

A HANDFUL OF OLIVES:
STORIES OF GREECE AND GREEKS

Demetri Lontos

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A B S T R A C T

DEMETRI LIONTOS

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The collection of short stories which follows has as a unifying background the author's perceptions of Greece and the Greek people. The work is divided in three parts and utilizes both first and third person narration. The first part deals with the search for a Greek identity by a persona of Greek parentage who is a North American by birth, and is rooted in autobiographical experience. A trilogy of stories set on the Aegean island of Amorgos follows and attempts to show the impact of place on the inhabitants and the foreigners who visit it. The last part contains a trio of stories utilizing differing themes and writing styles.

The idea behind this collection is to give the reader a feeling of the contradictions, cultural differences and power of landscape inherent in Greece, and the effects of these on a North American.

D E D I C A T I O N

For Lynn

love, friend, critic

and

For my parents

who, after all, started everything

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Associate Professor Malcolm Foster of Sir George Williams University's English Department in guiding, inspiring and prodding him towards developing what was a scattering of ideas into the collection of stories that follows. These, and several other stories outside the scope of this work, were a direct result of the University's Creative Writing program, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, in which Prof. Foster was for him a key figure.

--D.L.

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by

DEMETRI LIONTOS.

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I. FIERY BAPTISM

"Όπως τὰ πεύκα
κρατοῦνε τὴ μορφὴ τοῦ ἀέρα
ἐνῶ ὁ ἀέρας ἔφυγε, δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖ
τὸ ἴδιο τὰ λόγια
φυλάγουν τὴ μορφὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
κι ὁ ἀνθρωπος ἔφυγε, δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖ.

"As pines

keep the shape of the wind

even when the wind has fled and is no longer there,

so words

guard the shape of man

even when man has fled and is no longer there."

George Seferis, Three Secret Poems

BLACK LETTER DAY

The boy couldn't understand how the tiny blue cube would make the clothes whiter. His disbelieving eyes stared into the soapy water to see if it would happen. Loulaki, he repeated to himself, loulaki. It was the name his mother called it, but at the store the man who spoke only English called it 'bluing'. Now it was no longer a cube but a mass of wavy blue lines trailing through the soap bubbles. And each time his mother poked the stick into the clothes the blue lines became fainter and fainter, until they disappeared altogether.

"Why don't you go out and play?"

"Because I want to help you."

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His mother nudged him away from the washing machine as she replaced the cover and pushed the lever to start it again.

"And the English boys are still at school," he said.

The pampa-ta-pampa of the machine filled the house as it had all morning, and he went back to rock on his earless rocking horse in a corner of the kitchen. He liked the sounds on laundry day and the piles of clothes resembling mountains. He made up words to rhyme with loulaki -- ridaki, pontikaki, faraki--and sang them in time to the pampa-ta-pampa and his rocking.

"Do you have a cold?"

"No-o," he sang.

"Here, let me see." His mother put down the dripping sheet she was about to pass through the wringer and came over.

"Wait--sit still a minute!" He felt her cold wet hand on his forehead; it had the strong smell of javel water which he didn't like. The red apron she wore whenever she washed the clothes brushed against his face and he saw it was dirty. "Well, you're a little warm but I don't think you have a temperature."

Before he could begin rocking again the doorbell rang. He quickly got off his horse to run and answer the door as he always did. When he opened it a strange man in a uniform stood before him.

"Who is it?" called his mother from the kitchen.

"The postman," he called back.

"What does he want?"

"He says he wants you to come."

The postman had already passed earlier that morning and this was another one. The boy eyed the stranger in the familiar uniform. He didn't have a bag like their regular postman. He carried only a few letters together in a bunch with an elastic around them. The boy noticed that his fingers were stained yellowy-brown and he smelled of cigarette smoke.

His mother said in broken English: "Yes, what is it?"

"Registered letter. Please sign here." The man opened a little book and gave his mother a pencil.

"Registered? Who send me--?"

"Please sign here," repeated the man. His mother wrote carefully in the book. "Thank you," he said. He exchanged the book for a thin blue envelope and then went down the stairs.

"Who is it from, Ma? From Uncle Yanis?" He could tell from the envelope that the letter was from Greece.

"Yes. But why would he send it registered?"

His mother wiped her hands on her apron and tore open the flap. Inside was a single sheet of white paper which she quickly unfolded and read.

"Oh, dear God, no! No, it can't be! No, no, no!"

"What is it, Ma?" The boy rushed to his mother's side

but she ignored him.

"Oh, my God, tell me it's not true! How can it be?
And she--so young! Oh, my dear, dear little sister, how can
you be gone?"

"What is it, Ma? Tell me!"

His mother's words were unclear now as she had sat down
in the hall chair and, with her hands on her face, had started
to cry.

Frightened and confused at the sight of his mother crying,
he reached down to pick up the fallen letter. He knew he
couldn't read it but he looked at it intently and could never
remember seeing a letter with a thick black border around it.
Inside the border was the funny writing he had often seen
before in letters from his uncle and aunt in Greece. It was
different to the writing in his comics and colouring books.
He, too, did not like this letter that made his mother cry so
much, and he let it fall to the floor. Now he looked at the
envelope of thin blue paper. Other letters from Greece always
had stamps of different colours on them, but this one had
the most he had ever seen. The whole envelope seemed to be
covered in orange, green and red stamps.

"Get me a glass of water, my boy." His mother's voice
was quiet and muffled now. He came back quickly with the water
and she drank it all at once. He saw that there were tears

still in her eyes.

"What did the letter say, Ma?"

"You're too young to understand...your poor Aunt Maria got sick and--and she died. Oh, God, I can barely think it let alone say it!" And she started to cry again.

"Aunt Maria? She died?" He had only seen Aunt Maria in two fuzzy pictures: one standing on the balcony of her house in Greece, wearing only a dress when it was winter; and another picture of her playing the piano inside the house. The pictures were still tucked into the side of the mirror in his parents' room, next to the brown ones of Uncle Yanis and his family which had been there ever since he could remember.

"Please, don't cry Ma. She'll get better. Remember, you said she'd play the piano for us when we went to Greece." This only seemed to make his mother cry even more and he instinctively put his arm on her back to comfort her.

"One day--one day you'll understand...she won't play the piano ever again...nor will she show us her beautiful lemon trees...and--and her house overlooking all of Athens." His mother held him very closely for a moment and dried her tears with her free hand. Then she got up and slowly walked back to the kitchen. In a few minutes he again heard the pampa-ta-pampa of the washing machine.

He thought about the curled-up pictures on the side of

the mirror, and wondered if Aunt Maria had caught cold because she was only wearing a dress outside in winter. Then he remembered the envelope and he took it to his room. There, he carefully peeled off the stamps and hid them in his secret place in the clothes closet. He didn't want his brother to come home from school and take them; they were safe here. He felt pleased with himself and curiously happy. He knew he would always remember the day the black letter came from Greece because it had brought him so many stamps of different colours, and because it had made his mother cry.

FIERY BAPTISM

The smell of the pines at dawn was so exhilarating I leaned over the ship's rail to inhale more of the fragrance. So this was it; the moment I had carried inside me for nearly twenty years etched into life and I struggled with my senses to prolong it. Each second the sun shot up another ray, giving shape to the tugboat ahead and to the shouting figures grappling with the towline on deck. The smells, cries and images told me I was finally in Greece.

We seemed to be stopped; not actually stopped but gliding through a narrow waterway, our engines silenced. "Corinth Canal!"

the Italian steward had called earlier through our cabin door, and I had crept out leaving my sister asleep in her berth. I wanted to savour our entry into Greece alone.

Walls of blasted rock towered above so closely you could almost touch them. Soon the canal was behind us and the engines again reverberated through the ship. The tugboat went off to one side, its crew jabbering in flawless Greek. Somehow they sounded out of place: my ears were still trying to bridge an ocean between this Greek and the Greek spoken by my parents in North America ever since I could remember.

My sister joined me and we gazed down at the hypnotic blue water. "God, I can't believe we're here!" I nodded and we lapsed into a silence which only intensified our disbelief.

In a few hours we docked at Piraeus. Already the heat of Greece was making itself felt as we walked down the gangplank. The din of the quayside was deafening. A fence separated the disembarking passengers--mostly foreign tourists--from the horde of raggedy hawkers reaching through the bars. "Chiclets!" "Pistachios!" "Sunglasses!" "Koulourakia!" A pot-bellied man in naval uniform waddled up and down, pushing back outstretched hands. He growled, "You know they can't buy anything until they go through Customs. Get back!"

Inside the Customs shed it was surprisingly cool. No air conditioning was necessary, it seemed; simply being out of

the sun was enough. My sister and I presented our passports and were asked to wait. We noticed that other passengers were allowed to proceed with merely a perfunctory chalkmark on their unopened bags. We waited impatiently. Finally, when all other passengers had been cleared, two Customs men in plain clothes approached us.

"Mister and Miss Xenakis," said one with a pencil moustache, flipping through our passports. "You are Greek?"

"Yes," I replied in Greek, proud to answer him in his own language, "but we were born abroad."

"I see. That is why you have foreign passpor--"

"Anything wrong with that?" my sister broke in. "Is that why we were made to wait so long?"

"Have you anything to declare?" said the second one, ignoring her. His beady eyes glared suspicion. "Cigarettes, cognac, gifts for relatives? You do have relatives here, don't you?"

"Why--uh--yes--"

"Open your bags--all of them!" It was a command not a request.

An upheaval followed--clothes, shoes, beachwear, towels, books--as they dove voraciously into our bags. We watched stunned and helpless.

"What's this?" asked the moustache.

"That? Uh--it's long underwear," I said, feeling we'd been found out.

"Three pairs of it?" he asked incredulously. "Now what would a young man like you want with three pairs of long underwear in the summer? Do you know how hot it gets in Greece?"

At this moment I was cursing my mother who had, with all good intention, liberally stuffed our bags with trinkets for her beloved brother, whom she had not seen for twenty-five years. We were emissaries of her continuing affection and of things she imagined unobtainable in Greece.

"And these shirts?" put in the beady eyes, not to be outdone. "Surely too big to be yours--or are you planning to grow into them? You know, our food here is delicious but fattening!" Both men burst out laughing. My sister and I exchanged blank looks.

"You will have to pay duty on these items," declared the moustache, pencil poised and waiting.

This was the moment, I knew, to offer them a little something--the classic Mediterranean bribe--so we could be on our way. But I hesitated (perhaps believing that Greeks were beyond such things), and the pencil was set in motion.

"That will be three hundred drachmas."

A quick mental calculation. "Why, that's ten dollars!"

"I am sorry, it's the law."

Reluctantly I counted out some of the crumpled, funny-looking notes I had received for a traveller's cheque on board the ship. Then I replaced my passport in the blue tote bag kept for essentials

and turned to go.

"Excuse me," cut in the second Customs man, "but what else is in that bag?"

"This one?" I realized they had not inspected it. "Just a shaving kit, some books, a couple of oranges..."

"Ah-ha! Oranges!" he said triumphantly. It was the discovery of the day. "Don't you know it's illegal to import produce of any kind? We have plenty of beautiful oranges right here!"

I feebly said something about not importing oranges on a grand scale but merely carrying a few for our trip. Still, he held out his hand authoritatively, and one by one I grudgingly emptied the bag of our prize Italian oranges.

"That will be all, Mr. Xenakis," said the one with the moustache. "You may go now."

We picked up our bags in a fuming silence and headed towards the exit. Just before we reached the door, the beady-eyed one shouted after us.

"And welcome to Greece!"

Four-letter words rushed to my throat in retort, but I suppressed them because of something in the man's voice: paradoxically, he sounded sincere.

Outside the sun was blinding hot following the coolness of the Customs shed. We pushed our way through a knot of travellers and gesticulating locals. Fighting off an assortment of porters,

vendors and guides, we reached the street. A buzz of activity awaited us: the Mediterranean chaos of Durrell's Alexandria Quartet was being re-enacted for our benefit, it seemed.

The streets of Piraeus quivered with traffic, human and motorized. Old blue and white buses groaned under the strain of their cargo. A trail of diesel-belching motorcycles, three-wheelers and ubiquitous taxis whipped by menacingly close. Everywhere around us were a hundred different souls, pushing handcarts, wielding brooms, or plodding mule-like under a mountain of flour sacks. It was not the Greece of the tourist brochures.

I put down my bags to survey the scene and felt a surge of liberty. We were free of the ship, free of Customs men, yet a little lost as to what to do next. No one has this feeling for very long in Greece, I discovered, as a jolly-looking man approached us.

"Taxi for Athens?" he oozed in English.

"Would it be too expensive?" my sister turned to me.

"How much?" I asked the man in Greek.

"Oh, you speak Greek." He toned down his smile. "Not so much."

I had been warned on the ship about the wily Piraeotis, the locals who live off the trade their busy port brings in.

"How much is 'not so much'?"

"We'll go by the taxi meter if you like," he said and the smile reappeared.

"How far is it?" my sister asked prudently.

The man, not paying the slightest attention, had already loaded our bags on the roof rack and was holding the door open to his tiny Fiat. "Please, come..." He motioned.

"Well, it can't be too far," I rationalized as we got in, "so it shouldn't cost too much?"

The Fiat lurched forward and nosed into the mainstream of traffic. In the back seat my sister and I held tightly onto the cross-bar in front of us, our knees not far from our chins. The driver had quickly turned on the meter when we got in; now as we picked up speed the funny little dial clicked away like a coffee percolator. He tried to make small talk, but between traffic noise and sheer concentration to avoid a collision, little was said.

The chaotic streets of Piraeus gave way to the tree-lined boulevards of Athens and soon the quality of the buildings told us we were nearing the heart of the city. It was midday and the city arteries were clogged, our driver informed us, with workers going home for dinner and xaploma, the Greek siesta. We moved off the main thoroughfares, smartly uniformed gendarmes orchestrating the way, into a maze of side streets. A short-cut to our hotel, he said, boasting twelve years' experience in plying these streets.

We sighed with relief when we arrived at the Cairo City, the hotel the shipping line had booked for us. It was away from the tourist centre of Athens, one of those simple, "cube-like" buildings we had noticed lining the route. Several balconies crowned its white facade. The driver unloaded our bags off the roof rack and, insisting he carry them all himself, lumbered through the doorway to the reception desk.

"How much do I owe you?" I had meant to note the fare, but my view of the meter had been obscured.

"Only two hundred and fifteen drachmas," the driver said. The smile now reached to his murky brown eyes.

"Only--!" I mocked, sensing we had been gyped. Another mental calculation. "That's over seven dollars!"

"Please, sir," he said earnestly, "come and inspect the meter."

I stalked out to the taxi, the driver at my heels. There on the meter was indeed the figure 215. I felt a flush coming to my face. My eyes averted his while I nervously shuffled through the strange blue, red, green notes. I handed him the exact amount, deliberately excluding a tip.

"Thank you," he mumbled, the dark head nodding slightly. I nodded back sullenly and was somewhat puzzled: were Greek taxis only for the rich?

Inside the hotel an energetic desk clerk signed us in,

pulled down a room key and summoned a youth to take our bags— seemingly in one fluid motion. "I trust you will find the room to your liking." He peered up through his glasses. "Please call on me for any assistance—city tours, guides, night clubs—I can arrange anything for you." I believed him.

"Well, there is something I want to ask you."

"Anything, anything. All you have to do is say it!" He shuffled a mound of street maps and brochures into neat piles as he spoke.

"Well, what I want to know is—" I paused. "—is how much should a taxi from Piraeus cost? Normally."

"From the docks?" He stopped shuffling and took off his glasses to chew on the ends. "Oh...I'd say no more than a hundred drachmas—including bags."

"Ah-ha!" I pounced. The beady-eyed Customs man echoed inside me. "Our taxi man charged us two hundred and fifteen!"

"He robbed you! Didn't you look at the meter?"

"That's just it. That was the fare shown on the meter. It clicked like crazy!"

"Ah...I know what happened. He put the meter on 'double tariff'...so you paid twice as much as you should have. The thief!" His tone was solicitous: what must we be thinking of his country, it said.

My sister was saying something about a bath and some lunch,

so we headed towards the elevator where the boy waited with our bags.

"Oh, Mr. Xenakis," called the desk clerk. "I will need your passports for registration with the Alien Police,"

"I'll give them to you now--" The blue tote bag containing my passport, travellers cheques and cherished books was nowhere in sight.

"You must have left it in the taxi," said my sister.

Panic and gloom followed. The desk clerk assured us he would do what he could. We went up to our room in silence. The boy went in first, deposited our bags and flung open the shuttered doors to the balcony. I stepped onto the balcony and was stunned by the whiteness of the light, a Mediterranean sun so dazzling you could not pinpoint it but only guess its general direction. Below, the streets crawled with noisy hawkers, market people, passing workers. And beyond, in the hazy skyline, I could make out the familiar columns of the Acropolis. The Acropolis!

I contemplated our arrival. The Customs men, the streets of Piraeus, the ride into Athens. Everything seemed more dream-like than ever in this quality of light which obscured by its very brightness. The telephone ringing in the room stopped my ruminating.

"Mr. Xenakis..." It was the desk clerk's voice, now rising frantically. "Mr. Xenakis, it's here...your little blue bag is here with me."

"But how did you get it?"

"The taxi driver brought it. Just this minute."

I went down immediately, but of course the driver had already gone. I tore into the bag and found--everything. The passport, the travellers cheques, even some American banknotes I kept for emergencies. Nothing had been touched.

Upstairs, I lay on my bed weary with relief and excitement. The unaccustomed heat, the events of the day had taken their toll. A lunch of sorts was brought to our room but I hardly ate any of it. After a while I showered, changed clothes and generally felt calmer. I had avoided the moment too long and now I had to do it.

I picked up the dial-less telephone and the desk clerk replied. He said he would dial the number I gave him and ring me back. I put down the receiver. In a minute or two the phone rang again. Apprehensively, I picked it up.

"H-hello, hello. Uncle Yanis, is that you? This is--this is your sister Katerina's boy. We've arrived...we're here!"

The first thing he asked was whether I had brought the long underwear.

SUNDAYS IN RAFINA

Someone was chanting. A deep rumble that undulated between layers of sleep and waking, until it pierced through the layers and made me open my eyes. I stared at the crude dark beams overhead for several seconds and, deciding I was neither asleep nor dead, turned to my wife, who was already awake and reading in bed. Before I could form words the noise came up again, amplified to a roar. A thick chorus of male monotones was coming through the walls!

"What time is it?"

"Darling—you're awake." She put down her book. "It's only eight."

"Then what's all that racket?"

"The Sunday church service--on the radio next door," she replied, equally annoyed. "Only someone's playing with the dials."

Kyrie elaison...KYRIE ELAISON... blared the voice, the volume going up and down.

"Hellas, Hellinon, Christianon--" Greece for Christian Greeks'," I mumbled the junta's slogan sarcastically. It recalled something my Greek mother had tried to teach me as a child.

The sanctity of our leisurely Sundays had been violated. Something had to be done: we couldn't just lie there, assaulted by this liturgy of the air. A complaint was hardly the way to meet our neighbours in Rafina, yet it seemed justified. We had only caught a glimpse of them since moving into the small white-cubed house earlier in the week. Now a meeting was inevitable.

Kyrie elaison...Doxa patri...

"I'm going to tell them to turn it down," I said, putting on my robe. "Nip it in the bud. If we don't, it might continue all day--maybe all summer!"

"Now don't say anything harsh," warned my wife, no doubt recalling previous confrontations with Greeks.

"Don't worry. I've found out what works."

Outside the sun's glare made me squint. I stumbled through the rose bushes and fruit trees to the fence separating the two

houses. The Kyrie elaison here reached deafening decibels. On the neighbour's patio a bald, middle-aged man slouched in a lawn chair. Next to him a young boy, very tanned and wearing only shorts, fiddled absently with an expensive-looking portable radio. The man read his newspaper, oblivious to the noise.

"Excuse me," I ventured in Greek. No reaction. "EXCUSE ME!" The man put down his paper and looked up. "Please, would you mind turning down your radio a little?" I could not have been more polite, clearly enunciating 'radio' and motioning downwards.

The man got up, brusquely pulled the boy away from the radio and turned it off completely. The tinkling of an incense burner hung briefly in the air. An equally deafening silence followed. Then the man cuffed the boy on the ear for his mischief.

"I didn't mean," I started lamely, "for you to turn it off."

The man nodded his bald head vigorously and repeated:

"Entaxi, entaxi--it's all right."

"Thank you," I muttered and picked my way through the thorny bushes back inside.

"Marvelous!" my wife beamed. "How did you do it?"

"Politeness."

"Politeness? I thought you threatened him."

"Never works with Greeks. Courtesy, on the other hand, throws them. They can't refuse you, or so it seems. But I didn't mean to--"

"That's a good tactic!" She hadn't noticed my chagrin at depriving the man of his weekly benediction. "Now we can get some sleep."

"Sleep? You must be joking! I'm all jangled after that. Our neighbour must have thought I was an atheist and couldn't take it. That boy of his was fooling around with the knobs and got whacked."

"Well," she said, trying to console me, "you can nap at xaploma time this afternoon."

The day was off to a bad start, all the worse because it was Sunday, our respite from work. We had chosen the little port of Rafina for its few distractions, the best of which was an opalescent Aegean. We'd rented the summer house through Greek friends who had visited us in the States. It was situated well away from town and had only one other house next to it. Its location promised the tranquility we both needed: I to finish work on my dissertation, and my wife to structure new courses for the fall semester. But I was beginning to have doubts.

On our arrival in Rafina we had eagerly explored the area and quickly found its wide expanse of beach. True to the tourist brochures, the water was "an emerald green deepening to cobalt blue". No mention, however, was made of the tar which defaces almost every beach in Greece. Black sludge was everywhere on the rocks and sand. Stepping gingerly over it and into the water, I had been plunged into another world: bright red coral, swishing

anemones, gaily striped fish. Rafina, I'd thought, was quite a find.

Looking forward to a leisurely Sunday swim, we packed towels, sun lotion and books after breakfast, and walked down to the beach. It had been deserted on the weekday but now it was filling up with day-trippers. Cars and motorcycles poured right onto its sandy reaches, menacing the sunbathers. Family clusters arrived trailing air mattresses, inflatable ducks, regiments of children. Games started up; and between paddle ball and beach soccer, one's territory shrunk to the size of a beach towel.

"It'll let up," said my wife, sensing my agitation.

But it only got worse as the morning wore on. Vehicles of every description now popped through every approach. Three-wheelers transporting meat carcasses on weekdays were pressed into Sunday service, ferrying the owner's family and beach gear. Vespas, Fiats, Volkswagens—even a dump truck that disgorged an entire clan! Where did these people come from? Surely not from the town. They came, I later learned from our landlord, from Athens—fifteen miles away—the burgeoning Athenian middle class come to find its place in the sun. Only why did it have to be Rafina's sun?

There were few people actually in the water considering the masses present, the Greeks not being a nation of swimmers. (Perhaps Leander swimming the Hellespont had proved their point and

now they felt they could rest on their sandy laurels.) Most of them were children splashing playfully at the water's edge. I tried to read one of the tomes I'd brought with me, An Etymology of Joyce's Ulysses, but it was no use—Joyce's Dublin was an unbridgeable distance away. Besides, a commotion had started in the water nearby and the shouting precluded concentration.

A stocky woman in a bulging swimsuit appeared to be chasing someone through a maze of bathers, shrieking in a fishwife's voice. Ella Yorgo! Ella exo Yorgo! In another instant I caught sight of the object of the chase: the berry-brown boy who earlier had robbed me of my sleep. From the shouts and yells I could make out that the boy—Yorgo—had bullied a smaller child into the water. The woman eventually caught Yorgo and, dragging him back to the family fold, clouted him roughly several times around the ears. His sobs could be heard all over the beach. I recognized the bald pate of the father who, unconcerned with the proceedings, toyed with a large cassette recorder.

"What's going on?" My wife, sunbathing under a thick layer of Coppertone, sat up.

"It's our friend from next door," I said venomously. "He pushed another kid in the water and got whacked again—this time by his mother. They take turns."

A minute later, turning over on my beach towel, I beheld a curious sight: the woman who had slapped and screamed at her son was now actually kissing him! Even the father, acknowledging

his boy's existence, patted him good-naturedly on the bottom and allowed him to play with the tape recorder. The offspring must have said some endearing thing, something to make them proud he was all theirs. I could not bridge this distance either: the emotional fluctuations of the Greeks were beyond me.

The heat soon got to me and I went to cool off in the water. I pulled hard on my combination crawl-backstroke as though to get away as fast as possible. At length I stopped and floated in the calm beauty of the Aegean as I'd done earlier that week. But today the cries and shouts pierced the calm and made me look back at the beach with disdain. An unlikely mosaic! It did not seem like the same place.

Similar scenes must be going on all over Greece, I thought. It wasn't the fault of the place, it was the time. Sunday, that illusory day of rest. The sardining of so many people in such a finite period of time. The excruciating drive from Athens alone--through choked arteries brown with exhaust fumes, through endless suburbs of Greco ticky-tacky, off the six-lane onto the hairy two-lane highway, bumper to bumper since early morning, jockeying with some of the world's most aggressive drivers--would curdle the will of the brawniest truck driver elsewhere. But not of the Greek Sunday tripper.

When I returned my wife was at the water's edge. A watermelon rind casually floated by as I swam to her.

"You missed the farewell scene," she said.

"What happened?" I could tell by her tone it was our neighbours again. It seems that the parents were ready to leave but Yorgo, of course, was playing in the water and would not come out. The mother had stood on the beach screaming Yorgo, fevgoume! over and over, threatening to leave without him. But Yorgo blithely played on for another five minutes while his mother screamed herself hoarse. Another battery of slaps greeted him when he finally came out.

"No kisses this time?" I said spitefully. An intense dislike for Yorgo was forming inside me, and a foreboding for the days ahead.

We returned from the beach sooner than we wanted, vowing never to go again on Sundays. As we left we noticed many others leaving too, heading in droves for home and dinner. The main meal in Greece mystifyingly coincides with the hottest time of day; and it occurred to me that on Sundays this would be the ideal time to set out for the beach. But we wouldn't want to risk another day like today.

After a light salad lunch we retired to the bedroom for xaploma, the siesta of Greece. (A fine Mediterranean custom which we took to wholeheartedly, unlike many foreigners who resist the idea.) The cicadas outside chirped louder as the midday heat intensified. Hardly any breeze came through the full-length shutter doors, but the darkness they provided gave the illusion of coolness. Illusion of coolness...

Yee-ah-hooo!...Yee-ah-hooo!

The peace of sleep had no sooner come than it was broken. I lay there staring up at the overhead beams again. It was a familiar moment.

"Now what the hell is that?" I propped myself on a shaky elbow.

"Sounds like our friend again," my wife said wryly. She too had been rudely awakened.

Yee-ah-hooo!...Yee-ah-hooo!

A repeat of the morning. Only this time it was 'live'. A chorus of young warriors filled the air, but by far the loudest voice was unmistakably Yorgo's.

"That kid—that kid needs his head bashed in! That would shut him up." I sensed my blood rising. "I'm going to throttle the little bastard!"

"Now, darling," she pleaded, "don't lose your temper."

I threw on my robe, flung open the shutter doors and, dazed momentarily by a scorching sun, stomped across the garden to the neighbour's fence.

Yee-ah-hooo!...Yee-ah-hooo!

I was vaguely aware of sweat pouring down my face onto my robe; my throat was parched. In the neighbouring yard I could see four or five boys playing on a mound of earth, a game like King of the Castle. On top of the heap, as I'd expected, was

Yorgo shoving back all comers, yelling at the top of his lungs. He stood there defiantly in a bright lime-coloured shirt, easily the biggest of the boys.

I grabbed hold of the fence and rattled it as hard as I could. "Yorgo! Yorgo!" I shouted, "Listen to me...I'm talking to you!" The boys stopped and looked up. "Yorgo, you stop that yelling right now!" I commanded. "You know damn well it's xaplo! And it's against the law to disturb people at this hour!" My voice was cracking but something spurred me on. "If you don't stop, I'll call the police! And if that doesn't stop you--" I blurted uncontrollably, "I'll break every bone in your body!"

I was out of breath and could barely see through the hot sweat in my eyes. I heard the boys whispering among themselves. In another moment there were adult voices on the back patio. I released my grip on the fence and turned my back on the crowd of Sunday visitors at the neighbour's. I went back to the house, weary and confused.

Later in the afternoon my wife suggested going in to town for dinner. It was an excellent idea as our Greek friends had told us that Rafina had many good seafood restaurants. We started our walk to the port just as the sun was setting in a soft fire behind Mount Pendeli. It was the 'beautiful hour' as we called it and with it came the cool of the evening. Fragrances of the oleanders and pines of Attica wafted through the air and felt soothing.

As we neared the fringes of town we could see several groups of people also strolling towards the port, talking and gesticulating as they went. Soon we came upon a Luna Park, although we'd already heard its cacophany, where children towed their parents to various rides and amusements. Bumping cars, Whiz-o-plane, Duck Pond, Riviera Express—a Coney Island in miniature, seven thousand miles away. We walked on towards the restaurants. With each step the crowds grew thicker and noisier until we reached the harbour. Here the hubub made you feel like a spectator in a stadium. Masses of Sunday strollers thronged around us; we were jostled by children playing tag. Even cars and motorcycles miraculously threaded their way through, honking continuously. The cool night air had been displaced by the sultriness of human bodies, the fragrance of earlier moments by the stench of exhaust fumes and fried fish. No one in Rafina, it seemed, stays home on Sunday night.

We chose a restaurant at the far end of the waterfront where there were fewer people. We sat upstairs on an open-air terrace which commanded a panorama of the town and sea. On the horizon a pale orange half-moon was coming into view.

"I think I'll have some red mullet," I said to the waiter, "and a side order of squid." My wife ordered the same fish but not the squid.

We waited in silence, observing the passing scene. Just then a loud commotion started a few yards from the restaurant.

From the terrace I could see a knot of bodies quickly gathering below us. There were screams and I leaned over to see what had happened.

In the centre of the crowd a man was leaning over someone. Next to him the wheels of a fallen motorcycle were still spinning. Then the man moved slightly and I could see the prostrate figure. From the lime-coloured shirt, tanned skin and cropped hair, I recognized the boy! A flash of panic went through me: was he hurt, or perhaps even dead? I now found myself praying for my senseless threats not to come true. I even asked forgiveness of the saints my mother never got me to believe in.

In a few anxious moments a man with a doctor's bag arrived. He obscured my view but soon I heard familiar sobbing and realized Yorgo was at least alive. My wife had been speaking to me for several minutes but I hadn't heard a word.

"What is it, darling?" she repeated, perturbed at my anxiety. "He doesn't really seem hurt. Look! He's standing up...and walking around now. He's going to be all right."

The crowd milled around for a few more minutes. I sat down in a cold sweat. My wife looked at me strangely, but I was at a loss to explain myself.

The sizzling platter of pink fish arrived ringed with lemon slices. My wife neatly divided the row of mullets and served them on the plates before us. I sat quite still for a long time,

looking out over the water at the brightening moon. I thought about the day and about Yorgo. I thought about the Greeks and their emotional outbursts, and about my parents and the Greekness they had passed on to me. Mostly, I thought about paradoxes and contradictions, and bridges that could never be built.

II. A M O R G O S

* Μὰ στὰ ρηχὰ
ἕνα καμακωμένο χταπόδι τίναξε μελάνι-
καὶ στὸ βυθὸ —
ἂν συλλογιζόσουν ὡς ποῦ τελειώνουν τὰ ὄμορφα νησιά.
Σὲ κοίταζα μ' ὅλο τὸ φῶς καὶ τὸ σκοτάδι ποῦ ἔχω.

"But in the shallows

a speared octopus pulsed out its ink,

and in the depths—

if you could think where the beautiful islands end.

I watched you with all the light and darkness I have."

George Seferis, Three Secret Poems

AMORGOS: SEA

The boat was late. You had to allow for that with the Aegean swells and cantankerous Greek engines. It bumped through the last foam-crested waves before settling into the calmer water caused by the island ahead. Amorgos. I said its name to myself. A fuzzy chunk of headland poking greyly out of the sea, slowly coalescing like a picture coming into focus.

I was getting anxious to land--ten hours bobbing on the sea can seem a very long time--and growing a bit fidgety about seeing the Davidsons again. It had been six years since we stood at Logan Airport, Paul, Julia and I, and said our goodbyes. Their Greek Odyssey they kept calling it: a hop here and there all

over the Aegean until they'd found their island. And now here it was, its steep rust-oxide mountains catching the last of a June sun, looming in the distance like the spine of a sleeping animal.

An arm carrying a coil of rope interrupted my ruminating.

"We landing in ten minutes," the Greek sailor carrying it said gamely in English. "Please to move back so I throw rope—yes?" He wrestled with the rope as though it were a boa constrictor, finally mastering it. I thought I'd try his English rather than have him test my shaky Greek.

"Were they told on the island that the boat would be late?" I asked, wondering if the Davidsons would still be there to meet me.

"Sure," he smiled casually, "the captain he telephone by radio. But the island peoples they know boat always come late. Ha!"

The Kanaris swung into the bay of Katapola and for the first time the ubiquitous whitewashed houses lining the port—which one was theirs?—came into view. The sight of them made the passengers rush to one side of the boat causing it to list precariously. And the chatter that had been in the background ever since we left Piraeus now rose to a crescendo. Returning husbands, families, relatives and friends leaned impatiently over the rail as though to hasten our arrival. Our lateness had merely heightened the anticipation, doubtlessly reciprocated by the crowd waiting on the dock.

I remembered how envious I felt when Paul and Julia wrote

to say they'd at last found an island—unspoiled, out of the way—on which to settle. It had taken nearly two years of island-hopping, and working in Athens during the winter, but had been worth it. From their descriptions in Christmas cards and occasional letters it seemed an idyllic existence: unhurried days by a magnificently clear sea, where Paul would go spear-fishing to catch the day's dinner, while Julia turned out magazine stories and read prodigiously. It was a life I'd often yearned for, and even took Greek courses in preparation; but any plans fizzled out every time a tempting photographic assignment came my way. But enough was enough. A taste of another man's drink had become necessary, and I decided to take up the Davidsons' standing invitation. A month in Greece, away from hot studio lights and darkroom chemicals, would help to restore lost yearnings, reshape vague dreams.

Paul Davidson had, in the years since our days at the Rhode Island School of Design, fully justified the confidence of those who'd granted him the school's highest award. He had made something of a name for himself—first as a graphic designer, then as a painter. On Amorgos, he wrote, he had all the time to paint and explore new directions in his art; and the shows he had in New York and London had borne him out. I was on assignment on the West Coast when he had his New York show, and couldn't see him. But he must have sold well, because shortly afterwards they'd bought the house on Amorgos.

I wondered how Julia got along with the place—it was, after

all, quite a change from Beacon Hill. But even more of an adjustment was getting used to the rugged islanders, most of whom, she once wrote, had never been as far as Athens. And then I remembered how bubbly and sociable a creature Julia was—why, she could even make friends in the Arctic! At any rate she had a string of stories to her credit, and the women's magazines were crying for more, or so I gathered from Paul's cryptic note before I left.

Shouting and squawking now filled the deck of the Kanaris as the vibrating engines finally ceased. We coasted towards shore. The squawking, I noted, was genuine enough as many islanders were coming home with baskets of live chickens. I scanned the waiting masses on the dock for Paul and Julia—had they received my wire?—but it was impossible to pick out one face from another. Surely most islanders would know the American couple.

No sooner had the passengers set foot on land than a human tidal wave surged forward to meet, hug, kiss and cry over them. Shrieks of joy were followed by tears of reunion. A Greek on board had told me that the whole island turns out to meet the boats; it certainly seemed so today. For many, the arrival of the weekly boat from the mainland was the most exciting event of the week, and for most weeks of their lives.

Dusk had fallen giving an effect of filtered light over everything. I looked out over the sea of dark, bobbing heads and eventually spotted a tall, bearded figure at the edge of the crowd.

"Paul! Hey, Paul!" I bumped my way towards him as he met me halfway. We shook hands, clapped each other on the back.

"Hi! Thought that old tub would never get here. Good to see you again!"

"Hi, Tim, glad you made it all right. You haven't changed a bit since Providence. Did you have much of a sea? Here, let me give you a hand with your bags."

We floated along the mainstream of the crowd towards the village centre. As we walked I told him briefly about my flight from the States and the stopover in Athens. "And how's Julia? Did she go home early?"

"Julia's fine, Tim," he said quietly, and added, "the last time I heard. You see, she's not on Amorgos right now."

"Julia's not here? Where is she?"

"Let's go in the café and have an ouzo." By the quiet, almost constrained tone in Paul's voice I sensed something had happened and unwillingly tried to guess what it was.

Boat night had brought throngs of people into the waterfront café. Paul led the way to a table where a couple of islanders had kept places for us. They smiled widely, shyly, as Paul introduced me, more out of courtesy than anything else, and we all shook hands. The café owner, a gregarious man called Nikos, came over to introduce himself, and soon he and Paul were conversing rapidly in Greek.

"You speak Greek like a native," I said enviously, after the

owner had left us. "I couldn't catch everything he said."

"He wanted to know what you thought of the current political situation. Nikos is a good man, but he's obsessed with overthrowing the dictatorship."

Questions about Julia rushed to be asked but I had to hold them back until Paul, in his own methodical way, said something first. I could not hide from myself the disappointment of her absence, for I'd looked forward to seeing her as much as Paul or Amorgos itself.

"Did you bring enough film?" he said after we downed a fiery ouzo. "You won't find any here. I think I wrote you that."

"Brought stacks of it, which the Customs guys in Athens didn't appreciate! And the trusty old Leica. But Paul—"

"That's good, 'cause there's a lot to photograph here. You should get some good shots of the monastery. It's the island's claim to—"

"Paul!" I couldn't stand it any longer. "Where the hell's Julia?"

He looked down into the empty ouzo glass in silence for a few seconds before his clear grey eyes locked onto mine. "Julia's gone, Tim," he said at last. "She went back to the States a few months ago, back to Boston to work for a magazine."

"But I thought..." I shrugged, speechless at the news.

"You thought everything was just fine on our little island. Well, it was up until a year ago, I guess. That was when I had a

show in London." He looked into his glass. "It was never the same after we got back here."

"But I thought she loved it here?"

"She did—for a while. Especially the first couple of years. But then she got fed up with—oh, so many little things. She couldn't get the books she wanted, things from the States would get lost in the mail, the food turned her off—nothing to choose from. And then the people began to get her down."

"The people? I thought you wrote me the islanders here were really lovely people—hospitable, helpful and all that."

"They are, they are," Paul nodded. "But Julia found them well, limited I guess you'd call it. That's it. They just weren't stimulating enough. You know, she was used to that Beacon Hill set. The parties, the weekend jaunts, get-togethers with friends. It all came back to her when we were in London with some friends of ours. We had a great time together—doing the pubs, the restaurants, Soho, Chelsea, you name it. Anyway, the upshot was that she couldn't settle into our quiet routine when we got back here. She was restless, found fault with every little thing, had had enough of the island mentality and Greece in general."

"But at Christmas," I said, "she wrote me a few snippets in your card about a broken water pump, a run-in with the mayor or something—but not a hint about...this."

Paul ordered more ouzos as though to summon strength, and went on. "It was in January that she'd made up her mind. I

told her she should go back for a few months, an extended holiday. But she wanted to work, felt she was stagnating here."

I took a gulp of ouzo when Nikos brought the fresh round, and tried to articulate my dismay.

"Oh," he started evenly, "I held out hope—February, March, April. Thought she might change her mind, come back for the summer. She always loved the summer here; except for the Meltemi winds, it's a lovely time. But then last month I got the letter about her magazine job. She sounded so excited about it, and everything in general. Then I knew for sure she'd never come back."

"Well, Paul," I said, treading carefully, "I'm sure you thought of—of going back with Julia—back to the States, I mean."

He looked into the distance and nodded dreamily.

"Oh, yes, I thought about it. I thought long and hard—and, well, I just couldn't. I couldn't go back." He looked at me now. "This place...this island. You see, Tim, I'm painting better than ever here. In the States I could never do the work I'm doing here."

We sat awkwardly still for a few moments, enveloped by the febricity of boat night. I thought of Julia thousands of miles away, and had trouble reconciling the picture: for all the years I'd known them the two had been inseparable.

"Well," Paul broke the silence, "we'd better go up to the house. You must be tired after your trip."

He paid for the ouzos and we said goodnight to the islanders around the table. Outside, night had fallen and the sky glimmered

with a million tiny holes. The absence of a moon added to the number of stars lighting our way to the house. Across the bay, the braying of a donkey oscillated briefly in the air.

The house was a classic island house with simple lines, a fresh coat of whitewash. Paul lit a smoky kerosene lamp as we went in and its dim yellow light reached to the corners of a very tidy room. He showed me around the house, pointing out the idiosyncrasies of taps and lumps; I put my stuff in a small room next to his studio. It was the room, he told me, that Julia used to work in.

"I've made up the divan; it's more comfortable than it looks."

"Were you working on anything today?" I asked, curious.

"Uh, yes, matter of fact I was. I normally work until sunset, then it gets too dark."

"Can I see it?"

"Sure." We went into the studio. "The place is a bit of a mess—"

He put down the kerosene lamp by an easel which held a large canvas. On the white expanse were several bold strokes of fresh paint giving the impression of rocks breaking up, cascading down. It wasn't finished but I could guess the result would be a very powerful painting.

Sensing my curiosity, Paul reached into a stack in the corner and handed me canvas after canvas. His sunburnt hands released

them gently, almost lovingly, as I held each one up to the flickering yellow flame.

There were paintings of seas gone wild with fury, of craggy mountain peaks penetrating serenely blue skies. There was canvas after canvas juxtaposing fragments of rock, earth and sun in such variations that it made me dizzy to look at them after a while. He had caught the sharp, blinding colours of a hundred Greek suns refracted through the opal hues of the Aegean. He had made the island over in the prism of his mind, had transposed it onto canvas. No living creature broke the purity of the elements.

"My style's changed since you last looked."

"Yes," I said almost in a whisper, "yes, it has."

It would be a long night ahead, and I knew that in the morning I would not see the same island I had seen earlier tonight. I lay back on the divan and looked out at the stars. Somewhere in the night I could hear the sound of Julia at her typewriter.

AMORGOS: SKY

It couldn't be much further now. I scrambled over the sun-glazed shale lining the path to the monastery. The downhill part was even more treacherous than the climb over the mountain. How did the monks do it? Did they use the sure-footed island mules to get to the village? A fierce gust of wind came at me and I grabbed at the shrivelled thyme bushes to keep from falling over the edge. I glimpsed down the sheer face of the cliff: below, the gale winds had whipped the Aegean into a boiling froth. I looked away and again pushed into the teeth of the wind. Sweat trickled down from inside my straw hat making my eyes tear; a salty sweat that could not quench my thirst. Nikos, the café owner in the village, had merely said that it was just

over the top of the mountain. He forgot to say what an ordeal it was to get there.

Only the elements were my witness: the stony Greek earth, a translucent blue sky, the furious sea. And I was right to come alone. Paul Davidson, my artist friend on Amorgos, had recommended the monastery as a good photographic subject. But now the walk itself had become a challenge, a fight: if you won you earned the right to see the thousand-year-old monument. To my surprise, the path ended suddenly when I turned the last bend. Standing defiantly ahead was a massive iron gate, once ornate and imposing, now rusted and about to fall off. Medieval in design, it was the kind of gate that warned of an impregnable fortress ahead. It blocked out the sight of whatever was beyond; it blocked out the sky. I paused to catch my breath, then leaned hard against it. It creaked open, giving me goosebumps.

I looked up, my eyes drawn by some giant magnet: there, as though hanging in mid-air, suspended somewhere between sky and sea, was the monastery of Amorgos. It nestled high in the cliffs at the end of a neat cobblestone path. Huge grey boulders ran jagged along the skyline, protectively ringing the tiny structure. The villagers said it was a thousand years old. But a fresh coat of whitewash—traditionally painted every Easter—made the monastery appear almost new. Here on the windward side of the island it stood away from any living thing, touched only by Meltemi winds and occasional thin clouds.

The sight of the monastery made me forget my weariness; I stopped long enough to take a few photos and eagerly walked up the smooth cobblestones. A large oak door appeared to be the only entrance. I paused. Was anyone here? In the village they hadn't said a word about the monks themselves. I only presumed there were some to keep the faith, there seemed little else they could do here.

I rapped loudly on the thick door and waited. No one came. I pushed hard; it swung open with a noisy, drawn-out squeak. Blackness inside. A total blackness that made me feel like a blind man: eyes open, seeing nothing. A coolness drifted over my body, which felt soothing after the scorching trek. I groped along what seemed an interminable corridor. At the end was an opening-- a small courtyard surrounded by wooden doors and tiers of monastic cells. The walls were freshly whitewashed, but instead of an iridescent glow they gave off a cool greyness. I stood very still for a moment and felt an uncommon peace.

I walked to the courtyard and timidly called out. "Is anyone here?" No answer. I called again, but the silence was broken only by the pounding of waves in the distance. I didn't hear the cell door open, but when I turned around I was startled. A very old man in a flowing white beard was standing a few feet away. He wasn't really standing, but hunched over a crooked cane trying to keep his balance. I noticed his faded blue cassock was wrinkled and dirty. I could see that he too had been startled and adjusted

his gaze to get a better look at the intruder.

"Kali mera," I greeted him in my broken Greek. "I--I called out but there was no answer."

"How did you get in?" asked the old man in a gravelly voice. "Wasn't the door locked? I was asleep taking my afternoon xaplo and didn't hear a thing." I struggled to make out what he said but I seemed to get the gist of it.

"No, it was unlocked so I just walked in. I hope it's all right. I'm just visit--"

"All right? Of course, it's all right," he croaked loudly. "The French tourists must have left it open this morning." He stroked his beard absently. It was very full, unkempt and went down to his chest. Around the mouth it was stained bright yellow with nicotine, I guessed, as his gnarly fingers were also stained. "Come to the visitors' room. I was about to make coffee," he added and shuffled ahead.

The monk took a second corridor leading off the courtyard. He ushered me into a small room, motioned to sit down, and hobbled off to make the coffee.

I sat in a corner of the room on a divan stuffed with straw and looked around. My exhaustion now made itself felt and I breathed deeply to overcome it. Thoughts of the climb receded as I slowly became transfixed by the sight before me. Tucked away in this tiny, overfurnished room was a millenium of history, a veritable Pandora's Box of religious treasures! It made me feel

as though time had been tightly crammed in the confines of these tiny walls, never to escape. My eyes were instantly drawn to the most imposing treasure: five or six gilded, polychromed Byzantine icons scarred with cracks and termite holes, yet still crying out an eloquent, devout beauty. Jewels of Greek Orthodoxy. Their liquid golds, magentas and vermilions gave out a warm, reassuring glow--comforting images still alive seven centuries after their creation.

I got up from the divan to examine each icon. A reverence gripped me, an uncertain believer. Through the Byzantine script lovingly lettered around the halo of each figure, I could barely decipher the names of the saints once familiar in my childhood and now forgotten. I stood back to scrutinize them one by one and it suddenly struck me how remarkably individual each figure was, having its own peculiar character. Yet one emotion on these golden faces was common to them all: serenity. The long, bearded faces with almond eyes spoke of an oriental serenity, inseparable from the sanctuary where they rested.

I wanted badly to take some photos of the icons but felt it would somehow be sacrilegious. They were like nothing I had ever seen before. They were nothing like the icons the antique dealers in Athens tried to pass off as originals, but could never duplicate. Of all my vivid impressions of Greek antiquities this was a rare moment and for an instant I was lost in time, far from this century. I had glimpsed into the past and understood the blissfulness of

Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium"—its holy fire, its singing-masters.

My gaze shifted to another wall and I was brought forward in time by a row of yellowed photographs in sombre black frames. In sharp contrast to the serene icons each picture showed a group of monks posing at the entrance of the monastery. The older photos, brown with age, showed forty or fifty monks curiously resembling a reunion of old boys at school. The fresher-looking pictures had progressively fewer monks in them, mutely telling the story of the monastery's decline. There was no logical comparison, of course, but I couldn't help seeing these saintly-looking beings as icons too, a continuation of the Byzantine originals: the unmistakable serenity was also on their faces.

I tried to find the old monk somewhere in the photographs but couldn't, and while I was still looking he shuffled through the open doorway carrying a tray full of cups and glasses. He set it on a low table covered with a plastic tablecloth.

"For you," he said, extending a glass of yellow liqueur. "It is Kitron. It will revive you after the long walk here. The monks of the island of Naxos near here make it from their own lemons. They send us some by caique when the winds are kind," he said in his gruff voice.

"Thank you," I sipped the lemony syrup and felt its bitter sweetness on my tongue before it trickled down to warm my insides. It was strong and welcome. I reached for a glass

of water to wash it down and noticed there were three cups of Turkish coffee.

"Who is the third coffee for?" I asked, trying to get the Greek syntax right.

"Oh, that is for the other one," he said offhandedly. "He must have slept longer than usual. We take our xaploma about this time, but the other one, he's always up before I am. He is younger, you see." He spoke slowly and deliberately. His voice was not unfriendly but rather indifferent, and he showed not the slightest interest in me or why I had come to the monastery. I represented something from the outside world which he accepted without question.

The monk sat facing me on a tattered chair and reached into his floppy old cassock. He pulled out a blue and white pack of Gaulloises, carefully took one out and put it to his lips. His unsteady, veiny hand struck a match and lit the cigarette. Then looking at me he remembered to offer one.

"Would you like one of these? The French tourists gave them to me this morning. They are not bad for foreign cigarettes but not as strong as Papastratos Number Seven, of course. That's the kind I smoke whenever the other one brings back supplies from the village."

"Thank you, I'll try one," I said. I no longer wondered about the yellow stain on his beard and his harsh voice, not if his Greek cigarettes were stronger than these! We smoked in silence

for a moment. It felt odd taking smoker's communion in this holy place with a man who actually lived here. He belonged here, yet it suddenly occurred to me he had said nothing of religion or prayers. When he got down to the butt, he held his thumb and forefinger close to his lips so as not to waste any of it.

"Who is 'the other one'?" I asked.

"Pater Yanis? He is the priest of the monastery now. Came here only last year," he said tersely.

"And how long have you been here?"

A half-smile came through his beard and his watery brown eyes crinkled a bit. "It's been so long, I've almost forgotten." He scratched his mane of long white hair. "Must be about thirty-five years," he said indifferently.

"Thirty-five years!" I exclaimed. Nearly a lifetime! I choked on my first sip of Turkish coffee—it was black and sweet, sweeter even than the one Nikos made in the village café. After several weeks in Greece, I still couldn't accept the syrupy demi-tasse of black liquid as "coffee". Invariably, I'd take one sip too many and end up with a mouthful of dregs.

The monk sat back smoking another pungent cigarette. He looked abstractly out the window and slowly talked about his life on the island, as if he were thinking out loud. He had originally come from the mainland and when he was younger and in good health, he would get out to one of the many small villages scattered around the island. This would happen three or four times a year, and then only to replace a priest who was ill, or to assist in

Christmas and Easter services. He said he had no particular skills and could serve at nothing else, but that didn't bother him. Now he was too old to leave the monastery. He hadn't been to the village in two or three years--the walk being too strenuous--and had not missed going there. Nowadays he was content to receive the visitors that came from various parts of the world to see the monastery, to offer coffee and have them sign the visitors' book. (He pointed to a large, frayed book bound in brown leather and gold-edged pages.) The priest, Pater Yanis, he related unhurriedly, showed the visitors around the monastery as he found even this too tiring. There were just two of them at the monastery now, as a monk had died last year. This left only Pater Yanis to go out to the villages.

"Don't you find the loneliness unbearable sometimes?"

He turned his gaze from the small window overlooking the sea and looked at me as if for the first time. "Oh no, I've grown used to it all these years," he said without emotion.

Just then the door opened and a tall bright-eyed man with a bushy black beard came in. His flowing black cassock was immaculate, a clean white collar circled his neck which gave him an air of clerical authority.

"Kali spera! Welcome to our humble monastery," he said in a well-articulated Greek. "I am Pater Yanis. Where are you from?" he asked inquisitively. I told him. "Ah, we have many visitors from America. I have a brother in Chicago. Have you ever been to Chicago?" He didn't wait for a reply. "Many of our islanders have

relatives there and I will go myself some day."

I felt a little out of breath when he finished. The stark contrast between the two men was baffling--how could they ever live together under the same roof? Before I could say anything the priest went on in a thick pontifical voice.

"You must let me show you our little chapel. It is the oldest in all the Aegean with many treasures in it. People come from everywhere just to see the icons in this monastery. They are from the eleventh century--very holy icons, you know," he said proudly, and finished his coffee in two sips. While he talked he never once looked at the other monk nor even acknowledged his presence.

I was beginning to feel hot and sweaty again; the sight of this lively man in dark robes was overpowering and made me fidget. Unlike the old man, he did not seem to belong here in this holy place. I saw him more suited to the village church or somewhere on the mainland.

"Yes, I'd like to see the chapel," I said, suddenly feeling restless.

"Please follow me," said Pater Yanis.

Before we left the old monk looked up and said quietly: "You mustn't forget to sign the visitors' book before you go." Had he perceived my uneasiness? I went over to the little corner table where the visitors' book lay open and signed below the three French names. The book smelled musty. As I left with Pater Yanis I smiled warmly at the monk who in turn nodded his fleecy head.

The priest walked briskly ahead through a series of corridors and passageways like a medieval maze, chattering all the while. We passed row upon row of old wooden doors which led to the cells when the monastery boasted over three hundred monks. Now they were empty and locked up, he said, tombstones to a dead past. We went into the small chapel which smelled of incense and was lit by a few flickering candles. Pater Yanis made the sign of the cross and muttered a short prayer under his breath. He pointed out antique silver chalices, pewter incense burners and some Byzantine icons in front of the altar. The icons were done in a style similar to those in the visitors' room, but somehow I felt they were not as sacred. I suddenly felt a strong urge to leave and said so to the priest.

"Very well, my son," he said patronizingly, his white teeth smiling. "But first I wonder if you wouldn't mind taking a picture of me and sending it from America." I nodded.

We wended our way in silence back to the main courtyard where the old monk reappeared hobbling on his cane. I asked him if I could take his picture too, as I had really wanted to photograph him. He just shrugged, not minding one way or another.

"Picture?" he croaked. "All pictures lie anyway. They are not like real life." I took several angles and told him I'd send it along with Pater Yanis'. He merely shrugged again; he hadn't smiled or posed as the priest had done.

"I should be going," I said. "It will be dark soon."

"You must come to Amorgos and visit us again," said the Pater. "And remember to send the pictures," he added cheerfully.

"Of course, I promise. Thank you for your hospitality.

Yassas kai Adio!" I said in farewell, and made my way down the dark corridor through which I'd come in.

It did not seem so forbiddingly dark now, as if my eyes were seeing it in a different light. I thought of the monks and wondered whether they saw the sky and sea around them as an idyllic setting, a haven. I wondered if they believed that— cupped high in these rocks—they were nearer to their Heaven. Or were they in fact self-imprisoned in an impregnable fortress? The prisoners and the jailers.

My predilection for such a haven had been eclipsed by the thing itself, by its cruel, indifferent beauty. I had found what I came to find, only to leave empty-handed. I began to see how such a terrible beauty could come to possess a man. The real beauty, it seemed, lay in the struggle, the unending fight with these elements, and the eventual coming to terms with them.

For me, it had been the gruelling trek to reach the monastery and not the man-made sanctity I found waiting there. It was the trip, not the destination that mattered.

The monks watched from above as I walked down the cobblestone path. When I reached the rusty iron gate I turned to wave goodbye. Only Pater Yanis waved back. The old monk wasn't there.

AMORGOS: ROCK

It was unusual for something to be stirring in the house at that hour of the morning. But there it went again. Nikos pushed back the sheet and propped up his head on the flat straw pillow. The noise wasn't from Katina. She was lying very still, sleeping on the side away from him. Nikos rubbed the sleep from his eyes and looked around the small, orderly room. Whatever it was, it must be coming from the boy's room next door.

"Taki," he said in a hoarse whisper, "is that you?". No answer. The shuffling stopped, intriguing him all the more. He stroked his walrus mustache, then got up and went to his son's room.

"Taki! Why are you up so early? There's no school today. And why are you dressed like Sunday?" asked Nikos, puzzled.

Taki stood in the centre of the tiny room, half into the blue suit he wore to church on Sundays and holy days. When his father spoke he averted his eyes which instead caught sight of the row of boats bobbing in the harbour. It would be windy out today, he thought; too choppy to go out fishing with Kyrios Panos. But he wouldn't go anyway because the teacher had told them--

"Where are you going all dressed up at this hour?" demanded Nikos in a stage whisper, trying not to awaken his wife. "Answer me!"

"I wanted to go before you woke up because I knew you wouldn't let me."

"Go where?"

"To school."

"But there's no school today. You know what day it is!" Nikos said gruffly.

Taki looked up uneasily. "Teacher said there would be no classes today. But there's a visitor coming...because it's National Liberation Day. An important man from Athens. And we're going to sing and recite poems about the--" He hesitated, fearing his father's reaction. "About the Revolution," he said finally.

"About the Revolution!" cried Nikos in disbelief. He was fully awake now, no longer worried about disturbing his wife.

"About the Revolution!" His eyes stared incredulously at the boy.

Nikos stood motionless in his bulging white undershirt, eyes on his son. He ran his fingers through his bushy salt and pepper hair. He did not want to believe that a child of his would try to deceive him by sneaking out into the grey morning to pay homage to them. For years now the dictatorship had made his life a nightmare. Not that the police had ever bothered him or his family. They had let him run his little café in Katápola, the port of Amorgos, without any trouble. No, it was the harsh fact that the regime had turned his beloved Greece into a nation of bootlickers and informers. He hated the guts of those in power, and said so to his friends at the café. But that was it: he no longer knew who his friends were. Who could you trust?

"Get undressed and go back to bed," the father ordered and returned to his room, as though the turning of his back on the boy was undisputably the last word.

His father was always like that, thought Taki. Pronouncing final judgment, passing The Law, on him and his mother. He couldn't do that with his customers at the café. No, it was his family, and he was the one to decide everything.

Taki stood erect in his blue suit, pressed only yesterday by his mother. He wasn't a child anymore. After all, he was twelve now, and caught his share of fish whenever he went out with Kyrios Panos, the old fisherman. And besides, hadn't his father said often enough that he was no longer a boy but almost a man? Taki

again felt his father's penetrating glare.

"Well? Do I have to take them off for you?" the man said menacingly.

"I want--I want to go, I--I must go to school--the other boys will laugh at me if I don't go. Besides, the teacher said..."

"I don't care what the teacher said!" his father roared. "She's a puppet like all the others! You think your friends will laugh, eh? What do you think everyone will say to me? 'Nikos Lekaris openly defies the dictatorship but quietly sends his son to sing about it.' Ha! They can laugh but not at my expense."

"Teacher said--it--it was our duty--to--to go today. Our duty to the country, she said."

Nikos sighed impatiently. His stubby fingers ran through the heavy mustache that was his trademark on the island. In the next room he could hear his wife stirring.

"What is it, Niko? Anything wrong?" called Katina.

"No, it's all right. Go back to sleep," he said. He sat down on his son's tiny bed, crushing the straw mattress. Taki looked down at the floor.

"My boy," Nikos started slowly, fondling his mustache, "you know what your duty is--I've told you often enough. Your duty is to your family and to all free men. And we must believe that to free our country. Anything else doesn't matter. That, my boy, is your duty, and mine and the duty of every Greek!" He was about to continue his little speech when his wife came into the room.

"What is it, Niko? Why is Taki all dressed like Sunday?" Katina asked sleepily. The boy, seeing his mother, went quickly to her, silently asking her to be his ally against the power before them. The woman put a hand softly on Taki's tousled hair and gathered in her nightgown with the other.

"He wants to go to school, Katina-mou, to the 'Enslavement Day' ceremonies," said Nikos bitterly. "Some military pig is coming from Athens to make sure the islanders are in step with them. Those bastards—they're even brainwashing the kids!" There was vengeance in his voice. It seemed to say that things would be different if he ever had his way.

"The teacher said we had to go today," Taki told his mother. "If I don't go, the other boys will know that Father kept me home...and—and they'll call me names!" He looked for support.

"Names?" cried his father. "What's a little teasing when your country's freedom is at stake? Anyway, I don't want a son of mine to be called names. You knock the teeth out of the first one who calls you anything but Takis Lekaris. See if anyone tries anything after that!"

Katina Lekaris had lived with her husband's nightmare since the regime began. Although she herself had no strong political convictions, she always sided with her husband on principle. Nikos invariably got into heated political arguments in the café, and she often thought he went too far in his candour, but said nothing.

She thanked her saints that the military police miraculously had not locked him up for such open defiance.

"Perhaps it wouldn't hurt, Niko," she ventured. "After all, they're probably only going to sing some silly songs and recite a few poems." She saw the darkness lift from Taki's face.

"In the name of the Virgin, Katina!" her husband retorted, getting up from the bed. "They are actually brainwashing them with all that crap."

"Yes, I know," she said quietly, tightening the sash on her nightgown that concealed her plumpness. "But if you have any faith in your sermons about the evils of dictatorship, you'll know that nothing they say will matter," she added, a plea in her voice. Taki nodded agreement.

Nikos slapped his hands against the sides of his wrinkled pajama pants. "No, no, no! I will not allow my own son to add to the bootlickers. I'll be the laughingstock of the island!"

His wife clutched the boy's shoulder and braced herself. She said with a woman's gentleness, trying not to arouse his lightning temper: "But don't you see, Niko, if you forbid Taki from going, you are as guilty of dictatorship as they are."

Nikos sensed he was being cornered. "Ah, that's different."

"Not at all!" said Katina, more sure of herself now. "It's exactly the same principle. At least give Taki the chance to make up his own mind—let him choose—he's old enough now. You've said so time and again, haven't you?"

"Yes, Father, let me choose," echoed the boy. A glimmer came into his wide brown eyes.

Nikos Lekaris was not a happy man at this moment. He had virtually been checkmated by his own wife and, worse still, by his own preachings. He sighed a heavy sigh. "But the boy's mind is already made up—look at him."

"Well, maybe he'll change it. There's still time," Katina said, sensing victory.

Nikos looked sharply at his son for what seemed an eternity. His mind weighed—as it always did—the possibilities and consequences. Finally he spoke, firmly yet with gentleness. "Well, my boy...you do as your conscience tells you to do." An uneasy feeling gnawed away somewhere inside him. Was he doing the right thing? He left the room without saying another word; his wife followed dutifully.

Taki's face lit up. It was the first time his father had relented on something so important to him. The Law for once had not been passed, and he was overcome with the prospect of the days ahead.

Less than an hour later, the sun was arching over the shallow mountains of the island, warming the faint azure colours of Amorgos bay. The wind was no longer whistling; and the tall cypresses resumed their unwavering sentinel over the dusty road to the harbour. No one was on the road at this hour. No one except the cloud of animated dust streaking around the rocky bends. Past

the cubes of whitewashed houses, past the magenta-domed chapels. Down all the way to the harbour. For a split second the dust parted to reveal a small boy running wildly, then stumbling hard.

Taki picked himself up and, panting as he had all the way, continued running at full speed. He didn't mind the tear in his jeans nor the trickle of bright red coming from the scrape on his knee. All he could think of was the time.

"If Kyrios Panos hasn't left yet, we'll have a good catch. The boat will be full of fish today!" he said to himself.

"Kyrio Pano! Kyrio Pano!" he shouted, seeing the old man in the distance. On the prow of an old caique with blistering blue paint, a kindly old man with white mustachios and a black sailor's cap waved back.

"Saint Nicholas be thanked," thought Taki, gasping to catch his breath, "he hasn't left yet." As he came up to the quay, he suddenly thought of the other boys--Yanis, Harikos, and especially the big bully, Petros. They'd give him a hard time tonight for missing the ceremonies at school. But as quickly as the thought had come, Taki dismissed it.

"Let them try laughing," he said defiantly, half-aloud.

"Just let them try."

III.

THE CATS OF HYDRA

Something was wrong. Adrian shuffled uneasily in the chair knowing full well every move was being watched by the peasant-faced woman opposite him. Vicky, his young wife, sat next to him with her legs resting on their baggage, catching her breath after the long climb from Hydra's waterfront. They waited in silence in a kind of living-room for the old woman's husband to appear; and when he didn't, she went into her kitchen and returned with two glasses of water.

"Nero?" She extended the glasses towards the couple.

"Efharisto," said Adrian, mustering up all the Greek he'd learned at Berlitz last winter and from two previous trips to Greece. "But your husband is where?" he managed.

"He's coming, he's coming soon." The fat face smiled briefly, revealing a row of gold teeth.

"He said he meet us at the harbour," said Adrian, unsure of his tenses. "I gave him money for rent."

"Yes, yes," affirmed the woman. "He went fishing this morning and now he's washing himself." She sat back on a chair, her stout frame overhanging it, nervously adjusting her white headscarf. From the back of the house muted, intermittent splashing could be heard, and in the distance the meowing of a catfight.

"What's she saying?" asked Vicky impatiently. "Why can't we just unpack?"

"I don't know what's going on," Adrian said, annoyed. "All I know is we paid that fisherman rent for this place and we're staying put!"

Another quarter of an hour went by. The couple were anxious because—now at the peak of the tourist season—they knew there wasn't a room to be had on Hydra; and especially anxious because Vicky's parents were arriving the next day.

"Please," Adrian tried diplomatically, "tell husband to come here. I want talk with him."

"He'll come soon; he's still washing," the woman said impassively, showing no sign of leaving the premises.

"But he's been washing for nearly half an hour!" he said in English, knowing she couldn't understand. He listened for

splashing noises but they had stopped; he reverted to Greek.

"I pay him one thousand drachmas for house."

"Not enough," she said tersely, showing emotion for the first time. "He should have charged you one thousand five hundred." Adrian noticed in her tone the authority usually reserved for Greek males.

"The money all right yesterday, so all right today!" he sputtered, furious that she should want to welch on the deal.

With Milt and Dottie--Vicky's parents--coming, they wanted a house to themselves, especially as it was the older couple's first trip outside the States. This way they could show them around Hydra, Adrian's favourite island, with a certain amount of freedom and comfort. An American artist, whose room they'd shared for a couple of nights, had told them about the fisherman's house. Adrian found the fisherman in his boat nearby, went with him to view the house briefly, and the two men had come to an agreement the previous day. Everything seemed fine then.

"Do fishermen get that dirty?" asked Vicky derisively.

"I want to wash up myself."

"I'm going to go back there and get him if he doesn't come out soon," threatened Adrian. There was no need to for in a couple of minutes a wispy, grey-haired man appeared quietly in the doorway, faintly smelling of soap.

Adrian stood up as much to meet him as to assert his claim.

But before he could say anything the old woman launched into a

tirade at her husband which Adrian could barely make out. The wife scolded, pleaded, cajoled—seemingly all at the same time. Adrian caught the words money...rent...house...my dowry...crazy...old fool.

"What's going on?" Vicky looked mystified. "If she didn't want to rent the place why didn't she say so before. It's too late now!"

Adrian tried to intercede. But the fisherman put out his hand to shut up his wife, then turned to Adrian.

"I am sorry," he said slowly, almost shyly, "but my wife does not want to leave the house. You see, it belongs to her."

"It's mine! It's my house!" confirmed the woman. "He had no right to—"

"It's too late now," said Adrian hotly, towering over the couple. "I pay you good rent...the house ours now." He was straining his knowledge of Greek; Berlitz hadn't prepared him for this.

"One thousand five hundred drachmas!" repeated the woman, who got somewhat hysterical when her husband tugged her away from Adrian.

"We made an agreement, the foreigner and I," he said firmly to her, "and I will keep my word. Come, Annoula, we have to get ready." He nudged her towards the next room.

"They're getting it for nothing!" she shrieked back at the couple. "I'll be laughed at by the whole neighbourhood!"

The fisherman stoically led her away while she continued her harangue. Soon only muffled cries were heard from the next room. Adrian and Vicky looked at each other stupefied, feeling a little like home-wreckers.

"What's wrong with these people?" Vicky's voice squeaked.

"I thought you said they were good people on this island."

"They are," said Adrian, "or at least they used to be. I don't know. Guess all this tourism and money has screwed them up. It was really different five years ago. There was this--"

"I know, I know," interrupted Vicky, "you told me a dozen times. The house with a garden and the landlady who cooked for you and all for three dollars a week."

"Well, it's true. Man, that was something! Not like this..."

Adrian swept a faintly sunburnt hand in the direction of the next room.

Vicky started to unpack one of the bags and looked around the room. It was a large, crudely plastered room with an unpainted table, thatched chairs, a divan at one end. The small kitchen was off to one side, another door led to the bedroom.

"Guess we'll sleep in here; my parents can have the bedroom. What time does the boat get in tomorrow?"

"Around noon. We should be ready for them by then," Adrian said wryly. Past outings with his mad in-laws flashed to mind: the washed-out camping trip in Yellowstone, the sleepless weekend on Cape Cod.

"Now, Adrian, remember you promised to be patient with them. After all, it is their first time out of the States." He nodded absently, looking for a place to store his snorkel and mask.

In a few minutes the fisherman and his wife reappeared briefly, carrying bundles and plastic shopping bags as though they were going to the laundromat.

"If you need anything," said the old man, "we will be staying with my wife's sister. It's just across the street and down a couple of houses."

"Fine, fine," said Adrian, who noticed the woman was stewing as she went out.

Shortly after noon the next day the Neraida lowered her gangplank and oozed a swirl of tourists, like a giant toothpaste tube squeezing out its contents. Adrian and Vicky mingled with the waiting crowd, bobbing up and down to catch sight of her parents. Finally at the end of the queue a plump, middle-aged couple materialized, decked out in floral-print cruisewear. They trailed a pyramid of bags with two porters under them.

"Milt! Dottie! Over here!" shouted Adrian, to which the arriving couple waved acknowledgement and pushed their way through.

Vicky ran forward to embrace them and took her mother's bag. Adrian kissed Dottie lightly on the cheek and shook hands with Milt, who clapped him on the back a couple of times.

"Say, kids," said Milt scanning the port, "looks like a real

nice place you got here. I think we're gonna like it just fine...and say, wait'll you see what I brought along."

"Surprise me, Milt," said Adrian playfully, expecting almost anything from his father-in-law.

"Now, Milt," said Dottie, "that can wait till later."

"Yeah, Dad, let's get in the shade and have a lemonade or something." Vicky led the way to the nearest quayside café where the porters were paid and the foursome sat down to exchange news from home and first impressions of their trip.

"Didn't have so much as a ripple sailing over here," boasted Milt. "But geez, we had a rough time getting out of Athens."

"You're not kidding," Dottie put in, "we got this taxi at the hotel and he took us to the wrong place!"

"Well, Dottie, I'm sure the kids don't want to be bored with details," said Milt somewhat embarrassed.

A waiter, speaking impeccable English, took their order.

"What happened?" Adrian asked Dottie. "Did the taxi driver gyp you?"

"Worse than that," she shot a look at Milt and continued, "Milt told him to take us to the port—the PORT, he repeated it—only the driver didn't understand and took us to the airport instead!" Milt forced a smile as the others broke up with laughter. "Why, we just barely made ~~the~~ the boat before it sailed."

"Well, y'see," Milt summoned his defence, "I told him over and over, but I guess he just couldn't understand my English." He put a freckled hand through his thin, sandy hair to accent his dismay.

"Or didn't want to, more likely," said Adrian smugly.

An assortment of soft drinks, sandwiches, and gooey cakes arrived as the couples talked on. Vicky had plans for a lunch at the house, but when Dottie saw the syrupy baklavas served at the next table she couldn't resist ordering one. Then Milt's notorious appetite took over and he ordered ham sandwiches for everyone, confident he could clean up if anyone failed. Under the table two mean-looking alley cats caught Dottie's attention and she shared her sandwich with them, with an "Oh, aren't they cute!" The lean, hungry creatures vied for every scrap and meowed aggressively for more; Dottie ordered another sandwich.

"What about this surprise of yours, Milt?" asked Adrian.

"Well, you kids know," Milt began slowly, "how much I like my steaks...so I brought along my folding barbecue grill. Never travel without it. S'pose we can find some charcoal 'round here, Adrian?"

"You'll find the charcoal all right," Adrian laughed at Milt's extravagance, "but you won't find the steaks! At least, not the kind you get in the Midwest."

"No wonder," Vicky chimed in, "you've got so many bags! Mom, why'd you let him bring along that thing?"

"You know your father," Dottie shrugged.

Milt called for the check, and when the waiter brought it Adrian looked it over and thought it was exorbitant, considering the plainness of the sandwiches. Unabashed, Milt handed the waiter a ludicrously big banknote to pay for everything.

They soon left the café, loaded down with bags, and under a hot midday sun trekked uphill along steep cobblestone streets to the house. Milt had started to look for a taxi, and was astounded to learn that there were no vehicles on the island. Adrian led the way, followed closely by Vicky, then Dottie, mentally noting shops of interest, and lastly as always, Milt, who straggled far behind noting everything in general. When they arrived the shade of the vine trellis in the courtyard cooled them off somewhat. Adrian and Vicky went in the house while the older couple admired the panorama below the walls of the yard.

"My, what a lovely view," said Dottie, looking down the narrow streets towards the port. "And all the houses are so white..."

"That's because they paint them every Easter," said Milt knowingly. "At least that's what my guidebook tells me."

Once inside the house they started to settle in: unpacking bags, allotting beds, poking into every corner like cats in a new home. The boat trip and walk up the hill had tired them and, glad of the Greek siesta custom, they were soon asleep.

Adrian and Vicky opened up the divan, stretched out on it and also dozed off before long.

When Dottie awoke she noticed Milt was no longer in the room. She went into the large room where Adrian and Vicky were still sleeping, but her husband wasn't there either, nor in the courtyard outside. She peeked into the tiny primitive bathroom; he had evidently left the premises.

"Oh, he's probably just wandering round town," yawned Vicky when her mother woke her up. "He's always doing that. Remember Cape Cod?"

"Yes, but this is different. He doesn't know a word of Greek and nobody seems to understand him. We sure had a time of it in Athens."

"I'll have a look for him," said Adrian who'd just caught the gist of things, "when we go out. Anyway, the shopkeepers here speak more English than Greek nowadays. He's probably looking for steaks!"

It was six o'clock when they got to the port. Adrian went off to look for Milt while Vicky took her mother through the string of souvenir shops on the waterfront. The sun was going down behind the Kanoni promontory as Adrian combed the cafés, restaurants and bars lining the lower part of Hydra. Where could the man be? He knew Milt's weakness for food and drink, but could not find him in any of the well-known establishments. It was getting close to dinnertime and to the rendezvous that Adrian

had made with Vicky and Dottie. He now walked aimlessly through the upper streets where there were few shops. Suddenly a piercing guffaw came out of an innocent-looking building; Adrian immediately recognized the sound.

He peered into the dark recesses of the place. There by a row of huge wine barrels sat three or four benign local men, with Milt holding court. A half-dozen glasses and wine measures littered the table, where Milt was prattling away as he poured another round. The men couldn't understand a word he said but seemed fascinated nonetheless.

"Say, Adrian!" exclaimed Milt loudly in genuine surprise, "Come on over here and have some of this great wine—what do you boys call it? Ratsina? Come meet my friends here? Boys, my son-in-law Adrian...he even speaks Greek. Say something in Greek, Adrian."

"You had us worried, Milt."

"Nah, nothing to worry about. Just doing a little sightseeing. Here, have a glass of this. Great stuff!"

"Okay, Milt, just one glass, then we've got to be off. Vicky and Dottie are waiting for us on the waterfront."

A clean glass was brought as Adrian exchanged pleasantries with the locals, who were pleased he spoke their language. Much later than he'd imagined, Adrian helped Milt to his feet and tried to pay the wine merchant. But Milt had already paid in advance. The two men said their goodbyes and started shakily down

the narrow lanes towards the harbour.

"Where did you get to, Milt?" Dottie asked, relieved and furious at the same time. "You had us all worried. Why, just look at the state you're in!"

"Well, I'm not in Illinois—haw, haw!" Milt guffawed. He explained his whereabouts as best he could, counting heavily on Adrian to support his claims. "A honey, you really would have liked those fellahs. Weren't they a swell bunch of guys, Adrian?"

"Sure, Milt." Adrian steered the group to one of the better restaurants.

"Besides," Milt continued undaunted, "I've got a surprise for all of you tomorrow."

"Now what!" said Vicky, expecting the worst.

"Listen, kids...I met this terrific guy—spoke English and everything—and since we can't get steaks on this here island, he's going to get us—something else. It'll be deelishus!"

"What?"

"Ah, it's just the wine talking."

"Well, if I told you now," Milt said playfully, "it wouldn't be much of a surprise, would it? Sooo, let's wait till tomorrow."

"Oh, Dad! You're still a kid at heart."

"A middle-aged delinquent," muttered Adrian.

The couples found a secluded table so Milt's loudness wouldn't attract too much attention. At this hour most things were off

the menu and they had to settle for commonplace stewed veal. When dinner arrived so did a wandering band of alley cats demanding their share. Dottie obligingly served them under the table.

"My but these cats are hungry!" she exclaimed. "They eat so much yet they're so skinny."

"That's because nobody else feeds them, Dottie," said Adrian.

Soon the meowing and scrapping brought out more cats, so that when the waiter came again he literally kicked them away, which greatly upset Dottie.

"Why, that's no way to treat those poor creatures!" cried Dottie.

"They all do it," Adrian said tersely.

"I'm ready for bed," yawned Vicky, and made the first move to go home.

Next day was Saturday and Vicky was getting the hot water ready for her husband's weekly treat: a hair wash. She'd set out a chair in the courtyard where the water could spill down a drain, and the sun could dry his hair. Milt and Dottie had slept in, and were quite secretive when they did get up. They had gone off around eleven saying something about buying a few things for Punch, which was all part of Milt's surprise.

Milt returned about an hour later with a big bag of charcoal. He soon set up his barbecue grill in the courtyard and started a smoky fire.

"Mmmm, the coals should be white hot by the time Dottie

gets here." Then he disappeared into the house to sneak a nap before lunch.

Adrian helped Vicky carry the cauldron of water outside and got into his swimsuit, ready for his hair wash. She ladled out some warm water with a saucepan and got up a mountain of lather on Adrian's head. No sooner had she started working up suds than a shrill voice came up from the street.

"No, stop that! Get away now! Oh, my goodness, don't do that!" It was Dottie's voice unaccustomly distressed.

Vicky rushed to the wall of the yard; Adrian followed in a trail of soap suds. Horror seized them at the sight they saw below: there, a little way down the street, was Dottie carrying a large platter. On the platter, which she held precariously above her head, were five or six magnificent Greek lobsters. And in a menacing circle surrounding Dottie and the lobster platter were a dozen of the meanest, hungriest residents of the island: the cats of Hydra. Then in the next second, driven on by the strong lobster smell, the cats began to pounce one after the other onto Dottie herself. The meowing grew louder and attracted even more cats. Suddenly, several of them, using a staircase as a launching pad, dove through the air smack onto the platter itself!

The shock of this caused Dottie to scream and trip on the cobblestones. Losing her balance, she fell forward, catapulting the lobsters right onto the cats. Pandemonium broke loose. While

Dottie sat dazed, amidst pieces of broken porcelain, cats of every description wildly tore the lobsters to pieces. Twenty, thirty, forty--cats appeared from every access, of all shapes, colours, sizes. Nearly every cat in Hydra joined the fray. The cacophony of meowing was deafening. Catfights raged fiercely over lobster morsels. Cats lucky enough to get anything streaked off to savour the spoils elsewhere.

In a few seconds the action was dragged to a neighbouring alley. Only the ferocious meowing echoed in the air. Dottie sat helpless, crying in the middle of the street as the last cat left her side to join the others.

Adrian and Vicky stood motionless in the yard above. It had all happened in a matter of seconds. Milt, awakened by the noise, now appeared at their side, dumbfounded.

"Wha-what happened? What's wrong with Dottie--where are the lobsters?"

Adrian explained, not quite sure what he'd witnessed had actually happened.

"What?" cried Milt, "You mean she fed them our lobsters?"

No, no, no. That wasn't it. Adrian tried to explain it again.

Milt seemed to understand but was quite unperturbed. He leaned over the wall and shouted down the street: "Say, Dottie, stop that crying now. You just go on back and get us six more lobsters. The fire's just right. D'ya hear?"

Among the spectators who had appeared on their balconies and terraces, Adrian noticed the fisherman's wife a few houses over. A vengeful cackle emanated from her mouth. The gold teeth glittered in the sun.

ONE LIKE HER

It was the time of day that Costas looked forward to more than any other, and with it, in the last rays of a kind October sun, came the sights he relished above all else. Sitting amidst the clutch of metal tables under the awning of the kafeneion, he barely listened to what his old friend Michalis Karalekas was saying. The passing show on Págrati's main square was far too good to miss a moment of it.

"There you go again," the older man said, shaking his head. "Here I've been prattling away about what happened at the store today and you haven't heard a word. Your mind just wanders off."

And mark my words, Costaki, you're getting worse every day!"

"Sorry, Maki," Costas said. "It's just that--ah--after a day at the ministry my eyes are dying to see something besides paperwork. What were you saying?"

Both men took a sip of thick Turkish coffee from their stained demi-tasses; Michalis started up his monologue with renewed vigour while Costas' head again turned imperceptibly from his friend to the shapes moving across the square. And as their daily ritual continued the only thought that picked at Costas was whether or not he was in fact getting worse.

He couldn't help it if the women of Athens were to his liking, could he? It was completely normal, he told himself, for a healthy Greek male to observe the opposite sex this way. Besides, what harm was there in merely looking? Was he like those mad womanizers Hadjipetros and Stamatelos at the ministry who had affairs left and right, lying to their wives every time they set foot out the door? No, that was not Costas Pinellis. His was a happy family: two loving daughters, a wife he respected who was a good cook and kept their home spotless, and even tolerable in-laws who lived far enough away to remain tolerable. Well, what of it if after sixteen years of married life he indulged himself a little at the sight of other women? It was, after all, completely normal.

The two men sat in a moment of rare silence, Michalis having finished another episode in the on-going saga of his boss and

Undertaker, the stock assistant. Costas stopped smoothing down his toothbrush moustache and absently reached into the pocket of his wrinkled suit jacket. He pulled out his well-worn worry beads and began tumbling them rhythmically through his fingers. His eyes, however, had not left the scene of the busy square where a steady stream of orangey-yellow trolley buses disgorged their contents of buxom secretaries, heavy-lidded salesgirls and housewives returning home from shopping.

Ah, just look at that little chestnut filly...now she's one with potential. A bit short maybe, low-slung, but solid all the way through. Mana-mou! If I only had her for a weekend on Aegina, I'd show that little rump a thing of two! And there, that big one in the red blouse...now there's some pair of melons! Po-po-po-po...

"And the best part of the story," Michalis added as though his epilogue had been incubating and was now ready to hatch, "is that Undertaker really had worked all through his lunch time. Only there wasn't anyone else there to prove it!"

"To prove what?" Costas asked innocently.

"To prove--there! See what I mean? You're off again! What's with you Costaki?" Michalis leaned closer. "I know, I know. It's the dames again, eh? You don't have to tell me, I can see it by the dribble on your lips. What's the matter--aren't you getting enough of it at home or what?"

"Ah, come on, Maki. You know this is different. I mean,

Rinyo is the perfect wife--faithful, kind, a good cook too. Have you ever heard me complain? But it's only natural to--ah--to look over the passing talent. Especially today's young stuff in those short skirts. Ha! They're getting so short, why do they bother wearing them at all?"

"To keep guys like you out of jail, that's why," chided Michalis.

~~"Tell me, what better is there to do in a kafeneion nowadays?"~~

We can't talk politics. Money we don't have--that's nothing new. Playing tavli becomes an obsession. So what's better than having a good look? I suppose you never look them over, never let them get you excited, eh? Didn't think you were past it, Maki." Costas arched back in the saggy canvas chair as though he'd kicked the winning goal.

"Past it? Ha! That's a laugh. You know me better than that. I may have a few years on you, but I'm not ready for my walking papers yet!" The older man repeated a gusty ha! under his breath to add conviction to his claim.

Overhead, the Ellinikon awning was swiftly being rolled back by a pimply youth in black pants, thus announcing the end of day and the beginning of evening. Matrons pushing oversized baby prams were hurriedly making their way home from the Alsos, the wooded park across the square, having gossiped longer than they should have. The two men, themselves prolonging their inevitable departure, lingered awhile before Michalis finally paid for the coffees.

"Mind you don't follow the choicest rump of the day into the wrong house," advised Michalis mockingly. "Her husband might not like it and send you flying through the window!"

"Don't worry, I know when to stop," Costas retorted.

"Yassou, Maki. See you tomorrow."

Costas made his way up the steep hills of Pagrati to little ~~Danarou Street where the familiar grey apartment building stood~~ waiting for him like a tombstone. Going up on either side of it were modern, taller and, it seemed to him, finer buildings. He found himself again wishing he could move his family into one of them. High up there it would be cool, and the penthouses would look down even on the Acropolis. If he could only afford those rents, he thought, then quickly dismissed the idea.

"Did you buy them, Daddy?" Maria had run to the door to greet her father. After the customary hug his younger daughter waited for a reply.

"Buy what, my mouse?"

"The picnic tickets for Yanna and me."

"Oh, that. No, I forgot. Besides, my little one, the ticket agent is a long way from my office." Maria hung her head and seeing this her father quickly added, "But first thing tomorrow I'll phone and reserve two of the best seats on the bus. Okay?"

The child seemed happy with this assurance and Costas looked up to see his wife standing by the kitchen.

"Costaki, it's you, I didn't hear you come in."

"Yassou, Rinyo." He went over to give her his usual peck on the cheek.

"Thought you'd be home earlier tonight," she said with a touch of annoyance.

"Well, you know Michalis and his stories--once he gets going you can't turn him off. Where's Yanna?"

"Doing her homework; I wouldn't disturb her."

Rinyo took off her soiled apron and smoothed the contours of the floral dress she wore nearly every day. She had spent more time making supper than she should have, and now she would have to hurry. She left Costas to his newspaper while she brushed her hair and put on some lipstick. Her hair, she knew, was in need of a hairdo but it would have to wait. She didn't like going out not looking her best.

"I'd better be going. It's late enough."

"Going?" Costas' face emerged from the sports page, puzzled.

"Yes, to my mother's. It's Thursday--remember?" Rinyo said tartly, indignant that he should forget the weekly duty call to her ailing parents.

"Of course! How could I forget."

"The supper's ready and just needs warming up. I suppose you're going to watch a game on television."

"The game, my dear," beamed Costas. "It's Panathinaikos and Olympiakos tonight!" Costas always got excited when his team, Olympiakos, played; but this grew to a frenzy whenever they played

their football rivals, Panathinaikos.

"Well, that should keep your nose in the television set,"

Rinyo said with a feminine lack of understanding in such matters.

"Oh, look at the time. It's a bad hour to be going across the city."

"Now, if I'd bought that car Lentzos was selling last spring I could have driven you there and back in no time," Costas said

wistfully.

The ride to the working-class suburb of Kypseli where Rinyo's parents lived required a change of trolley buses, and she hated the jostling crowds after shopping hours. She hurriedly put on her faded blue jacket and drawing herself to full height, which matched her husband's, extended a cheek for him to kiss lightly.

"Yassou! Regards to your parents. And watch out," he called jokingly after her, "for the men of Kypseli!"

No sooner had Costas settled down to watch the game than he sat bolt upright: the commercials were on. This was another of his favourite pastimes as, invariably, the advertisers used a bevy of sun-tanned beauties to hook the viewer into watching. Costas needed no invitation as he leaned closer to the screen to inspect the various dimensions, front and rear, of the Pepsi Girl, the Kolykos Toothpaste Queen and the Sanyo Sweetheart. He recoiled inwardly at the sight of each as, clad in the flimsiest outfits, they paraded their wares before his dilating eyes.

Po-po-po! Look at the wiggle on that one...what I'd give
to get my teeth into that! Ah, and the Pepsi Girl this year has
a great set up front...not like that ironing board of a thing they
used before...this one packs a wallop!

~~Costas looked up from his desk and noticed that the shadows~~
of the filing cabinet had reached the office door. This told him,
without the embarrassment of looking at his watch, that there was
only a half hour left in the work day. He made as though to tidy
up his desk by shuffling one stack of papers onto another, a
favourite dodge of his.

"Finished early, are you, Pinellis?" His neighbour Stamatelos
arched a disbelieving eyebrow.

"Well, there's little I can do until that Larissa report
comes in. Let's hope it's in tomorrow's mail." Costas could
feign enthusiasm as well as anyone. "I think I'll go and wash
my hands."

If there was any real benefit in being a clerk in the Ministry
of Economics it was this moment, thought Costas. Outside his
office he checked his watch and decided to take the stairs two
by two so as not to miss her. It was almost the exact time
that Miss Pantelides, the deputy minister's secretary, made her
daily trip to the ladies room before leaving. He positioned
himself at the top of the staircase, prepared to view the most

massive, best developed and lowest cut bosom in the whole ministry.

And to complement it, as Costas well knew--often having allowed her to climb the stairs in front of him--she had a Grade A pair of buttocks.

He dashed briefly into the men's room to make the most of his receding hair. On coming out he saw her at the bottom of the stairs talking to Hadjipetros. It was a widely-circulated

rumour in the ministry that he and Miss Pantelides were having an affair but Costas disbelieved it. What would such a lovely creature want with an unctuous old man like him? If only he had Hadjipetros' salary, Costas thought, he'd show her what a good time really was! Car rides, tavernas, expensive clothes, perhaps even a little garçonière where he could quell her many passions. If he only had the money.

Finally she came up the stairs. Costas pointed his head the other way while his eyes surreptitiously feasted.

"Why, good afternoon, Miss Pantelides."

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Pinellis."

"Yes, just putting the finishing touches to another day.

Did you have a busy one?"

"Busy? My poor fingers are worn to the bone from typing.

I can't wait to get home to soak them in hot water. Excuse me."

With thoughts of soothing baths and sensual massages he stepped aside and watched the 'come hither' movements of her hips, the firm roundness of her posterior.

Home...with her...po-po-po-po!

Costas had almost forgotten that, it was Thursday and he had promised to pick up the tickets for Yanna and Maria after work. As usual, he'd left it to the last minute as the youth club picnic was on the weekend. But he found that it didn't matter since, after going to the ticket agent's on Patisson Street, there was a good number of places available on the bus.

It was still early when Costas had picked up the tickets and he decided to stroll down the bustling, mercantile boulevard of Patisson. Bright lights, busy shops, crowds going to cinemas. It was a part of Athens he liked but never got to visit any more. Of course, they sometimes passed through here on the trolley, on the way to Rinyo's parents in Kypseli. But that was on Sundays when the big stores were closed and the area had a funereal look about it.

Tonight it was very much alive, and Costas swung freely down the street in the pleasant autumn air. Rinyo would be at her mother's and the girls had enough to occupy them until he got home. Rinyo's cousin who was visiting them would see to supper. Everything was as it should be.

As he'd missed his after-work ritual with Michalis, he thought he might treat himself to some ice cream in Fokinos Negrou Square. He remembered a café among the many smart ones there which made its own exquisite brand of ice cream. It would

also be, he thought, an excellent opportunity to view the passing show and compare it to the one in his home square in Pograti. He liked doing things like that.

Costas found the café he wanted and installed himself at a table whose view commanded most of the square. Children's cries could be heard, objecting to the nannies who insisted on taking them home. Early evening strollers were out in force and Costas soon singled out the women to his liking. Under the freshness of the big maple trees that studded the square several tables were filling up with the evening clientele.

The ice cream arrived, a special cassata with glazed fruit, but was not as good as Costas remembered it. He finished it quickly and leaned back to watch the crowd while absently twirling his worry beads.

Among those who caught his eye was a couple in the neighbouring café. He had cast several glances their way and each time had found them to be increasingly affectionate to one another, a rarity among Athenian couples. Costas liked public displays of affection and was aroused by the man's attentiveness. Although the woman had her back to Costas, he could tell from the man's stroking of her face under her wide hat and by the closeness of their heads that they were very much in love. She must be a beauty, thought Costas, because her escort himself was a handsome young man, dressed in a stylish suit.

In a little while the couple got up to leave and Costas immediately noticed the woman's tallness and how closely her dark, well-cut skirt clung to her. The fullness of this rear view made him sigh audibly. The man opened a silver cigarette case, lit up and paid the waiter.

As the couple left, Costas decided that he too should be on his way. He paid for the ice cream and started strolling in the direction the couple had taken. In the half-twilight he thought he'd play one of his old games and follow them awhile. He soon caught up but kept several feet behind them so he could enjoy the woman's movements without being noticed.

The woman's proud walk on her high heels, her rhythmic sway, her firmly rounded calves, her statuesque height— Costas allowed all these to seduce him into a state he had not known in years. This was better than anything he had seen in Pagrati Square—or in Omonia for that matter. She had far more class than Miss Pantelides ever could, he thought. In fact this was the best show he remembered ever seeing.

Po-po-po-po! Now that's what I call perfect Grade A!

Firm, full, ripe--yes, a ripe woman...Tall, the way I like them...

With a walk like a goddess...Ah, what ecstasy we could know!...

If I only had one like her....

Indecision was building up inside Costas now: should he follow from the rear and prolong his enjoyment, or advance to

see what delights she offered from the front? His sporting instinct to make her the all-time Grade A specimen triumphed and he quickened his pace.

Walking at an oblique angle to the couple he soon drew abreast of them several feet away. The sight was more than he had hoped for. Through her open, well-tailored jacket Costas could discern the fulsome shapes he prized so much and, in a second crushing glance, the face he had known for more than sixteen years.

SECOND MEETING

The Marine Venus: a statue of a
woman: period uncertain: found at
the bottom of Rhodes harbour:
damaged by sea-water...surrendered
her original maturity for a
rediscovered youth.

--Lawrence Durrell,
Reflections on a Marine Venus

I have looked forward to seeing Lindos for so many
years that now I approach the actual sight of it with
apprehension. Perhaps it is because, in the back of my
mind, I feel that the real thing pales before one's image

of it. Or perhaps (and this is more likely) it is because she is here and waiting, and this makes it not just like any old trip.

The bus whines painfully up the crest of the last hill. When it lurches over, we begin the sharp descent into Lindos. So my Greek neighbour tells me. Our three hours of torture will soon be over. Through our brief exchanges in my broken Greek, I've learned that he has been doing Rhodos-Lindos twice a week since he retired--once to market, once to visit his brother. This is routine. It's nothing. But this isn't nothing. Otherwise why the sweaty palms? And why can't I slow the beating inside? Take it easy, heart. You heard the man, it's nothing.

"There!" he rasps. "You can see the Acropolis. Of course, it is not as big as the one in Athens. But it is just as beautiful." He smooths down his thin white hair and looks out the window approvingly.

The rock-scarred landscape leads to a clump of symmetrical pillars. Frosty green olive trees stab the hillsides. I look into a slanting sun and in the blindness that follows, I see her smile, hear her laughter. The questions return. Did I leave it too late? A week later than we said--not so much, is it? Is she still here? Did she meet--?

The whitewashed houses of Lindos appear as iridescent cubes on a tangent of the sun. In the distance, cobblestone streets can be made out. The old Mercedes bus grinds its way down the

near-vertical road; a passing muleteer curses us. It is quite different to where we met on Sifnos. And even moreso than primitive Santorini, where we took separate boats to different islands.

In the month between Sifnos and Santorini we happily tacked our way from island to island, through the Aegean Meltemis. We'd land and look for a quiet spot away from the pulse of the island. The little coastal villages where few tourists got to, where nobody spoke English. Here, we would explore the far reaches of the island. We'd talk and listen to the sea. We would feast on the sound of the waves and on our newfound love. Then she had her doubts. Was it merely a summer romance? Too good to last? The first meeting is in the lap of the gods, she'd said. But if you can make a second one happen, the gods are in your lap.

And so came the idea to go off in different directions for a couple of weeks--to see if it would happen. What happened to me was a solid case of procrastination and self-doubt. Should this happen in your mid-thirties? But it did. That, and getting lost on a neighbouring island (intentionally?) thereby missing the boat for Rhodes.

"We're here--Lindos!" the old man says victoriously. He stretches his plump form up to the rack to retrieve his straw hat. I ask him if he knows this address. He nods, smiles to

himself. She'd hastily written a p.s. to her third letter and left all three at the American Express agent in Rhodes.

"Tired of waiting. Guess you won't show. If you do, I'll be at Frangas' in Lindos. Rhodes is hell!"

I was disturbed by the tone in her letters, each one sounded more hopeless than the last. She had expected I'd be in Rhodes to meet her as arranged. Had I changed my mind? Had something happened to me? When after five days of sweltering heat and crawling tourists I hadn't arrived, she left for Lindos with a Greek named Frangas (no other details given). In Lindos there would at least be space to breathe, she wrote, and a decent place to stay.

We bundle off the bus with the usual Greek push and shove.

The old man shuffles ahead in silence while I follow, sidestepping mule droppings in the street. The late afternoon buzz of activity has already begun; and locals, still rubbing their eyes from xaploma, are ordering demi-tasses of Turkish coffee in cafés. Old friends are pairing off in tavli matches. The women, staying well out of earshot of their men, chatter with the day's gossip. Already, for me, the town is living up to its name--'pretty'--as my gaze takes in the immaculate sweep of white houses and sandy beaches below.

"Ask in there," orders the old man. "This is Frangas' shop."

A shop? In my surprise I almost forget to thank him.
 He puts out a gnarly hand and we exchange yassous and adieux.
 A good soul. I enter the shop; a lumpy, middle-aged woman
 waddles towards me.

"Postcard? Souvenir of Lindos?"

"I am looking for Frangas. Is he here?"

The business smile disappears. "I am Kyria Frangas,"
 she says through gold teeth. "You must want my son, because
 my husband is dead, God rest his soul."

"Yes; is he here--your son?"

"ANDONEEEE!" she shrieks in the general direction of
 upstairs.

In a minute or two a short, swarthy, curly-haired boy
 appears still in pyjamas.

"What do you want?" he asks sleepily.

I came forward to meet him. "Oh--hello. Sorry to get
 you out of bed. I'm--I'm looking for the American girl.
 A tall girl with--"

"I know, I know," he cuts in, coming closer to inspect
 me. "She is not here. Who are you?"

"I'm--uh--her friend. She's expecting me. We were to
 meet in Rhodes but I--"

"You didn't come. I know, she told me about you," he
 says. I detect a note of smugness. His features are fine,

well-formed. His hair is long for a Greek, and he looks older than he probably is. I can see why she would like him, except that he's short and she'd often lamented the fact that most Greek men were shorter than she was.

"Will you tell me where I can find her? She wrote that she would be here."

His eyes, large and dark, size me up for several seconds. "She might be staying in a private house. At the other end of town." He slowly begins walking to the doorway and I follow instinctively.

"You see the first street crossing this one? Turn right on it and walk to the end. There, opposite a little church, is Kyria Argyro's house. She might be there." He stops and looks pleased with himself, standing in blue-striped pyjamas at the doorway of his mother's shop. I sense questions coming and before he can get them out I thank him and start walking down the cobblestone street.

"Hey," he calls out. "She was worried. Every day for a week she met the boats in Rhodes."

I nod, wave, feel guilty. "I'm here now," I call back. He shrugs and disappears into the souvenir shop.

The white houses form themselves before me, pass by on the periphery of my vision and re-form themselves, make me think of the first ones I saw this summer--on the island of

Sifnos. In tiny Castro they weren't as large or as well built as these, not so immaculately whitewashed; still, they opened their doors to me that day. And then to her when she arrived on the late evening boat.

'Where can I stay? Can they put me up here? Would you mind translating for me?' It had been easy and natural, seemingly fated. Meeting a helpless foreigner in a hidden corner of a small island: It made me feel so important, almost powerful, to have someone like that depending on me. 'Sorry my bag is so heavy. It's full of books, mostly.'

The cobblestones of Lindos now bring back the other cobblestones. San Miguel Allende, two years ago. The pre-honeymoon trip with Diana. (How different she is from her!) The hotel troubles, the Mexican police, a night of estrangement. Then the final blow--the confrontation, calling off the engagement, the inevitable break-up. Why did I think it wouldn't happen again? It had happened so often before. It was my style--or lack of it--my pattern.

But I keep telling myself: this time it's different. She's different from the others. I'm different. Older now; maybe even proverbially wiser? Don't hold back. Show her. Tell her. Make her feel you mean it. You do mean it. Don't hold back!

"Who are you looking for?" The screech of a voice above jolts

me. "Who are you looking for?" repeats the old hag on a balcony overhead.

"The house of Kyría Argyrò. Do you know where it is?"

"You're standing outside it. Knock and she will come."

Large oak doors inlaid in a blue-white plaster frame.

I knock and wait; my heart races on.

"Yes? What do you want?" A dark-haired woman with a round face stands back and eyes me suspiciously.

"Oh, hello. I'm looking for someone--an American girl. Frangas said she might be staying here. Are you Kyría Argyrò?"

"Yes; who are you?"

"I'm a friend of the American girl. You know, the tall one with the long hair. She's expecting me. Is she here?"

"No."

"No? But Frangas said--"

"She is staying here," the woman breaks in. "But she is not here now." She straightens imaginary creases on her smock. Not quite middle-aged, she must have been quite attractive before filling out in the way of all Greek mothers.

"I see," I say, somewhat relieved. "When will she be back?"

"She went swimming this afternoon. She should have been back by now." The woman allows the flicker of a smile, relaxes her stare. "She has been expecting you. Come and wait inside,

if you want to:"

The courtyard is long and cool. Brown doors lead off to either side. These must be the rooms. One of these is her room. The woman returns with a cane-back chair and the customary glass of water. In rushing to find her I had been oblivious to my other needs; I belt back the water greedily.

"Perhaps I could leave my bag in her room," I ask, "and try to find her at the beach. I'm tired of carrying it around."

"Well, yes. I suppose it's all right," she replies cautiously.

She opens one of the scratched brown doors; coolness wafts out. Inside I see familiar bags, books and clothes. She is here. I can smell her, almost touch her! The room is typically simple and small. A double bed with a white embroidered bedspread. A table beside it, a chair by the window. I hesitate before going in; the woman follows me closely. I put my bag down by the foot of the bed. Lying open on the table next to a pile of books is a spiral notebook; I recognize it as her diary. Should I look at it, invade her privacy? I must know how she feels now. The woman is watching me like a hawk. I casually pick up the notebook as though it's of no importance and read the last entry. It is dated three days ago.

Thursday, August 17th

Today was even hotter than yesterday. Still no sign. Don't know whether to stay or go on. If only I could

talk to someone. Wish Judy were around the corner, or that I could call her in Cambridge. Frangas is kind, but between dictionary Greek and sign language we barely manage essentials. Don't know who to turn to. Am frightened to see myself this way. I can't spend every night crying. Love is still the most important thing to me, but I don't know what it is, except that it's the thing other people experience. Where are you? Why don't you come? In a month I will be 30. You saw light five years before. Did it show you something it has yet to show me? While I was wasting away in the Harvard library, was there something I should have been learning? You too have been hurt. Maybe women are meant to be hurt and not say anything. Maybe tomorrow?

Somewhat dazed, I put down the notebook, a little guilty for prying. I leave through the oak doors as the woman points the way to the beach.

"I'll find it," I call back, and hurry down the narrow lanes by the Acropolis of Lindos. I don't know at what point I started running, but soon the jagged path to the bay is under me, and I'm hopping from rock to rock down to the water's edge. In the late afternoon water there are only a handful of bathers, the beach is deserted. I walk the length of it. Sand pours liberally into my tattered sandals. I search the water, look up the rocky sides, walk back again. No sign of her anywhere!

Then in a small, sandy cove I see it. The clutch of objects that identifies one human from another: her purple beach towel, a thick paperback, curved brown sunglasses. But not her. It's just like her to pick such a private, isolated spot. Again I carefully scan the water, the bathers, and find

nothing. It is becoming a puzzle, a carefully-laid plot I tell the Sherlock side of me. First, Frangas' shop, then Argyro's house, Her room, and now the beach. But not her.

There was only one place she could be. I hesitate at the water's edge. Then in a couple of seconds my sweaty shirt, pants and sandals are off. I jump in and the water feels cool and welcome against my naked body. Keeping away from the other bathers, I quickly swim out to the middle of the bay. Occasionally, I stop to look around 360 degrees before pushing on. Again, another twenty or thirty strokes and again a scan of the water. It's quiet out here, very quiet except for the masked and finned swimmer snorkeling a few yards ahead. The water in the bay is calm and soothing, a pool of azure blue.

Moving closer to the figure, hard-breathing now with the tiredness of the day weighing on my every stroke, I suddenly recognize the bright purple wimsuit, the long auburn hair trailing behind. Overhead, the temple of the Acropolis casts its shadow on us as I swim forward to meet her in the clear, ever-changing sea.