calm her down. She wouldn't be calm. She waved everyone away, shaking her head, refusing to speak or to listen to any of them, children, friends, relatives, even the Priest.

When they finally left, she crossed herself, begged forgiveness of the Virgin for what she was about to say, and turned on her husband.

"What I said before, about you being a good husband, I always thought you were, even when I didn't agree with everything you said, but now I'm not so sure." Eleni's voice was low. "You gave me many things, Costa, a nice house, there were no other women -- at least I don't think so -- and you never gambled or came home drunk, so I should be grateful. But you did other things I didn't like and I never spoke out. Well, I'm going to speak now."

She paused, swallowed, took off her coat and laid it on the bench. Her hat was there too; when did it come off? She would have liked to have got rid of the black dress as well. She yearned to be back home, in her floral housedress, a scarf around her head, digging in the earth in her back yard, tending to her flowers, struggling with

the eggplant. But she wasn't. She was here, and there were things that had to be said. She crossed herself once more "Forgive me, Panagia," she said again.

She stood up, leaned her hands on the arms of the bench next to her. "You kept me in darkness, Costa. Yes, in darkness. I came to you a young girl and it was your duty to ~~teach~~ teach me about this new country. When I'd tell you I wanted to learn English, you'd say we were Greek, what did I need to know English for? So I could speak properly to people at stores when I went shopping, or to the neighbours, or read about what was happening in the world, that was why, Costa!"

"I don't know what's going on so much of the time, Costa, because you kept me in darkness. When the children were young, I didn't notice so much because we all spoke Greek, but once the boys grew up and went into business with you, it was different. After supper you'd send me into the kitchen with Angela so you could talk with your sons, and it was always English, English, English! Why, Costa? So I wouldn't know what you were talking about? And you wanted Angela like me. I was so proud, Costa, when you praised me to our daughter and told her you wanted her to grow up to be as wonderful a woman as her mother. Proud! That's how stupid I was. And what did Angela learn? All the things I knew, things any fool can do, cook and clean and sew. And now our daughter's growing old, with no husband, heaven knows why, and no life outside the house because you

wouldn't allow it. When she started growing up you said she musn't go out with Canadian boys because they weren't like us and wouldn't respect her. Maybe you were right, I don't know; I would've felt strange with a xeno son-in-law, it's true. But, Costa, there weren't many Greek boys to choose from, and she's getting old now, what's to become of her?"

"Something else, Costa. Do you know how I feel when my little grandchildren come up to me, hold out an English book and say "giagia read" and I have to pretend I can't find my glasses, or they're broken, or my head hurts."

"Even the little babies can read the language of this country, but not their ignorant giagia. Remember when those papers and medals and letters came about Stephano? You said they were expressions of condolence. They were more though, Costa. They told you where our son was, but you wouldn't tell me. Paul and Tim say this was to protect me. Was I so delicate, Costa? I gave birth to five children and never mind how many I lost that you never knew about. Did you know how hard that was, Costa, one baby after another, and no machines then for the piles of washing day after day? How could I have done all that if I was so weak? And what about crossing the ocean all by myself to come to you when I was only sixteen?"

"Did you never wonder how a delicate flower could carry loads of washing up and down stairs and go for days without sleep because of sick children? I was strong, Costa, couldn't you see how strong? But I was stupid, wasn't I?"

Yet you said you respected me. How could you respect a stupid woman who can't read and write like everyone else? And how can I respect you now, Costa, and keep your memory pure, when you've left me with this bitterness?"

Eleni turned and stood silently until she was composed again. "All those years I told myself I was lucky to have such a good husband," she said quietly, her back still to him. She took a deep breath. "I can forgive you for keeping me stupid and in darkness, Costa. I can even forgive you for taking my baby away from me, but may the Virgin excuse me, I will never, ever, forgive you for keeping the truth from me about my son."

She turned to him, her fists clenched by her sides. "You paid your final respect to him, Costa, but you would not allow me to do that. You did not have that right, Costa, do you hear? Do you hear me? You did not have that right!"

She slumped onto the bench, closed her eyes for a moment. "Forgive me, Panagia," she whispered, crossing herself, "but I had to tell him."

She picked up her coat, hat, gloves and purse, got up, and, without looking toward the coffin, walked steadily out of the room.

Later that evening, after the others had done with

their whispering and staring and hovering and had gone home, Eleni called Angela to sit on the couch with her.

"Did you know about Stephano?"

"No, Mama. Truly. No one said anything."

"Your Papa wanted to protect you as well, it seems," Eleni said, her mouth dry.

"It's all right, Mama. I understand."

"I raised you well, didn't I, daughter?"

Eleni pushed off her black shoes, loosened her belt. She removed the rings from her fingers, the diamond Costa had given her on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary -- it was wartime; Stephano had just left for overseas and Paul was in training school --and the cocktail ring for her fiftieth birthday, two years ago, but she left the plain gold wedding band in its place. She lay her head on the back of the couch, soft blue brocade to pick up the blue in the Persian carpet Tim's wife had suggested when she'd asked for help in picking out fabric.

She had much to be thankful for. She ought, like a good woman, to dwell on that. For it seemed, from all she'd heard from her sons in the past few hours, anything their papa had done, or not done, had always been with her best interests at heart. And so he'd flown to visit Stephano's grave that week he'd sent her to Rhodes with her sisters. They'd all known, of course. And for a long time before that there had been a stone to mark her son's grave, and a foreign woman paid to keep it clean and covered in flowers.



Her sons seemed to think she'd take comfort in the knowledge that another woman had been looking after her child's grave these many years. What strange creatures these men she'd been living with, how distorted their ideas.

Eleni looked over at her daughter. Something had to be done, at least for her. It wasn't clear to Eleni how, or what, but she knew she had to try. But first she needed one final gesture from her daughter.

"Would you go with me to visit your brother's grave?"

"Go to France?" Angela seemed surprised. "On our own?"

"Yes," Eleni said. "On our own."

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