





DOUBLE BLACK GREEK COFFEE

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Double Black Greek Coffee

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Double Black Greek Coffee can be purchased at **Amazon**  
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To the unforgettable early years, to the real people of this  
story

My gratitude to the RadioArt internet radio, for the inspiration  
and the company

*Everything around us changes, and everything remains the same*  
M. Rassoulis (Greek poet and songwriter)

**Note:**

The terms Mandelbrot, Julia and fractal art derive from a field of study in mathematics, in particular the chaos theory, as originally defined by Benoit Mandelbrot. Fractals are images that, when you zoom in to their details, they change and reveal a new, wholly unexpected pattern, as strangely beautiful as the original. But if you keep zooming in, you eventually arrive at the same patterns as the original. There is no end to this process. Only when you can't zoom in anymore.

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## The two friends

“Come, let’s buzz, my little honeybee!”

This odd phrase and bidding was Harry’s way of advertising – at every opportunity – his great love for Helena. A love apparently rooted in the simple and strong instincts of the animal micro-kingdom. And, judging at least by his public demonstrations among friends, at parties, or old classmates’ gatherings, it was his favorite calling. The phrase confounded those new to his circle of friends. And never failed to carve the same, uncomfortable smiles across the faces of his old ones. “Honeybee,” as an amorous diminutive, is definitely an unusual, surprising and weird pet name.

But Harry buzzed with his honeybee. He buzzed non-stop. Not only at private get-togethers but in public places too. In coffee-shops, and bars, and theatres. And his honeybee, according to the dictates of feminine sauciness, would initially send him a discouraging signal. A signal she was unwilling, that it wasn’t the right time or place for buzzing. She would then, most times instinctively, pull away from Harry a little, as if she meant to reject his proposal to join him and sing in the monotonous frequency of honeybees.

Only for a moment, in the beginning, though. Because Helena the little honeybee would soon get her motor running, and shyly open her tiny wings. She would open her

wings and beat them excitedly so they would buzz for all to hear; not just their friends, but everybody within earshot as well. So there would be no doubt about a thing. And if Harry's attention happened to be momentarily distracted by a sudden conversation someone next to him accidentally started, Helena the little honeybee would lose her temper and speed up her wing-beating. And if the laborious, quick movement of her wings was not audible enough, and Harry continued to be absorbed in conversation with his friends, Helena the little honeybee would fly into a rage. She would recall that, apart from wings, she also had a sting. An infallible and reliable tool, not likely to go unnoticed. An unfailing remedy, a sure path through which to remind Harry the proposal he'd just made her and, for a moment there, had apparently forgotten already.

And honeybee Harry, in the face of his girlfriend's sting, would immediately return to the small pleasures of his micro-kingdom. He'd abruptly pull out of the conversation he was holding. Abruptly and rudely. He'd set his large bulk into rotary motion and once he'd brought himself face to face with Helena, he'd gaze fixedly at his beloved, with a pleading, apologetic look on his face for his inexcusable, momentary slip. And eventually become absorbed in his darling's buzzes.

But more than this weird insect communication code, more than the tiny animals and the winged little creatures of their amorous fantasies, people around them wondered about their relationship. It was the relationship itself, more than anything, which surprised everyone. Because Harry and Helena appeared to all who knew

them, without exception, to be two entirely mismatched creatures. Even worse; two incompatible creatures. Who, what's more, were guaranteed to remain so for all eternity. In other words, they didn't seem, on the outside at least, to click or agree on anything. As if fate had chosen to bring the two together, not for the usual sexual, psychological, utilitarian or any such ordinary reason. Rather, it looked like she brought them together for some kind of wild, bizarre experiment. As if she wanted to test these two organisms in her kingdom, and check out their tolerance to incongruity and disparity.

So Harry was out-going where Helena was a home-bird. Harry was tall and Helena short. Harry fat, Helena thin. And this aura of misalliance carried over and permeated more important things, too. It saturated them; all of them. Harry was into rock and jazz while Helena loved tavernas and bouzouki music. Harry loved skiing in Parnassus and Helena shopping in Ermou Street. They appeared to be from different solar systems, much less belong to the same family of winged creatures. Which was something that never skipped attention. Neither did the fact that it was Helena who always got her way eventually, each and every time. So this weird relationship, this misrelated relation, instantly rendered everyone speechless. Harry's friend, Orestes, along with everybody else.

\* \* \*

Orestes and Harry were old friends, then. They had the exact same age, their birthdays were just ten days apart. Harry was the older one. Their friendship dated back to

the early years of elementary school. But even before they met in the third grade, their lives ran along similar tracks.

They both grew up in different countries, and came from families living abroad which, out of sheer coincidence, at some turning-point decided to return to their original birthplace. So both boys found themselves in their homeland, simultaneously, at the age of eight.

Their families came back to Greece, then, at the same time. Orestes' family from Germany, Harry's from Salvador. The only thing Salvador had in common with Germany was that both countries were totally different from Greece. From Greece where, owing to some twist of fate, both Harry and Orestes found themselves, on roughly the same day, in the same neighborhood, at the same school. Somewhere in the area of Ilisia, in Athens. In the mid seventies, shortly after the country exited the darkness of the dictatorship.

They both felt totally alien to the other kids in their class, and were instantly drawn to one another. Soon they became what we would call bosom buddies. They were both good pupils at the time and would remain so during their entire school and academic career, in the following years. Something which, initially at least, owed probably to the fact they had few friends and plenty of time on their hands; apart, of course, from that which they shared together.

Then music came along. Accustomed as they were to a different set of sounds in their first country, it only followed that local, folk music and the many post-dictatorship, revolutionary songs playing constantly on the radio

at the time, sounded weird to them. So they devoted themselves to more neutral sounds, more universal types of music, which they could appreciate better. Such as rock and the like. Music would become an integral part of their lives a few years later. Orestes played guitar, Harry the flute; they became a duet in music, too. They cut themselves off from the rest of the world entirely then. They shut the door to everybody else. And what happened with their music, happened in almost every aspect of their lives; their lives which were so solitary, so different from the lives of all the other kids around them.

And so the years went by, in seclusion, until they reached their teens. Then their age came knocking on the door. It knocked and they heard it loud and clear. They then felt there was reason enough to break out of the autism in which they'd been so comfortable all these years. It couldn't happen any other way. They felt the strong urge, the longing for the female sex, stir inside them, and overwhelm them.

It's a universal lust, the same the world over. And invincible, on top. It was then, when they decided to come out into the open air and set sail towards sexual intercourse, that they saw that weird music on the radio and all the countless oddities of the period, under a new light. They resolved and strove to build a bridge to all that. To view them with a sense of familiarity. To fabricate it, if necessary. To open the door to new opportunities. So their circle, their social circle, might grow wider. And let other people in. Of the female sex, of course.

They were sixteen when Harry suddenly came across and was stuck on Helena. They met at a party Harry and

Orestes had gone to, after they had decided it was no longer right, nor wise, to restrict themselves solely to each other's company. It was at that party, then, where Harry started canoodling with Helena. The two of them had, at the time, a simplified view of women. Apart from the unnatural sweetness that overwhelmed them, they approached the matter like some kind of ineffable mystery, which they had to unveil at all costs. That's how they felt about it.

\* \* \*

The memory of a primitive and unfulfilled attraction which had infatuated them two years earlier was still vivid inside. They experienced it both with the same, unprecedented intensity then. For Harry's cousin, Rinoula. Two years ago, at the time of their first awakening, when all three were pushing fourteen.

Cousin Rinoula was a rare early bloomer. The boys had hardly noticed her before. They used to call her stupid and a moron. They paid no attention to her. But suddenly Rinoula became a full grown – a strikingly lush – woman. Precocious but also voluptuous. With luscious curves and perfect sways. And a maddening sauciness. Thus the two radically reconsidered their view on Rinoula's mental capacity. They found a new, very engaging, interest. They never missed the chance to feel up, to touch, to brush against. Rinoula was, naturally, aware of her power and she tested it securely on these two harmless fledglings. Without feeling threatened herself and without of course giving a fig that she had them, both, hankering in vain.

Rinoula could see their anguish and sense their artlessly staged disinterest. And drew great self-confidence from it all. The more they suffered, the more relentlessly Rinoula lead them on and finished them off. And then preened herself on her great, alluring charm.

That was the great moment when the two boys first emerged from the shell of their small, private world. From their little rooms with their rock records, their flutes, their guitars, their books and their long chats. They were both utterly smitten by the aura and the image and the scents of Rinoula. They were also crazed by all the stupendous stuff that unfolded in their fantasies. Somewhat surreptitiously though, a bit obscurely and without direction. They were still too young to work up any resolve, even though they'd lost their sleep entirely.

Orestes, who unlike Harry had no incestuous restrictions, at some point considered setting himself a goal. But he set his goal only in his head though; and when such goals are restricted to one's head, without the soul and hands having any part, they usually come to nothing. So Orestes remained indecisive, idle, without ever managing to make some move. This, in any case, would probably frustrate Rinoula, who was rather more into rehearsals with the male sex, and target practicing, but still unwilling to engage in true battle.

Orestes therefore made do with conjuring Rinoula in his fantasies. Where he had more freedom in handling her. He even invited Harry and, at the peak of his excitement, shared her body with him. And that was a slight, a rare thought, which he never dared share with his friend Harry. He never dared ask him either if Harry too, during

his sweet torment, invited him to join them.

\* \* \*

Now that Harry was carrying on with Helena though, Orestes succeeded, in the light of that first, common, great upheaval, he succeeded in going one step further. He managed to see beyond the sweetness of the female. No small feat, considering the circumstances and preoccupations of their age at the time. He succeeded in thinking beyond sex. He felt Helena was out of tune, damn it. And her aura wasn't even close to the incredibly high standard Rinoula had set for them. In his eyes, Helena appeared inapt and indifferent. Nor was she particularly good-looking. And since he knew his friend well, since he had a distance from Harry's romance, and his mind was clear and unaffected, he could see from the start what would inevitably become evident to all. Namely that Harry, if it weren't for that cornerstone of human civilization, the unbearable sexual instinct, would never even have noticed her if he passed her on the street.

Orestes soon became convinced that once his friend blew off some steam, he'd see things more clearly and would no doubt break away from Helena's web. Even if he had to destroy that web first, tear it apart so he could break himself free.

## The touch

Harry's affair with Helena severely disrupted Orestes' life. First it shook it hard, and then it depleted it. They suddenly went from constantly together, to drifting apart. They lost touch. They saw each other once or twice a month. And the few times they did meet, it was in secrecy, almost illicitly. The little honeybee wouldn't allow her mate much leeway. A fact not necessarily pertaining to Orestes. Besides, Helena hardly knew Orestes and had no desire for it to become otherwise. She apparently had some problem with people. In general. Some sort of insecurity, some kind of distrust. Which had her convinced her sweetheart's loitering and constant hanging out with Orestes was almost unnatural. There had to be a limit. Perhaps even an end to it.

Harry naturally got her buzz-message straight away. He got it, digested it and made it his own. And came to believe it was perfectly reasonable, almost incontrovertible and natural, to now meet his intimate friend of almost ten years, the sole companion of his childhood and teenage years, to meet him once, maybe twice a month tops, and under pressure even then. Constantly peeping at the clock, in case he exceeded his short leave and instead of cheerful buzzing was received with a sting, again. But even the precious few times he finally met with Orestes, the only thing he talked about was his mad love affair. In

general terms, though, without offering up any technical details, which was what Orestes was burning to hear about. Without describing to Orestes how much his current experience, now he finally had carnal knowledge of a female, was similar to what they fantasized in the past. And if Orestes ventured to ask him something specific, if he tried to shed some light on the things that fired up their imagination and their body when they talked about them in the past, he never got a straight answer. Their conversation was constantly sidetracked to generalities and buzzes.

“But how long does it last, Harry?” Orestes worked up the nerve to ask once. But Harry always managed to talk him down and frustrate him. “You don’t get it, do you Orestes? We’re always necking and lovemaking.” That was Harry’s lame answer. Harry, whose narratives about Rinoula were always incredibly detailed, always sharply focused on the most crucial parts of her body and never failed to cause great agitation and excitement. The same as Orestes’ own wild imagination.

What could Orestes say or do under the circumstances? He felt unqualified to shake Harry’s bee-kingdom. He felt he had no right. Besides, his friend had entered a new stage anyway. He was under different laws and different forces. What did he know about these things? He felt he couldn’t say much; he lacked the experience.

Still, Orestes felt something was not quite right. Something didn’t click between what he saw Harry currently experiencing and the other, great stuff. The stuff his imagination conjured each time he coupled with Rinoula and became one with her these last two years. Together

with Harry sometimes. He was really sad to realize he was never going to get any opinion or firsthand descriptions from Harry. No matter how much he asked him about the thing that interested him most. About how much Harry's current experience was similar to what they dreamt and talked about in the past. About the stuff that turned them on and made them hot exactly the same way.

And so Orestes was left with a diffused sadness. Sadness over losing his friend without comprehending the reason. And without actually getting any straight answers, perhaps even some advice, about the mysteries that haunted and tormented him. Incessantly. What's worse, he blamed himself: he was unable, first time ever, to feel happy his friend was happy. On the one hand, his life was suddenly empty. Helena had effectively kicked him out of Harry's time and life. But mainly there was something he couldn't comprehend in all he witnessed. It seemed superficial, he didn't buy it. And that made him feel sad for Harry rather more than for himself.

Then, there was also Rinoula's ghost who wouldn't leave him at peace. "Women are not like that, poor Orestes, they're not like that! Make sure to steer clear of wishy-washy cloisters like the one my poor cousin is trapped in." That's what Rinoula told him whenever she appeared to him. And then she overwhelmed him with the enchanting scent of her precocious body and finished him off.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile they were graduating from high school. They

were preparing for their entrance exams. Orestes for the Technical University, Harry the University of Economics. Up to now Harry talked mostly about maths and technologies. Until he met Helena. But he had a sudden switch after that. No doubt, this was yet another result of Helena's influence and sway. She was preparing for that specific School herself. So that was definitely the reason! Helena steered his course. She had a way with such things. How else would he suddenly come up with this new idea?

So even at the crammer they went to, in downtown Athens, their classes were on a different floor. Orestes on the third, Harry on the first. Along with Helena, of course. The two came and left the school together. Always buzzing. Oblivious to everything else, Orestes included.

Then again there was the distance. The great distance between them. Which was no doubt enforced on them by Helena. Or was he exaggerating? Could it be it always worked that way with relationships? That's how Orestes thought when he questioned his judgment. And he fretted and broke out in a cold sweat all over.

Orestes then was tormented with questions. But this last possibility: that something similar to what he witnessed with his friend could happen to him, was terrifying and eating him up.

\* \* \*

Orestes was coming down the crammer's stairs one day when he bumped into Harry. He found him wrapped in Helena's arms, as usual. In plain view of the entire, dumbfounded, first floor. Orestes was in a bad mood, and that

probably helped make him view the complex of Harry and his girlfriend, under the astonished gaze of all their classmates, as particularly kitschy and repulsive. He felt an extremely strong, negative emotion, something that verged on revulsion.

And so, when Harry, in a rare display of courage, asked him if he would like them, all three, to go for a beer, the previous revulsion overrode the amazement he felt at Harry's suggestion. It also overrode Helena's strange, silent, and unprecedented, approval. He recalled two or three times something similar happened in the past. Other such sheepish suggestions from Harry. He remembered how many chores Helena always claimed she had to do, how impossible it always proved to go somewhere together in the end. And how Helena would quickly recall Harry to order, how his look would suddenly change, and how he would apologetically withdraw his proposal, hastily consenting and confirming the loads of chores his busy girlfriend had to do.

"No, Harry, I prefer to go for a walk, and stretch my legs. Some other time," Orestes replied. And later wondered and felt terrible he could be so aloof. They had shared everything with Harry, even Rinoula's body, there, in his early sexual fantasies. And here he was now, responding so lamely. And telling him all this feeble and phony stuff.

He felt a shudder of ugliness surge through him. It reinforced that previous bad feeling, which overwhelmed him when he saw them carrying on before. Now another one came along and joined it and magnified it and made it more unbearable still. It was his own ugliness. The false

and empty words he'd just uttered. First time he'd spoken in a way entirely foreign between them. He felt ashamed; he felt the need to run off, without another word.

Fortunately Helena helped him out. She almost lifted his mood. "Ok, Orestes, but you don't need to avoid us so much. You know how Harry considers you his mate," Helena said. And Orestes was relieved: a bit.

\* \* \*

But then he would quickly fall into doubt. He was like that. And he would begin an internal dialogue. It was something that happened to him often. Wondering and questioning everything. Even the obvious. Everything had to be scrutinized, thoroughly examined.

"Could Helena actually mean what she said?" he thought, shortly after he'd said his goodbyes and strolled leisurely somewhere between Exarcheia and Kolonaki. He started an internal debate. He asked and answered. Himself. He needed more arguments. That it was indeed a sham on Helena's part and not mistrust, perhaps even envy, on his. That last bit, the possibility of envy, upset Orestes more than anything.

The more he thought about this last incident though, the more he was convinced it was yet another fake gesture, a pretence from Helena. One of the things she'd say, once in a while, lest she was blamed for the distance she managed to enforce between them. Between Orestes and Harry. Everyone who knew them, at the crammer and at school, saw the distance; they silently noted it. Quietly, with their eyes, without a comment. Lest they were

held accountable for upsetting the beehive.

It was one of the few times Orestes arrived quickly at the truth, without tormenting himself with farfetched probabilities, as usual. So he shook his head, muttered “What a pity, Harry,” and entered the Zeppelin, a café bar along his way, which he had as something of a hangout.

He knew the people there and they knew him. He went in to listen to some music, forget himself a little, and think. Perhaps Rinoula might join him in his loneliness again, later. She sometimes did when he felt this way. And Orestes was almost grateful for her imaginary visits. And the intensity and heat that came with them. As he pushed the door open, he felt something he often felt. A kind of shiver. In prospect of Rinoula’s visit.

\* \* \*

He sat near the window. Out of the way. It was cold that day and close to where he sat there was a radiator, too weak to warm up the entire café. It only managed to heat a small area around his table. A few meters away the damp formed drops on the window next to his. He focused playfully on them, studying the way they distorted the view outside the café. Every now and then a tiny drop would trickle down the pane and the world outside appeared to flow, to move. Which then brought on a slight, strange movement to the world inside.

He felt he did well to choose this particular table. He needed the heat. He also needed to keep a distance from the rest of the world tonight.

Then Kostas, who worked there, came and talked to

him. They knew each other and chatted sometimes. Kostas told Orestes the central heating was acting up that night and he was wise to choose that table. It was equally warm at the bar, he added, if he preferred to sit there. But Orestes wasn't in the mood for talking. He preferred his quiet, warm little corner to the relative commotion around the bar. He ordered a beer and answered he'd rather stay where he was. Soon he was absorbed in his beer and lost in the music playing in the background. Led Zeppelin, in honour of the café's name. He soon forgot the incident with Helena and his friend.

He looked around indifferently. It was still early; there were less than ten people in the café bar. The vision usually came under similar conditions. Rinoula, that is. And there was more reason she should visit him today, and redeem him from all the negative stuff he experienced. Just a few hours ago.

His gaze wandered around the café bar as his soul and glands expected Rinoula to keep them company, when suddenly it stood at a spot behind the bar, on the other, the opposite end. There was a girl sitting there. Her features were barely visible in the dim light there. But he was certain she was a beautiful woman. She'd have a brief exchange with the barman from time to time. And her shadow seemed to betray a symmetry, something refined and well-proportioned, a unique elegance.

For a moment there he thought the shadow he was studying suddenly stopped moving. He wondered if she was looking towards him. But the light was too dim, and the figure that caught his attention too far away. He couldn't tell for sure. He thought, no, it couldn't be.

“Nah, I only thought so,” he muttered, and dismissed the thought. He must be wrong; the idea which momentarily crossed his mind could only be in his imagination.

That’s what he thought. But still, he was uncertain. So he turned his head, swerving around slowly this way and that, straining his eyes, trying to see better. And the more he passed his glance over her spot, in feigned indifference, the more he became certain the girl’s head was still. He was now certain about that. It kept still, facing always in the same direction. The more he saw it was still, the more he was convinced about his initial suspicion. That it was looking towards him, that is.

Orestes wasn’t very confident with this sort of things. Neither of course did he have the experience. He’d turn his eyes away quickly. But he began to feel a tension. A different one from the fake tension he gathered from Rinoula, who lived strictly in his head. He considered getting up and going to the bar. And checking things out from up close. To make sure it was really the way he thought. To see if the girl was actually looking towards him. The desire to do so was growing inside him. Slowly, though. Timidly. He was trying to muster the necessary strength which, apparently, he still lacked.

What troubled him was this: if things were indeed the way he thought, if he verified his suspicion, then he had to follow it through. He had to be able to maintain his stride, keep his gaze fixed. Straight into her eyes.

But while he was examining his possibilities and measuring his strength, another idea came to upset him worse than before. Suppose he got up, walked towards the bar, the shadow becoming gradually clearer, him managing to

keep his gaze steady and unfaltering, only to discover he was mistaken and the girl was looking somewhere else; then what? Could he handle the frustration?

Orestes was struggling with all these thoughts, trying to make up his mind. To defy the negative possibilities that tormented him. Until finally, a little while after, and as the situation remained unchanged, he worked up the necessary resolve. He decided that, next time he swerved his head, if the girl's shadow hadn't moved, if her gaze was still turned indistinctly but steadily in his direction, if it remained still, he felt he would be finally ready. To get up, and move towards her. Resolutely. With his gaze fixed.

\* \* \*

His head is now almost at the crucial angle. The angle radiating mystery and promise. This time he'll get up. He feels up to it now. He'll get up, with a steady stride, his gaze straight and unwavering. He can do it.

The thought of Rinoula flashes through his mind. He hears her talk to him. But this time he tells her to leave. Right away. Within the next, crucial, seconds. He doesn't need her any more. He doesn't need her advice or her seductive but nonexistent scent. Not her voice, nor her vision. If he can't grasp her, can't touch her, Rinoula is useless to him. "Goodbye, Rinoula, I don't need you anymore," he whispers to her. And draws even more strength from that, which he will now use, shortly, within the following minutes.

He smiles. Confident now. His look is now almost aligned. Towards where he will now take the great step.

Where he will now pursue the promise to actually touch. Regardless where it might lead him. Regardless of risking disappointment along the way. He'll get up to claim what Rinoula will never grant him. What she never granted him.

Apart from the pre-sexual, experimental and insignificant fondling of their adolescence.

To touch, not to fondle. That's what makes the difference now. That's where his resolve and strength comes from now.

\* \* \*

At last his gaze is in the right line. In the short space of time it took him to align and focus his glance, to settle matters with Rinoula and send her packing, to work up the strength he lacked and muster the confidence he needed, the shadow was gone. She'd left her seat. She was now coming towards him. He didn't need any of the stuff he was working himself up for all this time. The steady stride and the unwavering gaze. Stride, nope; he definitely didn't need that anymore. As for the gaze, it shouldn't prove difficult to keep straight, like he feared a fraction of a second ago.

Only his voice would be put to the test now, and his heart perhaps, which threatened to break the way it was beating. And then his mind and soul that would have to put the right words together.

\* \* \*

“I've been looking at you; you've been looking at me:

perhaps we could have a drink together? My name's Anna," the shadow spoke first, having now stepped into the light, dazzling Orestes with her beauty. Thousands of times more fiercely than the fake, nonexistent, vision of Rinoula. His pride was hurt, but only momentarily. He'd failed to hide the purpose of swerving his head. She'd caught him out, no doubt about it.

But all that seemed trivial now. Ludicrous. The shivers for Rinoula's ghost, his pride even more. The great moment surged through him like electricity. He saw its promise unfold clearly before his eyes. This was no time for pride and vanity. And so he managed to be sincere. And sincerity proved effective and won and prevailed over his inexperience.

"Like you said, Anna. I've been looking at you the whole time, you're right. If it took you another second, literally one more second, perhaps even less, I would've come over to you first. You beat me to it!" Orestes managed to pull off a difficult look, penetrating and discreet at the same time. Then he concluded with a smile: "Won't you sit down then? My name is Orestes. You won, the treat's on me; what will you have?"

Anna smiled back. "Thanks. Your treat, then, since I won. A double black Greek coffee, for me. I don't drink alcohol."

\* \* \*

Anna listened that night. In the beginning at least, she mostly listened. She listened to Orestes telling her all kinds of stories. Old stories, from the past, but more re-

cent ones, also. She listened to the story about Harry too, which was the reason for their meeting tonight. Three or four hours went by this way. The Zeppelin café was almost empty, it was nearly one in the morning. And Kostas, the waiter, occasionally cast them a quick, discreet glance. Perhaps a worried one, too. That the hour was getting late and those two opposite had entirely transcended time, its rule and the hands of its clock.

Anna was the same age as Orestes. What few words she used to describe herself all this time, were about painting, which was her greatest passion, and maths, which was her second best. And about the point where those two, painting and maths, met. Those strange words. Mandelbrot, Julia, fractal art. The words sounded far-out, unknown to Orestes. He'd open the topic, and ask more, another day. He'd be interested. Today though he simply listened to Anna's few words. Without answering them. He had a peculiar feeling, verging on admiration, that his company tonight had such, exceedingly special, interests. He would've certainly delved deeper and asked many things. If it were another day.

\* \* \*

This day, though, Orestes' glance strayed, now and again, from Anna's words. It wandered elsewhere. Anna had sat next to Orestes. At a distance which grew increasingly smaller at every chance. His glance wandered, then, and dropped and lowered itself toward a necklace around Anna's neck. He couldn't see the necklace itself, it was hidden behind her shirt. But its twin chains revealed it must

be a nice, a very fine and fragile piece of jewellery. So delicate, you'd think it'd break if you touched it.

That's where Orestes' glance would end up, time and again. And played with Anna's necklace, just like his head and its swerve played with Anna's shadow a few hours ago. And he realized that, just as Anna had noticed earlier, she must've noticed his downcast, persistent glance now too. How it scanned the area around her neck. At intervals, but incessantly. No matter what course it followed, his glance always ended up around her neck. That's where it spent most of its time. "But can it be she hasn't noticed?" he mused and recycled, as was his habit. "Besides, what does it matter; it doesn't matter at all," he thought, immediately after, following another, a new track of his mind, parallel to the other: the more official one their conversation flowed upon.

He kept on persistently exploring her strange necklace. As strange as Anna's interests. And after a certain point, Orestes' glance started moving downward. It started turning and moving slowly along the course of the necklace. Along its delicate twin chains, towards their imaginary convergence. His glance now began sliding downward, following the chain, which disappeared behind Anna's loose shirt. Yes, after a certain point his glance took off again. The dim light didn't prevent him. His glance moved slowly and freely behind all that. The thought Anna might notice no longer prevented him either. Not even her clothes prevented him anymore. And he finally ended up, at some point, at the bottom of the necklace. And struggled to make out what was hanging there. Perhaps one of those strange art math things Anna

told him about. Wondering if it was something of the kind.

And all this long time his soul was divided. Sweetly divided. Equally shared, split, between the necklace itself and the slow flow of Anna's words. It leapt from the necklace to their conversation and back again. From their chat, back to searching and seeking again. He felt they complemented one another in a way. An unprecedented pleasure welled up inside him. And he didn't care about faking it anymore.

He was now certain Anna must've noticed his glance turn and reach down to where the twin chains met. He felt he'd spent hours following their course. Until he reached the end of the necklace. Until he got to the unknown object attached to the two chains. Anna must've noticed for sure. Even though she said nothing. Even though nothing changed in the colour and the tone of her voice. He wondered then if he should take it one notch further and ask. Should he ask or should he wait for Anna to tell him something about the necklace herself? Should he wait for her to pull it out for him, perhaps even show him in detail exactly what it looked like, let him take it in his hands, see it, feel it?

And while Orestes wondered, Anna suddenly took his hand. She raised his hand in one of hers and stroked it a little with her fingers. She then began moving it, back and forth. Slowly, at intervals. Exactly like Orestes' head moved earlier, hours ago, when he was building up his resolve. First towards her, then back, towards Orestes; that's how Anna moved her hand, now she'd cupped his in hers.

During this slow, retrogressive motion of their two

hands, she told Orestes what he had anticipated hearing. She told him about the necklace. She told him she'd bought it in Egypt. And that it had some pyramids and some numbers on it. Orestes listened. He lifted his gaze. He was now looking right into Anna's eyes. Straight and deep.

He looked Anna, who spoke unhurriedly, telling him about the necklace, in the eyes. "So Anna could tell, then; she could tell, yet again. The thoughts going through my head. She could tell them all," Orestes thought, with mixed emotions, which were overridden by a vague, a foggy, a new anticipation.

Now the track of his gaze had been disclosed and revealed to Anna, now she had already told him the story of the necklace and described its artwork, what more could Orestes' expect now? What was this new anticipation in his eyes? Should Anna pull out the necklace? Carefully, so it wouldn't break, being so delicate? Could it be that?

\* \* \*

Anna is talking to him again, still leading Orestes' hand slowly back and forth. She's talking to him and saying, "You have nice hands, Orestes. And a lovely gaze. Linger-  
ing, deep. Penetrating. It can see behind clothes. Strange  
it was unable to see what I have on my necklace. Strange,  
again, it got caught on the necklace for so long."

That's what Anna says and suddenly stops moving both hands back and forth. She leads it now, she holds tight and places it, Orestes' hand, she places it a little under her necklace. She places it right on her breast. For a long

time. And she holds it there: tenderly, securely. When it trembles at first and then later, when it stops quivering and relaxes.

And when that happens, she then places her lips too, fully and persistently, on Orestes' lips.

## Distance

The news about Orestes didn't take long to circulate. It got to the school and the crammer quickly. And to Harry and Helena. But the way it got to them was somewhat incomplete. It reached them as a story but not as a picture. Anna told Orestes right from the start she didn't much like hanging out with friends. Of course he was free to see whoever he wanted, but she would rarely manage or wish to join him. The same went for her own, small, circle of friends. She preferred keeping their relationship separate, not involving Orestes with them. Meanwhile Harry was busy, caught up in his own, different, love-affair. So it would be some time before the three of them met. With Helena, they weren't destined to cross paths. Ever.

None of this mattered to Orestes. Suddenly his life changed so radically, so entirely, and so deeply, that he felt all this was trivial. He wasn't surprised or upset when that same, first, night they met, Anna told him she would leave the next day on a short trip with one of her girlfriends. Waiting for Anna was enough. It was a wonderful thing in itself, it was sufficient. That's how he saw it.

He told Harry the big news the next day after they'd met. Harry knew something was up the moment he saw him at school. Of course he would never have guessed exactly what happened. It had been just a few hours after Orestes had said goodbye and left him with Helena at the

crammer. Just a few hours, during which so much happened.

"What's going on, Orestes? You look a bit different today, a little strange. Are you tired and you skipped the first two classes?" Harry asked. Orestes had left the Zep-pelin around four in the morning. After endless kisses with Anna, in their warm little corner. They were alone in the café; Kostas had fallen asleep somewhere in the back, having decided he was going to spend the night there. He decided to sacrifice himself rather than interrupt that un-ending, unexpected and silent embrace that stretched on quietly and endlessly in a corner of his café. It was one of the hazards of his occupation. And Kostas knew how to handle those. More so in this case, where he was friendly with both kids; they were customers, even though not very regular. He'd chatted a bit with them. Each one individually.

Orestes approached, looked at Harry from a short distance and then hugged him. "Harry, I'm in love; unbearably in love," he said. Harry pulled his head back a little, as if he wanted to take a better look at Orestes. He looked at him quizzically. To make sure this wasn't some kind of a joke, he wasn't kidding.

And Harry was happy then, very happy; deeply and sincerely happy to hear Orestes' news. And when Orestes told him the story, after a point he became also curious. Very curious. Especially where Orestes told him that Anna, so soon after they'd met, after having shared just one long, passionate kiss and a tangled embrace which unlocked and unfolded only next morning, after many hours, with so little common history behind them, would

leave him for a few days, and go on a trip with her girlfriend.

This sort of behavior was utterly beyond anything Harry had experienced in Helena's honeybee hug. It was naturally unthinkable Helena would ever tell him anything like that. And it was of course twice unthinkable he could ever tell her something similar without getting a taste of her sting.

"I'll tell you something, Harry. I didn't mind what Anna said. Honestly, I rather prefer it like this, in a way. So much happened inside me during those hours, that perhaps I need some time to pull myself together. I need to think things over a bit. Clear my head. My brain has stopped. It's really stuck. Then, again, I think to myself, what could the brain possibly have to do with what I'm experiencing? I'm better off this way. I've never been better, Harry," Orestes concluded opposite a surprised but also slightly suspicious Harry.

"Ok, Orestes, ok; but would you ever say such a thing? Let's say the two of us had arranged to go on a trip; would you ever tell Anna something like that, the day after such an extraordinary night like the one you've just told me about? Would you say it, Orestes? Wouldn't you cancel our trip in a flash?" Harry insisted. And after a brief stop he got going again, even more confident and disarming now, as he presented the typical argument of reversing the sides.

"And if you'd never say it, how can you pass it over so easily?" Harry added, rounding off his question. Obviously this development had made a strong and definitely negative impression on him.

While listening to his friend, Orestes recalled, not without a momentary touch of melancholy, how Harry was drawing away, how he was changing. How he was always revolving around Helena's wishes. Embracing them for his own, without the slightest objection, and without even realizing it.

"And now," Orestes thought, "Harry accuses me of exactly the same thing. That I too adapted immediately to Anna's wishes. Immediately and oddly and without even realizing it!"

But Orestes was in a very good mood that day. It was no time for this kind of thoughts. They could wait. And he dismissed them on the spot, that same instant. Anna's form stood before him once again, and he was swept over by the same sweetness and absolute numbness as this morning's. And he surrendered to it again.

"What can I say, Harry? I can only repeat what I first told you. I'm in love. Head over heels. Everything Anna says or does, gives me the shivers, and excites me. So let's drop the subject. I'm not in the mood."

\* \* \*

The time that led up to their entrance exams, was a time of distancing. Orestes and Harry grew apart, they lost touch. Abruptly and entirely. As if their paths grew separate, as if each one of them got on a plane and left for far away and entirely different countries, like the ones they came from. To different corners of the planet, poles apart.

Harry went back to his beehive. He was curious about the incident of Orestes' new relationship, but his curios-

ity was short-lived. And that was just about as far it went. That was it. Harry soon let the incident, this major incident in Orestes' life, slip into oblivion. There was no follow-up to his initial, great and sincere joy, the one that sprung straight from their past. He forgot the whole thing. There wasn't even a pinch of envy when he, Harry, accidentally – how else – bumped into Orestes and Anna about a month later. When he saw Anna for the first time. The rare case of Anna, the exact opposite to the mediocrity he was now used to in his own relationship.

The matter was forgotten, then, and so was Orestes. That was Helena's silent dictate, which Harry's soul was so eager to please. And it would remain so for a long time, up until their entrance exams and also after them and their successful outcome.

\* \* \*

Anna wasn't very talkative, her glance wandered easily, her mind strayed, she didn't pay much attention to what was going on around her. At least that's the impression she gave on the outside. But Anna also had a very fine quality, a very special air of refinement. It seldom came through, most times unexpectedly. Her scant words would make a strong impression then. But it was mainly her expression and her grace that would suddenly come alive. And cut across and diminish the distance between herself and everyone around her. Anna's outbursts at such moments were something of an awakening. She would mellow, she would beam, she would shine when that happened. And then her peculiar, her profound gen-

tleness would triumph, it would predominate. It would impress, it would take everyone by storm. And also cause a bit of sadness when Anna withdrew and lapsed back into silence.

Anna's beauty was also special. It was like an extension of her soul. It too had something profound and aloof. And there was something straightforward and simple in her movements and her manner that outshone and predominated and eclipsed everything else. It wove some kind of a protective veil around her. Like a filter designed to repel, to exorcize superficial approach. To discourage it.

Those who managed to pass behind the veil and see beyond her upright, flawless, Amazon figure could also see Anna's dark, deep, soulful eyes. Only they could marvel at the rhythm of her movements. And all the strange wanderings of her mind and her soul which, along with all else, enchanted Orestes that first night.

Orestes saw and realized all this when he managed to reflect calmly on what had happened. The rare moments when his unwavering love kind of allowed his brain to boot and start working. And then he felt twice happy Anna was like that. That she was his, and his alone; unseen, except for those few who could see behind the veil. With first and foremost Orestes himself.

\* \* \*

Harry's reaction was rather flat the first time he saw Anna, when the three, minus Helena, ran into each other a few days before the exams. Tassos, Orestes' classmate from the crammer, was also present. Tassos knew Harry; and

as he viewed matters between the two from a distance, he was a bit more impartial. And so, the explanation he offered for Harry's indifference was envy.

But there was never any envy in Harry's soul. He didn't know the word. Much less feel that way for his best friend. So there could only be one explanation for his behavior. He stood on the outer side of Anna's veil. He couldn't see what was happening. Some power held him hypnotized, trapped on the outside.

"Harry, this is Anna," Orestes made the introductions while carefully studying Anna's reaction to her acquaintance with his best friend. He noted their handshake, their kiss on both cheeks and the words that followed. And also saw one of those rare sparkles of joy in Anna's eyes.

But Harry's eyes reflected nothing of the sort, nothing took off, his look remained flat. Harry's stiff reaction could hardly go unnoticed. It puzzled and saddened Orestes.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Harry. Orestes has told me so much about the things you shared together. I almost envied you both through his stories. You see I was never so lucky to have a bosom buddy by my side all the time. My childhood was quite lonely," Anna added.

There followed a stiff response from Harry. Totally foreign to the old, common code he had had with Orestes. Nor did Anna's appearance and shine seem to stir some impression in him.

\* \* \*

"Orestes, I think your friend is a bit jealous," Tassos said with a smile, after they parted with Harry and put Anna on

the bus. The two were on their way back to the crammer, on foot, for their last class that day.

Orestes was about to answer, to defend his friend and explain to Tassos that Harry was not at all like that. But then he thought it would be too much of an effort; it wasn't that important anyway. He cast an empty glance towards Tassos and left his remark unanswered.

For a moment he felt bitter inside. Bitter things turned out the way they did, bitter about the distance that was growing between him and Harry. Day after day.

And the bitterness would've overwhelmed him if it hadn't been for Anna's vision that visited him so often lately. It would've permeated his soul, if it hadn't been for the touch of her body. If he hadn't been swept by its scent.

All this kind of galvanized Orestes all over again. And his mind turned elsewhere and forgot about Harry. And passed over Tassos' remark as well.

## A great light

Those few magical months before the exams, Orestes had surrendered entirely to the glory of first love. Where there is no ineptitude, and no discord. Where everything is forgiven, passed over, ground and filtered through the unnatural intensity of feelings and emotions. Nor, of course, did the passion of those days affect the effort the two put into their studies. Or if did it, it proved to be to its benefit, making it more peaceful and more effective.

That's what Orestes' life was like that long in duration and short in measure spring. New. Full of touches and devoid of apparitions. Endlessly exploring and discovering. And only when he took a break and pulled himself away from that continuous and intense, that spring love, he would then occasionally talk about Harry, their great friendship and the great change he had recently seen in his friend. He'd talk then, he'd open his heart, and let out some sadness, what little sadness the moments allowed.

But those moments were few. And usually went without a comment from Anna, who found it difficult to trace and follow that particular path of Orestes' soul. She'd seen Harry only once, and from what she could gather he must've changed, a lot. But she was unable to see into the past, the common past and the common way the two had between them. Which had left such a deep mark on Orestes. Not even when he told her the story of their

great and identical lust for Rinoula, did it help shed some light on the matter.

Anna only smiled mischievously and asked for more details. And Orestes, even though he found it difficult, even though his cheeks turned red, drew courage from Anna's smile and gave her the specifics of sharing Rinoula with his friend. He also told Anna, not without some embarrassment, that this was perhaps the only thing he'd never talked about with Harry. The only thing in all the years they'd shared everything between them. He hadn't asked him if Harry had had the same fantasies also. If in his, wild, imagination, the two of them had met over Rinoula's body.

But all of this, Harry's shadow and the bitterness of the change and distance he had, even without realizing it, enforced between them, were just moments. Small dark spots the blinding, vertical, noon light of their love showered upon, gradually reducing and diminishing them. Turning them into tiny specks, barely visible in the distance. Orestes would be puzzled at first and then completely forget what these dark, tiny specks were. And he'd cast them out of his soul, instantly, without a thought.

\* \* \*

"Anna, just now I was out to get a newspaper and I was suddenly overwhelmed by this strange, deep feeling of happiness inside me. First I felt a kind of distance from the sights and sounds around me. Then the distance faded and everything drew near, and I thought they all looked neat, everything was in harmony. Like a perfect set, made

just for us, the two of us, that's what it all looked like. I felt we were the leading actors in a play, with the whole wide world for a theatre. I felt everyone knew this was absolutely true; they'd all agree with me and if I talked to them, they'd say something meaningful. I've never felt this way before, so wonderful, so bright, so much in tune with the world around me."

That's what Orestes said that great day in June, after he'd gone out to get a newspaper. But then got carried away and bought only some lilies from a vendor. And then the flowers turned him on again and drove him quickly home. And then they made love passionately against the door. With Orestes holding Anna and Anna holding the flowers.

After all that then, when they dropped to the floor, that's when Orestes told her these words. And Anna replied, in her sweet way. And took him in her arms and led him on a journey again.

\* \* \*

That's what that spring was like, the spring inside them. And that's how bright the days were. Identical to one another, yet so different from every past one. So favourable to these two; the new to life, the newly initiated in love.

And nothing could change them. Not the night, nor any third party, or random coincidences, or the cycle of the year or the worries of everyday life. Rather the opposite, it was their spring that changed all the above and remedied them, when necessary. That endless spring of theirs. The springtime of their love.

That's what it was like and that's how it would always stay, that spring. An unforgettable memory, a reverential companion.

\* \* \*

And when it would end, even when it would finally end, even when it too would become a small speck, like the other small, dark specks, that she currently blinded and made vanish whenever they appeared; even then, when that first spring would become a distant memory, there would always be moments when her brilliant, virginal, aura would come alive.

It would swirl then; this time, their time, the different and younger, along the whirls and the helixes of Mandelbrot. And would come out of them as it was back then: bright. It would lead them to those old moments. And the helixes would then become an elixir. An elixir of immortality.

## After the exams

The exams went well for all of them, as was expected. Orestes was accepted at the technical university, Anna in fine arts and Harry and Helena in economics. This last bit fulfilled the prophecy again. That there was nothing these two honeybees didn't do together.

They didn't even organize a get-together to celebrate their success. That's how large the distance and the wall were. Around the beehive.

\* \* \*

Anna painted. Well before she entered the school of fine arts. And she carried on after she was accepted there; her daily routine wasn't much affected. And she painted with passion and devotion and the same weird inspiration she drew from maths and the Mandelbrot toys that were very fashionable back then. She studied the random patterns, the irregular contours of the fractals, for hours; she saw into them, and from the beauty of their chaos, made other things. Things from the real world. Faces and objects often only she could see or tell, but obscure to everyone else. As hard as you would try getting into their detail, it was impossible to comprehend the path Anna followed. And only when you looked at her works from a distance, could you sense some connection between

the erratic fractals and the smooth, symmetrical lines of Anna's paintings. You could sense a fine line passing from the world of anarchy and irregularity to the world of order and beauty that came alive in her works. Such a fine line, you could never be sure you were right, if the line actually existed. If it existed at all and it wasn't a figment of your mind that was deceiving you, trying to bridge the great and solitary distance where Anna trod.

Orestes would rack his brains studying Anna's paintings and the albums with the new fractals that constantly sprung up in the bookstores of America and Europe back then. He tried to see into each painting, to identify the hidden objects, to comprehend the path that led from the fractal to the painting. And he felt his inability to comprehend as a sort of limit between them. He found it difficult to work his way through Anna's paintings and the strange sources of her inspiration. He could only work out that intangible fine line which seemed to connect them. And often he wasn't certain that even existed, either.

And when he would talk to Anna about his inability, she would reply that the irregular fractals, the chaos they contained, liberated her, took her on a journey. And that the core of her real inspiration lay elsewhere, not in the fractals themselves. They were just the path.

And her reply made Orestes' inability even more tormenting. And made his anguish, his agony to find the vital lead which joined all this together, and to decipher these strange paths, even more futile.

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They never spoke about politics. Anna neither understood nor cared about it. Orestes realized it immediately and accepted the fact. Besides, political activism was not his thing either. But he was well-read, he had his views. Views that most times sounded radical, bordering on anarchism. He detested the faceless mob, authority and the idea somebody could rule, for any reason, over another. But he expressed these radical views only in theory, when he talked. In practice, Orestes was not involved in active anarchism. Not with any of its groups, nor the people in them.

But Anna's way of life shook him in this field too. It undermined the self-confidence he'd built, especially these last few years, on many of the books and essays he'd read. He saw Anna, sitting next to him, listening to her favorite music, violin and piano mostly, and then generating inspiration from chaos. And her inspiration and the art that germinated it and then transformed it into that other art, her art, all this seemed to him the most authentic anarchic experience he could ever possibly conceive. Much more than the theoretical criticisms he had collected in his head. It made him feel a certain degree of admiration, different from the one he had for Anna as a woman and an artist. This was an admiration for the spontaneous, the unpredictable, for something that speaks to you and expresses your inner self but at the same time you're unable to describe it and reach it. And it was only love that prevented a kind of envy, a kind of inferiority and distance, to take root amid all that.

“Anna, you know, your ability to draw inspiration and transform chaos to art, works some powerful spell on me. It stirs something deep inside; it touches me to the bone. It seems so strange but so beautiful at the same time, how naturally all this comes to you.” That’s what Orestes told her that morning. Then his attitude changed. “But sometimes it scares me, you know. How unpredictable your paths are.”

Anna noticed the slight tremble in his voice. They’d made love earlier. And then Orestes watched as she painted in her peculiar way for a long time. And he gradually worked up this strong emotional response.

Anna didn’t reply. She only gave him a hesitant smile that betrayed there was something in his words she didn’t quite understand.

Still, Anna transformed that slightly quizzical smile into a gentle, sweet sanction. She transformed it into a long, sweet kiss, with the same magical and indecipherable method she used to transform chaos into art.

She was like that, Anna.

\* \* \*

Orestes made new friends at the Technical University. But he didn’t spend much time with them. His mind and his soul were elsewhere. And his new friends would sometimes tease him for the great fixation he apparently had with his girlfriend.

So Orestes spent only as much time in the amphitheatres as was strictly necessary; even less gossiping and loitering in the corridors, like students usual do. Which the

new friends he gradually made found disappointing.

“Hey, Orestes, won’t you introduce us to your girl-friend, so she can introduce us to her girlfriends, so we can get some action?” they’d bleat and then whine about how dull and loveless their lives were.

How could he explain that nothing of the sort would ever happen. He hadn’t met any of Anna’s friends. It was part of the “deal” of their relationship. From day one. But how could he explain that to his fellow students? He’d told Harry, who was his best friend, and he found it weird. Not only that, he was also utterly negative about it.

\* \* \*

But of course love was above all that. It occupied both space and time, it brought everything to life. It sweetened every hang-up, and softened the hardships of the day. It was a love unnatural, intense, endless. A strange love. So strange he sometimes felt it was a fragile, unpredictable love.

He thought about Anna’s strange, magical paintings on which she glided, in which she immersed herself. And which not even Anna herself knew where they would lead her.

It was those paintings that frightened Orestes sometimes. Those were the source of his secret apprehension. Sometimes, most times, all this enchanted him. But other times he wondered uneasily. He wondered where they would eventually lead her some day.

\* \* \*

What if something was revealed in their magical flow;  
what if Anna saw something different, something beau-  
tiful in them and she herself went ablaze inside? What if  
their splendor led her down a steep and faraway path, a  
path with no return?

## The fractal of the lake

Anna was in a sad mood that day. She went by the school but didn't stay long. There she met and talked a bit with Thaleia, an old friend and neighbor, two years older than Anna. Some years ago, when she was still a teenager and those two years seemed like light years, Thaleia had a strong influence on her. She was the one who first put to her the idea of going to art school. She saw Anna had a passion for painting; she noted, with mixed emotions, Anna's strange inspiration, her ambiguous influences from diverse sources, like mathematics. Indeed for a moment there she dreaded Anna might choose maths over painting. She tried to persuade her then, perhaps even dissuade her, since she sometimes feared Anna had already made the wrong decision.

Thaleia was the friend Anna went on a short trip with the day after she hooked up with Orestes, at the Zepelin. And during that trip, apart from telling her about Orestes, she also told Thaleia her decision. Her main path in life would be art: painting. That's what she told her then. She'd made her choice. The two lessons, those she always excelled in at school, had competed against each other and art had won. In Thaleia's eyes, that is, because Anna never saw or realized there was any such conflict. Thaleia was greatly relieved things turned out the way they did. She even thought there might be some connec-

tion between the two incidents: Anna's decision and her relationship with Orestes.

Thaleia was happy for her friend when she entered fine arts. Anna sailed through the exams, she was one of the best entrants. And Thaleia was happy because it was then that Anna's decision was finalized and she tipped to the right side.

Thaleia was one of the people Anna later told Orestes she'd rather hang out with alone. And so it was. The three never met. None of them sought after such a meeting, nor would they ever, even accidentally, meet in the future.

\* \* \*

They didn't say much that day. Thaleia noted Anna was moody. She thought it strange. It was still early on, Anna had only just started lessons a couple of months ago. So Thaleia thought she might be having trouble with her new environment. She offered to help.

"Anna, if you need any help with the school, just let me know. You will need some time to adjust and get used to it here. Be patient, you'll soon fit in, you'll be very happy here. It's a phase we all go through at first. You'll see," Thaleia said.

Anna seemed a bit uncomfortable. Like she had expected to hear something different from her friend. She smiled a little uneasily and then said, "I suppose so, Thaleia, everything takes time to get used to, I know."

Thaleia was not convinced, she felt she was off the mark. So she made another attempt.

“Anything wrong? You look distracted, upset, or somewhere between the two. What’s wrong? A row with Orestes maybe?”

No, that wasn’t it. Anna considered talking to her friend for a moment, and telling her. Tell her what though? The moodiness written all over her entire presence hadn’t reached her head yet. How could she put it into words?

“No, there’s nothing specifically wrong. I’m just moody I guess. I won’t stay, I’m going home, I’ll skip design today,” Anna replied.

“Good idea, I wish I could join you but my timetable is very busy today,” Thaleia said. There was a sense of relief as she felt that whatever it was, it was fleeting and unimportant, and would therefore eventually pass. Whatever it was bugging Anna. She said she’d call soon, arrange to get together and chat. Thaleia was now living with her boyfriend. They weren’t neighbors anymore. So they didn’t see each other as often.

They kissed. Then Thaleia disappeared down the corridor, passing behind some bill posters fighting about who had priority over a few free inches of wall. Anna watched her go until she was no longer visible. Then she watched, indifferent and absent-minded, the bill posters for a while. And a little after Thaleia had gone, she moved towards the exit. She’d take the bus home. That was her initial plan.

\* \* \*

The day was moody too. Same as Anna. There had been a hesitant drizzle since early this morning which made

traffic very slow and ill-tempered. It made the pace of pedestrians hasty, almost neurotic, as well. People walked quickly, to avoid it and shelter as best they could against the water from heaven, coming down, on and off, irregularly and unpredictably. With a heavy, dark haziness in the background annulling any hope the weather might lift. Rather, it guaranteed the whole day would continue the same way. It was early December.

When Anna got out onto the street, she changed her mind. Orestes would probably be at home. But she wanted to be by herself for a while, to shake off the bad mood which, encouraged by the day's weather, seemed to have taken hold of her. She turned the corner. She decided to visit the national gardens. She might manage to calm down there. Feel better, lift the bad mood.

She got to and entered the gardens in about twenty minutes. The drizzle had stopped but had managed before that to make all sorts of water puddles and loads of mud everywhere. Water and mud entirely put off pedestrians from visiting the now vacant gardens. She was pleased she found it like that, quiet and deserted.

She kept walking, slowly and carefully. She felt the dew in the damp air. She enjoyed it, even though it was wintry, therefore still colorless. She also relished the peace and quiet that got stronger at every step, which prevailed over and slowly covered the bustle from the avenues surrounding the gardens.

Then she started thinking. Wondering about the root of her bad mood. But she couldn't think of, or remember, anything that could've annoyed or upset her.

She kept walking. She had a direction: the one that

kept her as far from the commotion of the day as possible. And the same, hazy, thought kept visiting her. Coming and going, without an answer.

The question that preoccupied her became more tangible as time passed. She was struggling to get to the beginning. To the beginning of her bad mood. So she slowly traveled back in time. To yesterday.

\* \* \*

They returned home late at night. They'd gone on one of their long, full, walks before ending up at the Zeppelin, Orestes for a couple of drinks, Anna for her double plain coffee. They both enjoyed these aimless walks, with no direction. Without much talking. The peace between them did most of the talking then. And they only interrupted it with their long, endless kisses.

They got home around one. Anna was ahead of him, she got to the point first. "Orestes, I don't want to make love tonight. I prefer to paint," she told him.

"As you wish, Anna," Orestes replied. Then added. "Is there something wrong?"

"No, I'm fine Orestes. I just feel like painting. Would you mind if I put on some music? Will you be able to sleep?" Anna replied, trying to reassure him.

"You know how much I love watching you paint! Of course I don't mind the music. On the contrary, I'll enjoy watching you even more. I'm not at all tired, so something tells me I'll be able to watch until you finish tonight's painting," Orestes said.

A faint smile, caused by Orestes' hint, spread across

Anna's face. Then she started to paint. She started from scratch. A new painting. She didn't need to flip through any album that night. As if the inspiration was ripe already. She even forgot to turn on the music she told Orestes of a little earlier. The confidence she felt about her painting that night was certainly unique.

Her strokes were slow but confident. Orestes lay on the bed and tried to figure out exactly what Anna had in mind. As there was no music, Orestes made up for its absence and murmured a song himself. A song by the Doors. Over and over. He wondered what path she would take, what tonight's subject would be. But her strokes came out slowly, it would take some time for the basic forms, the basic shapes, to appear on the canvas. Perhaps it wouldn't even happen that night. Perhaps it'd never happen, he thought with a pinch of sadness.

And so, after a while, Orestes fell asleep. And the low tune he murmured, the one by the Doors, eventually stopped.

Anna then put on some soft music to compensate for the vacuum. She chose the violin that night, instead of her usual piano.

\* \* \*

There was only the sound of the violin. Slow and plaintive, it's the only sound to greet the colors. Which come out slowly and with difficulty on Anna's canvas that night. And the symphony of the violin and the colors continued till late, into the deep stillness of the night. Until, later, hours later, it's finally interrupted by some other sounds. The sounds from the neighborhood and the first workers

of the day, on their way to work.

\* \* \*

Anna, at the gardens, reflected, recalled and entered into every detail from the previous night up to that moment. She wondered if it could be those second sounds, the sounds that announced the advent of the new day, her bad mood stemmed from. But she felt certain that wasn't the moment she was looking for.

\* \* \*

She puts aside her colors, turns off the music. She lies next to Orestes, who has been sleeping for hours. She lies to sleep and the tune Orestes was murmuring comes to her lips.

Love me two times, babe. Love me twice today.

It amazes her. She murmurs the tune a bit too. Over and over. The day is dawning. A light drizzle begins.

Anna falls asleep in the morning.

\* \* \*

She sits by the lake, in the gardens. The place is totally deserted. Inside and outside and around the lake. Even the ducks are settled in their duck-houses. The towering trees drip a few drops now and again on the surface of the lake. And the drops form beautiful, large circles that slowly, symmetrically, widen to cover the entire lake. But there, on their way, they meet with other circles. Those coming

from the many neighboring drops. Those dripping from the many neighboring trees.

The circles meet. They collide and mingle. They destroy one another. That's how it appears to Anna. And then other circles come. From other drops. And the beautiful, original harmony, the symmetry of each separate circle ceases to exist. Each one's individual beauty lasted only a brief while. It's now lost.

But Anna lifts her gaze and takes in the entire lake; she draws it into her gaze. And then, another picture is revealed to her over the lost harmony of the solitary circles. No, the circles aren't lost. From the new distance of her altered view point, she sees them all forming a new enchanting picture. The entire lake sings to Anna. And she's immersed and loses herself in that ineffable symphony.

In the symphony of the lost circles. In that inconceivable beauty. In the beauty of chaos.

She's upset. Her eyes well up with tears, they're cleansed. They're cleansed and strengthened. They're strengthened and can now see behind the magic of the little lake. They finally see what they were looking for. The music of the drops has clearly revealed it to her. The music of the circles, the circles which now take their new magical forms.

Love me two times, babe, love me twice today.

I'm goin' away.

\* \* \*

There are things that don't have an answer. Anna didn't adapt, as Thaleia told her, just a few hours ago, at her

school of fine arts. And she didn't surrender to the great love, the recent one, with Orestes. Why did she choose not to, why did she refuse to surrender to her two great loves? She'd never find the answer to that.

And there are paths that aren't on the map. Like this one, that went from yesterday's painting, to the lyric later, to today's seductive symphony of the lake. The lake which voraciously swallows the water circles and everything predictable along with them. And from their carcass makes another painting, beautiful and strange, unseen and incomprehensible to most. The lake whispers it, but it's inaudible. Some few can sense it. But it's inaudible, and inexplicable to all.

Anna glided along that relentless fractal of the lake. She surrendered to it and was enchanted and her eyes were fooled. She tried to take the lake in. But the lake cast her into a wild whirlpool instead, her own uncontrollable whirlpool. And like the times when she immersed herself in the fractals and had no idea where her soul would emerge and what path her pencil would draw on her paper, she likewise had no idea where she would emerge coming out of nature's fractal where she was now gliding, running. One thing was sure. That she would emerge somewhere far away, somewhere else.

There are things that don't have an answer. That's why they're called whims of youth. They say they are strictly dictated by youth. And that youth, in turn, is dictated by them. That turmoil, that chaos. But a reverent chaos at that. Because mindless chaos exists later in life, too; it doesn't fade with youth. Reverent chaos, like the seductive, the enchanting symphony of the little lake.

## The lost step

That wasn't the only time Anna was ahead of him. Back then, the first time at the Zeppelin. It would always be like that, for as long as they were together.

Like a recurrence, a sort of reprise of that first second. That's the way their short-lived life together would be. Anna would always be one step ahead. And Orestes would always be dazed, ceaselessly, by that extreme, fearless and silent allure. The one that revealed itself to him unexpectedly. That suddenly emerged and stepped out of the shadows and opened the door to another world to him, a world he never imagined existed, much less realized it in the least. And afterwards took him journeys, on her body, in her soul and in her works. Her many works, with the beautiful colours.

Orestes would be dazed and would follow. Always. As long as he could see and follow Anna's – leading – step. Like he so masterfully did, back then, at the Zeppelin.

\* \* \*

But now that Anna is swirling away, Orestes can't follow. Now that she's surrendered to the enchanting melodies that surge through her soul and push her towards other worlds, now that she's whirling away, far away, Orestes can't follow. It would be unnatural if he could manage the

same, irregular, flight as Anna.

\* \* \*

But what's going to happen now Orestes is inevitably losing that step? Now he's losing that first, now unnatural, step of Anna's and can't follow it anymore? What's going to happen now?

Could such a mistake, such a slip-up, prove too grave and unforgivable? Will Anna get past it? Will she give a second chance? Will she let her precious, unique, touch continue to vivify Orestes?

Alas, there can be no second chance. Such a chance is not in Anna's jurisdiction. Anna's paths have no return. It's impossible to move contrary to the swirls of a fractal. There's no hope of finding the way back. There's even a mathematical proof to verify it.

## Exile

At first Orestes thought Anna went somewhere. Somewhere away from Athens, alone, or more likely, with friends. With some of the friends she referred to back then, in the beginning, the ones she wanted to meet on her own. But days went by and Anna didn't show up and Orestes began to worry. It was almost a week, when he decided to check at her school. He'd heard of Thaleia, he knew she was Anna's closest friend. He had a vague hope Thaleia wouldn't be there, she'd be away with Anna, they'd gone somewhere together. That's what Orestes thought. That's what he hoped. But that thought and hope were short-lived.

It didn't take him long to realize that it wasn't like that at all. Anna hadn't been at the school for days, no one had seen her lately. But info about Thaleia was different. She was there. Quite a few people verified that. A surge of fear slowly crept over Orestes.

Asking around, he found a group of Thaleia's friends. They were talking about someone's latest work. They saw Orestes. He looked distressed. Their eyes, puzzled, focused on him. First they listened to him, they paid attention. Then they answered curtly, assuring him that Thaleia, no, wasn't out of town. She was in Athens, only she hadn't come to the school that day. Orestes asked for a telephone number; he asked, visibly shaken now, if

anyone knew where he could find Thaleia. But his agitation triggered the wrong response. It made the look in their eyes hesitant, uneasy. Then Orestes raised his tone of voice, he persuaded his unacquainted and suspicious interlocutors, Thaleia's acquaintances, that something serious, perhaps even very serious, had happened. He was looking for a friend of Thaleia's, who'd been missing for a week. It was imperative to contact her. The whole group exchanged glances, silently and confirmatory. Then a girl said, "Thaleia lives very close by, behind the Museum. Rethymnou Street 8." She then searched for and found, with some difficulty, a telephone number in an address book. She scanned her friends' faces first and when she quickly got everyone's clearance again, she told Orestes the number. He jotted it down on a newspaper he was holding. Then he said goodbye and rushed off.

Orestes was extremely worried by now. He couldn't think clearly, make decisions. At first he tried to find a telephone, but he soon gave up. He realized Thaleia lived nearby, just five minutes away on foot. So he thought it better to go straight to her house. It seemed like a better idea, a more immediate solution. As if visual contact with Thaleia could give him additional answers which, otherwise, might get missed over the phone.

He was knocking on Thaleia's door in less than ten minutes.

\* \* \*

Thaleia opened the door herself. She was exactly as Anna had described her. Tall, red-head, and very thin; skinny.

Born to be an artist. But what Orestes noted most was her entire look betrayed distress. Some sort of prolonged and ripe sadness. That had accumulated on Thaleia's features for days. His anxiety increased.

"Good morning, sorry to disturb you, I'm Orestes, Anna's boyfriend. Perhaps she's told you about me," Orestes began.

He studied Thaleia. He saw her expression abruptly change. In a flash. But without becoming more specific, without leaning towards some other emotion. Orestes could tell something serious was going on. Even though he couldn't tell exactly what lay behind Thaleia's distress, he now had no doubt something serious was going on. When, after a few uneasy seconds, Thaleia hugged him, he lost his last, infinitesimal, hope. That he'd made some mistake and had simply misunderstood the troubled look on Thaleia's face.

"Come in, Orestes," Thaleia said after releasing him from her prolonged embrace. Orestes unfroze then and took the last hesitant and fearful steps. The steps towards Anna's truth. Towards the truth he now had no doubt Thaleia was well aware of. She knew its entire course, its every step, this last, great week. The week of great absence.

\* \* \*

Thaleia made some coffee and began unfolding the facts. She told him Anna had gone away, she'd left Greece. She got a letter from her a few days ago. In that letter Anna told her she was well, not to worry. And then she wrote

she was in Paris, where she'd stay for an indefinite space of time. It took her about five minutes to articulate these few words. Then Thaleia paused, took a sip of coffee. She struggled to find the words to continue.

Orestes watched her. He was dumbfounded. Thaleia's few words were enough to start weaving a new picture in his head, a new grim vision. Not the innocent apparition of Rinoula's promises. It would be a different vision this time, the vision of a lost paradise. This one would hole up inside him for some time, a long time. It would become his cross. He was listening to Thaleia, but he saw himself walking with Anna, walking next to Anna. Then he saw Anna take an unpredictable step. And saw himself, standing there, watching her in dismay, unable to understand or follow it. Then he saw Anna walk away and him, still standing there, unable to move, to take the smallest step. He wanted to shout but realized that wasn't what Anna expected. And he remained there, silent, glued to the ground, watching Anna disappear in the distance.

Thaleia studied him, unable to tell where his mind traveled. But she could see the stillness of his soul. She sensed that no questions would come from Orestes. So she continued.

Anna then wrote that she had no explanation. For leaving. And that no one was to blame. She simply felt a strong urge to leave. She also wrote about Orestes. That she knew he would be upset, that it wasn't his fault in any way and that she'd write to him soon. Indeed, if Thaleia wanted, she could give him the letter to read. Anna correctly foresaw Orestes would try to find Thaleia. She was the only person she mentioned so often, even though

they never got together, all three. He wouldn't have any difficulty finding her at the school.

A new pause from Thaleia. Orestes' profound, mute, blank sadness infused the room. She sat next to him, and put her arm around his shoulder.

"What else? What else does she write?" Orestes asked, after a brief silence. He anticipated he still hadn't heard the most difficult part. He was certain about that. Thaleia hadn't put it into words yet.

"She writes her decision is final. As much as it appears inexplicable, to us, to her even, as much as she can't find any excuse for it, she's certain her decision is final. We shouldn't have any doubt there."

Thaleia swallowed hard. She still had her arm around Orestes' shoulder. She didn't know him at all, so she was uncertain about his reaction. She wondered if she should distance herself a bit. If she should pull away a little. But Orestes' absolute stillness made her decide to stay where she was.

Orestes could now see Anna disappearing, drawing away, her figure growing hazy in the distance, turning into a speck. Moving out of the light. And him, there, as motionless on the inside, as he was on the outside.

"Does she write anything else?" he asked after some time.

"She writes... She writes..." Thaleia hesitated.

Orestes slowly turned his head. His dark glance was just a few centimeters from Thaleia's.

"She writes she'd rather we didn't contact her: that's it, isn't it?" Orestes' abruptness was startling. He was sinking into the abyss but his foresight had pluck, and to the

point. He was spot on.

Thaleia hesitated. She motioned with her hand, and lightly squeezed Orestes' shoulder, who meanwhile had turned his head again to its previous, motionless, position. Orestes' was certain about the words he was to hear next.

"Yes, that's what she says," Thaleia replied after a difficult delay. And Orestes sensed the tear that accompanied her final words.

\* \* \*

He headed home. It was plain to him that what he knew as home would soon cease being that. He could see he wouldn't have a home anymore. He thought then, for a moment, he saw it clearly: the street would become his body's home. And his soul's home, hell itself.

So that was the sentence then. The price for his unknown failure. It had just been announced. And he took it standing, courageously, as he had done earlier, during Thaleia's narrative.

Same now. He wasn't fooled, his ears didn't deceive him. He was ready.

\* \* \*

He spent an hour, maybe two, on the street. He didn't think of anything during that time, he would never recall those hours again. It was as if he hadn't even been alive during those hours. And when he finally ascended to the upper world, he had his first thought since he left Tha-

Ieia's house. He headed home. He thought to give it a try, even though he knew it was dangerous, risky. He'd heard the sentence. Home was forbidden. He was exiled on the street.

That's how it was and that's how it would stay. For months. Until next spring. That's how long his sentence, his punishment lasted. Exile on the street. It wasn't very long. But each day was unnaturally cruel during this period. And therefore endless.

He entered the house. They'd warned him though, when they'd announce his sentence. Not to venture there. He'd be like a lion in a cage. His idea was silly, it was a bad decision.

Quite predictably, he couldn't stay in there. Shortly after he entered the house he felt he was suffocating. The feeling puzzled him. Only a short while ago, when he was out on the street, he was almost catatonic. And now he's climbing the walls. He feels a great outburst building up inside. He runs out onto the street to avoid it.

He starts walking.

\* \* \*

Where does Orestes walk during these months? He gets on a bus, any bus, and off another. He walks on and on. Aimlessly, with no direction. Day and night, until dawn. He walks and walks, his head empty, his soul empty. No weights, so he can walk for hours. And only when the sun comes out, only when the traffic starts and the early workers head to work, only then does he feel tired, only then does he return to the forbidden house. He sleeps a few

hours and hits the streets again. Before the terrible voices inside have time to wake. The voices that will remind him his sentence, screaming. That will revive the vision. That will throw him out onto the street again.

Where does Orestes walk during these months? In new neighborhoods, in streets and shops, from the Saronic Bay to Mount Parnitha. Quiet, like a ghost, he goes unnoticed. In the cold, the rain, the wind. Beyond all that, rather than in them. He doesn't feel any of nature's elements, nothing can reach him. He doesn't communicate with the people around him.

Where does Orestes walk during these months?

\* \* \*

In a square Orestes is looking to buy some flowers. Lilies. He sees the flower sellers here and there but when he approaches they vanish.

That's how short his course is, even though it seems endless. That's how short his real course is.

And it becomes even shorter when, without any lilies, for no reason, he gets on a door and stays there alone, mute, stark naked.

That's where Orestes really walks. That's how tiny his real path is.

## Rodeo

Orestes dropped out of the Technical University. He disappeared from his friends, those new, envious ones. Who, in the early days, pressed him about his secret. Who wanted him to play ambassador, to act as a go-between, so some of them might get lucky like he was. And all that without any of them ever having seen Anna. That's how radiant Orestes' happiness was, those first, few months.

After Orestes disappeared, they were initially curious about what happened. There were all sorts of rumors. So they tended towards one version, then another. There were also all kinds of questions, some expressing concern, some envy, and some wonder. But no one was certain about anything. Besides, Orestes wasn't close with any of them. They were only acquaintances, shallow, full of assumptions. So rumor had it Orestes probably left Athens, maybe the country even, without telling a soul. That was usually how most incidental talk about Orestes' disappearance ended. Which, after a while, became more and more infrequent. Until, after a couple of months, it stopped altogether. The end of the semester came, and Orestes was still missing. It was roughly then all talk about Orestes died down. He was entirely forgotten.

As for Harry, he didn't notice his absence. His circle – Helena – notified him; she notified him with her silence that something was going on with his weird friend and he

decided to drop off the face of the earth. “Well, if that’s how he wants it, let it be for the best!” That’s what Helena silently said, that’s how Harry heard and accepted it without complaining.

So Harry was living in bliss. Jaunty, unhampered. And he came to feel that every thought, every moment dedicated to Orestes, was a moment lost. And this culpable idea of his quickly muffled all questions and concern.

Only Thaleia thought about Orestes sometimes, in the beginning. But not as much to want to find him or see how he was doing. Then again, she was waiting for Anna’s letter. She said she’d send one. Thaleia planned to look for Orestes when the new letter arrived. To share it with him. Only, the letter didn’t come. It never came. And she kept put off meeting with Orestes. Her thought sometimes turned to their meeting, in that abyss, where she saw Orestes silently sink. She shared some of the same sadness. But Thaleia’s sadness wasn’t as pronounced, it was under control. She was getting over it, day by day. And so Orestes gradually receded in her memory, until he completely vanished from there too.

\* \* \*

Everyone in his old world forgot Orestes, then. He ceased to exist. He now wandered, utterly alone, in a new world. A random world, constantly unfolding before him, without him making any choices, without desiring anything. Other than perpetual, aimless motion. And the relief it brought him. That’s all he asked for.

Endless paths, identical paths, passed before him. And

no matter which one he took, they were always identical, nothing changed. That's why he made no effort to tell them apart, to choose one over the other.

These paths were so similar he would forget them all later. They would all be swallowed by darkness. He would never be able to recall any of them, to feel bitter or laugh at any of them. Their memory would never bring him any sadness, or nostalgia, or any other sentiment. Empty time. Endless and empty.

Orestes would talk to himself when he walked. It was a habit of his, since childhood. Now he needed its help. He thought he was lucky he'd prepared. He'd trained. He talked to himself and that brought some small and pleasant variety in his life.

These soliloquies though would also be forgotten in time. They'd leave no trace either. When he'd done his sentence and his exile would end, when he would come back to the world, back to people. Old and new people.

\* \* \*

The Rodeo was a bar in a neighborhood of Athens. It was Orestes' only minor pleasure during these months, the only human reflex to alter his course a little, to give it a direction. That's why his path brought him there several times. Usually around the same time. Late afternoon, early evening. As if he expected something to happen then, at that, always the same, time. The Rodeo would be the only ray and memory from this timeless period. Unclassified. Neither good, nor bad. Concrete though. Fixed in time. And therefore special.

In the Rodeo he was destined to meet someone who would leave a lasting impression. Perhaps, if it weren't for that strange encounter, the Rodeo would've followed the same course as everything else; it would've been lost in the dark abyss that swallowed up Orestes' life.

\* \* \*

The bar was empty and pitch-dark. Bars don't usually have many customers as early as Orestes used to stop by the place. But it was difficult to picture it busy even during the hours when most bars are actually open and receive customers and come alive. It had nothing in common with the Zeppelin. And there was absolutely no chance anything similar to the experiences he had at the Zeppelin could have ever unfolded here.

The music was always the blues. Orestes never heard them play anything else. At low volume. Only instruments, no voice. Even the music conveyed that the place was not meant for talking. Customers didn't come here to talk.

That was the message Orestes got too. The promise of silence. The certainty he wouldn't have to emerge from the abysmal straits where he wandered and lived.

\* \* \*

The first time there he sat a short distance from another customer. The man was wrapped in thought. He had a book next to him and it looked out of place, alien. He didn't look like someone whose favorite pastime was

reading. That's how Orestes' eye fell on the book. It drew his attention because it looked odd.

He looked several years older than Orestes. But you couldn't be sure, because he dressed and looked more like a worker than a scholar. And time runs differently, more quickly, for them.

His neighbor noticed Orestes too. He didn't say anything the first time. He turned his gaze, and kept to himself. He spoke to him the second time though.

"Silence is scary only for talkers, don't you agree?" he said to Orestes.

Orestes was startled at first. He hadn't spoken a word for over two months. So he was struck by what his near neighbor said. And before he had time to complete the thought, he heard him add.

"Burroughs said that, not me, of course," he went on, with a faint smile. A sarcastic smile, aimed at himself. In case anyone might ever think he had such a thought himself.

Orestes reaction was mixed. His initial uneasiness subsided quickly. And then he felt a sense of familiarity through what he'd just heard.

But he remained blank.

Then the neighbor introduced himself. His name was Yiorgos. He turned the book towards Orestes. "Do you happen to know Burroughs?" he addressed him again, lifting and showing him the book.

Orestes had heard something of the author, but he didn't know much about him, nor had he ever read any of his books. But he was impressed that Yiorgos, as the man introduced himself, read something like that. His bearing,

his whole appearance, betrayed a different kind of person. From a different civilization.

“I know him, yes, but I haven’t read any of his works. He was a drug addict if I’m not mistaken,” Orestes said. This was the first dialogue he had with someone in a long while. So long, the tone of his voice startled him. “Apparently you don’t speak to yourself the same way you speak to others,” Orestes thought.

“Yes, he was a drug addict,” Yiorgos replied, his tone neutral. “A drug addict and a poet, that’s who he was,” he added flatly.

“And how did you come across him, what did you like in his writing?” Orestes asked.

Yiorgos smiled slightly sarcastically again. “I liked, I was intrigued by the fact he was a drug addict. I’m a drug addict too, you know. But not a poet, just a drug addict,” he replied. And with that comment, which went without a remark from Orestes, he wrapped up their first encounter.

\* \* \*

They met at the same place, two weeks later. It was Orestes who spoke to Yiorgos first this time. He entered the Rodeo, saw him and sat at a nearby table. He remembered he didn’t introduce himself the first time. He did so now and then began talking, slowly, without blabbering. He promised to respect the house rule, which was also of course Yiorgos’ rule, and Orestes’, as well.

“I’ve spent the past three months, the whole winter, on the street. I go home only to sleep. I wake up in the

morning and run out of the house like a madman. I suffocate from this unbearable feeling. I go up the walls. So I wander the streets all day, on my own.” That’s how Orestes started. And then slowly continued relating his story. Yiorgos listened as he went through fragments and unrelated incidents of his affair with Anna. He listened without interrupting at all.

And when Orestes felt he’d said enough, when he felt he didn’t want to talk anymore and that perhaps Yiorgos didn’t want to listen to his stories any longer, he stopped. But he felt a strange, fleeting sentiment, a small euphoria that apparently sprung from the memory of a time when he still talked with people. A time than now seemed very distant.

And Yiorgos replied to Orestes’ slow narrative with just a couple of words.

“Orestes, has Anna really left?”

\* \* \*

Were the fragments of Orestes’ story so unbelievable that Yiorgos wondered if they were real? The thought stayed with Orestes the rest of the night. And he made it part of his soliloquies. He would ridicule Yiorgos’ question. Then he’d sober up and try to understand it. Wonder what made him say that.

\* \* \*

The third and final time he met and talked with Yiorgos at the Rodeo, he invited him to his table.

He bought him a drink. Yiorgos then read him some of Burroughs writings. Always from the same book. They apparently held a strange, intense appeal. He didn't comment on anything, he just read. Nor did he say something about Anna and his odd question last time. And Orestes didn't bring it up either. He just listened to what Yiorgos read. But mainly, he listened to Yiorgos read.

Yiorgos stopped reading at some point. He closed the book. Then he said.

"At first, when Rhea died of an overdose, I felt rage. I blamed everyone. Human nature, I guess. But I soon got over it. I soon laughed at it."

Yiorgos paused a moment and cast a quick, penetrating glance. To see if Orestes was listening.

Then he went on: "soon I stopped raging about uncaring society. I fell into depression. And depression triggered an urge of self-destruction. I sought Rhea in my self-destruction. It brought me close to her. That's how I felt. That's how I tried to evoke her image. Rhea's image remained of course elusive, unfulfilled. And I was sinking, I was slipping away."

There was a brief pause. An eloquent pause, though. Yiorgos heard its voice and could see the uneasiness escalating in Orestes. Then he saw it in his look. So he thought to lighten the atmosphere a bit.

"Do you always drink coffee?" he asked.

"Yes, coffee; not always, but often. Now you mention it, it's part of Anna's influence. Double black Greek coffee. It was her favorite."

Yiorgos shook his head. "Yeah, I get it," he muttered. Then he picked up his book again. But something changed

his mood. He put the book down, turned at Orestes.

“You know why you drink coffee, Orestes?” he asked.

Orestes answered quickly and with conviction. “Because it reminds me of her, because it brings her back in way. Mentally.”

“You drink coffee for the same reason I surrendered myself to drugs. For the image, for the memory. Instead of focusing on life, we’re stuck on the first image that’s gone. And we struggle every way we can to keep it alive. That’s what we’re doing Orestes! That’s what we’re both doing. But there’s a difference between us.”

Yiorgos smiled and rounded off his thought. “Caffeine is one thing, and heroin another. Your attempt to bring to your image close is innocent, perhaps even beautiful. Mine pulls me down. It’s killing me.”

Orestes was upset. He felt guilty for the thoughts he’d awakened in Yiorgos. He apologized. “I’m sorry Yiorgos, if I brought back... I would never have thought something of the kind.”

But Yiorgos bypassed Orestes’ words. He stayed on the same, on his, path. “Instead of focusing on life, of finding the new Rhea, I chose to make a memorial out of an image. Even though it sucked me in, day by day, even though it tore me to pieces.”

There was silence. Yiorgos got up, he was about to leave. He looked at Orestes and said: “bye now. Time to go. I hope you manage to focus, and one day see your image on the outside, standing before you, stretching her hand towards you. Smiling at you. I hope you free yourself from the unbearable, the untouchable that lives inside you now. I hope so. Not only do I hope, but I believe

so, too. You'll see your image elsewhere, on the outside. You'll find the way. And the image you told me about now, the previous one, will take a different place inside you. You'll be able to live with it. It will be appeased and beautiful." Yiorgos paused a moment. He was getting emotional. Then he smiled a little, pulled himself together and added: "to forget her, or get even with her, you neither want, nor have any hope to. I know it, I see it."

Yiorgos stopped abruptly, his look changed; it turned solemn and hard. "Of course, there will be something left, there usually does. Something that will awake and get nasty from time to time. That will bring you back to the original image, that will torture you, perhaps mercilessly. But the unbearable ghost that makes you suffer today, that will be appeased, some day, soon. It'll change. You'll manage it, I feel it. You'll manage to live with it without suffering."

There was a pause before Yiorgos added. "That's the only difference between us, my friend. You can tame your ghost. You're getting there, day by day. You'll mellow it, it will stop torturing you. As for me, I don't hope to be freed of mine, Orestes. Bye now!"

Yiorgos opened the door and left. Orestes lifted his eyes. He barely had time to see the bitter smile on his face, as the door closed behind him.

Orestes stretched himself comfortably in his chair. He relaxed a moment. Then he started thinking. He frowned. His thought turned to what Yiorgos had told him. What he said about returning back to the original image reminded him of something. He tried to remember, but nothing, absolutely nothing came to mind. Even though the word

he'd used- focusing- sounded so familiar. Even though it stirred inside him and awakened something certain, something beautiful and profound. Nothing reached his mind.

\* \* \*

Next time he went to the Rodeo, Yiorgos wasn't there. Orestes asked at the bar. They told him he'd left the neighborhood. He'd stopped coming. And so Orestes didn't feel the urge to go there again. He went back and continued the same walks. Traversing the same, empty, days.

What will stay with Orestes from this period of his life? From this winter? Apart from one minor exception, a few afternoons at the Rodeo, he neither met anyone, nor noticed any landscapes or other moments and beauties of nature. Nor would he ever remember his soliloquies in the future. Orestes won't remember anything. Nothing at all. He had gone into hibernation.

And Yiorgos, perhaps that's why he asked him if Anna had really gone. Because he saw her rooted deep inside his existence. Because he could clearly see her figure behind his hibernation.

And the few writings of Burroughs he read to Orestes, were of a similar nature. Dark essays, about the winter, about a life now lost. Writings about the torture brought on by something lost. Something that left inexplicably, that's gone forever. Words about something that became untouchable.

\* \* \*

And Yiorgos' final words, those that brought on that liberating relaxation of their last moments together, perhaps they were the new seed and the omen of spring.

## Return

That day –it was a Sunday– he jumped out of bed with his usual morning anguish. He woke up heavy-hearted, like he did every day. From his restless, guilty sleep. He dressed and run to the door. To rush out on the street, where his real home was. To empty his mind, to walk to oblivion.

But as he touched the door handle, some invisible power restrained him. Made him hesitate. He opened the door slowly, like something was keeping him. He noticed the corridor was strangely quiet. That's how it seemed.

Then he thought it must be Sunday.

And with that thought, he latched on to and climbed back on time. He only experienced time, during this period, early in the morning, when he was tired. When he was exhausted. That was the only moment of the day when he thought about time; when he talked to himself, like he always did. When he whispered a “the day is over”. He also experienced time when he woke up, when he stepped into the light and sought quickly the redemption of the street. Those were the only two moments he acknowledged as night and day, as early and late. The rest of the day, the rest of the night, there was no time.

That's why that morning felt weird. Very peculiar. It was because he experienced the sense of time after so long, darting as he did out from the timelessness he lived

in.

And that small moment was enough. Enough to set the hands in motion. The hands of his personal clock.

He went back to the room. He almost smiled. He found it very strange, almost unnatural that, up until a moment ago, he felt that way, he felt he was suffocating so bad, he felt such a manic urge to rush to the street. He was calmer now. Almost certain he would spend this day differently. It would be a new day. Perhaps the following ones would be like that too. New days, without that unbearable urge to leave. Days mobilized by time. People's time.

He sat down; he made himself a coffee. He looked out towards the park opposite. He noticed the peace in the park, the empty street.

"Of course it's Sunday," he mumbled again. He felt a remote, a slight sense of joy approaching.

He wondered then about Harry. "Can it be that he left some message on the phone and I missed it, lost in space all this time?" Orestes thought for a moment. He browsed his messages. And then he smiled bitterly as he realized Harry hadn't left any message. Harry or anyone else. Perhaps if there had been something of the kind he would've been reborn sooner. The thought did occur to him. But today Orestes didn't want to leave room to complaints. And so he bypassed Harry. And the thought of him was very short-lived.

\* \* \*

When he later walked out the door, he was a different person. A person gradually reborn.

He planned to go downtown, towards Monastiraki. It was forty minutes away. The target he set and measuring that target immediately after, both filled him with a strange feeling. A feeling of return. Return to a world from which he departed a while back, from which he was washed ashore. And which he now found again. With the conviction gradually taking root inside him he would stay with it for good. A new sense surged through him. Conviction. It brimmed to his lips, it turned into words. “That’s certainly how it is,” he mumbled and realized the borderline where he stood, the end that was also the beginning. And conviction, that simple first conviction, gradually changed too; it grew larger, and took a different course. It drew away from the mind, it overflowed; it reached the regions of the soul. And there it turned into a shy joy, a vague desire. Visible on Orestes’ face.

In the forty minutes of that cold Sunday morning in March, which Orestes walked for the first time in more than three months with a specific direction, time ticked constantly inside him. Clearly and with such precision, that the rhythm of time affected his stride. So that too became steady and even. And every few steps Orestes’s thoughts would jump to all the different things that were part of the life he’d left behind. To the people he knew, to his friends, Harry mainly, but also the others he’d began associating with at his school until one day he walked out the school and out of their lives.

\* \* \*

He later sat in Monastiraki, for a coffee. He sat outside,

and the waitress at the coffee shop was surprised someone preferred sit outside, such a cold Sunday morning, in the cold, instead of inside, where it was warm and inviting. She was so surprised she thought maybe she should suggest he take a look inside the shop, where it was so warm and nice. She was so surprised she even found the nerve to ask.

“Would you like to take a look inside, where there’s a fireplace going and it’s nice and warm?” the waitress asked politely.

Orestes was divided between her politeness and the surprise brought on by what the girl said. From her suggestion to move to a warmer place. Warmth and cold hadn’t been a part of Orestes’ day. It would certainly be some time before he reached their domain again. And he found the girl’s suggestion hasty and odd.

Orestes was unable to reconcile these two emotions, to turn them into something tangible. So the look in his eyes was strange, confused. And his look quickly affected the girl’s mood. That look came for afar, it had something distant and cold in it.

“Could you bring me a double black Greek coffee, please,” Orestes ordered in the end, avoiding answering the girl’s suggestion.

So she rushed into the shop to make the coffee he just ordered. Puzzled and slightly shaken by Orestes’ look that day.

\* \* \*

“It’s over. I’m coming back,” Orestes mumbles, in his new,

current, hope. He now feels a strong and well formed urge to return. The clock's sound is steady, it's ticking is loud. Orestes starts drinking his coffee in the solitary morning cold. Of a winter that refused to end.

\* \* \*

Soon, about mid-March, Orestes returned to his school. The exams were over, he'd lost the first semester. The second had already started. He barely made the enrolment deadline.

Meanwhile everyone had forgotten him. Fellow students and staff. People were surprised when they saw him one day in the amphitheaters and the corridors. So surprised no one spoke to him, at first. Only when Orestes talked to them first, only when his voice sounded normal, unchanged, like they knew him a few months ago, only then did they approach and answer him. And later, ask too. Ask him, although they were aware there might be reasons difficult to talk about behind such a prolonged absence. And so, eventually, out of tact, the conversation would turn to the future. It became more about what Orestes planned to do, rather than what he did when he dropped off the face of the earth.

"How are you going to cover the lost ground Orestes?" Julia asked him one day at the University. That's what she asked and Orestes couldn't help a delayed and benign smile.

When he thought of the "lost ground".

## The encounter

Harry was the last one he encountered. By chance; he didn't seek after him. At first he thought to get in touch. But the idea of bumping into Helena was unbearable. He thought of the look of well concealed sadness in her eyes. Sadness Orestes had turned up again and, in Helena's mind, threatened with his whims to disrupt their daily routine, their lives, their hive.

He knew Harry and Helena lived together. It was only natural they would, anyway. But he dismissed the idea of going by their house. Nor could he bring himself to call on the phone. The prospect of Helena answering and having to start a conversation with her gave him goose bumps. But even if Harry was the one to answer, how could he tell if it was actually Harry talking and not his prompter, Helena. She had a way with these things.

Then he thought to go by his school. It would be easier to arrange the setting there. He could make certain he approached Harry when he was alone there. He only needed a bit of luck, to catch him on one of the rare moments Harry was actually alone, without his chaperon.

\* \* \*

There was an early spring breeze. It tossed the trees and the flowers, and whipped up a strong, pleasant odor

everywhere, signalling the harsh winter was over. The bright sun, inching across an empty sky, nodded in consent. And the pair of them together, the wind and the sun, sent word to Orestes that the hide and seek he was planning was insignificant, perhaps even entirely silly. So Orestes decided to leave his encounter with Harry to fate. Not pursue it.

\* \* \*

And fate heard him, and responded.

En route, then. Walking slowly and with a purpose. With a profound feeling of content and in a state of complete relaxation. En route, in the streets of a large city with millions of people, Orestes crossed paths with Harry. Harry, who was fortunately alone for the first time after a long stretch. And who also looked different, upset, sad. Whose distress was so obvious, so clearly imprinted in his guise and his gestures, it thwarted Orestes' initial feeling of surprise and prevented it evolving into joy. A feeling of alarm gathered in his soul and carried through his features, instead. No doubt, something serious was going on with Harry.

Their eyes met. And Orestes' concern escalated by the minute, from one second to the next. Because Harry was obviously unwell. Because the surprise from unexpectedly encountering Orestes after so long faded quickly in Harry too; it was obscured by his dismay.

But memory and instinct had time enough to act, regardless. And the two friends fell in each other's arms. They stayed like that for some time; enough to slow down

the flow of passers-by and attract many looks of surprise.

“Harry, it’s been three whole months, maybe longer,” Orestes began, pulling away from him. Like he wanted to check if there was any change in his friend’s extremely troubled appearance.

“Yes Orestes, it’s been as long as that. Sorry, man, it’s my fault I didn’t get in touch. I thought you were so deeply in love, you see, that maybe I’d be unwanted,” Harry replied and instantly realized he made a serious blunder. Like he said something wrong, something he seriously shouldn’t.

Orestes smiled. He smiled to hide a wave of anger swelling in him, which Harry’s evidently sorry state dictated he’d better check. But he couldn’t help some drops splashing over. They got out and sprayed Harry and drenched him. “Well, is that what you thought then? Is that what you thought all these months and never once came looking for me? You thought you’d be unwanted? Is that what you honestly thought? Was I so fooled, then?”

His initial, troubled expression never wavered at any point. Harry’s. Only now there was a good proportion of guilt mixed into it, too. Like he realized and recognized the absurdity of what he just said. His question, though, the one that followed, surprised Orestes. It surprised him because it had no relation to his guilt over his unfortunate remark, as well as to his overall, unwavering, great distress that day.

\* \* \*

“Is it true you split up with Anna?” Harry asked. And Or-

estes instantly affirmed his friend's query. He also added some extra, important, info.

"It's true. And what you implied at the beginning is true as well. Maybe I wasn't lost in love, but I was with Anna the entire time. And that second bit, that I broke up with Anna, is also true. We broke up a few days ago, yes, you've got that right too. I'm finally unhaunted. The only thing that isn't true is the part about you been unwanted."

Harry was surprised. But only for a moment, though. His look quickly changed, it went back to guilty again. He's now certain he'd spoken offhand, his words were hollow, fake. But it doesn't stay that way long, the look on his face. Something else is eating him. Something wells up inside him again, and takes over. It gets to his head, he flushes. It brims to his lips, and turns into words.

"Orestes, we broke up. She's dumped me, Orestes; can you believe it? Helena's dumped me! She found someone else, that's what she told me, someone she can trust, someone who has steady feelings for her." That's what Harry said and it was as if all his tension and dismay were instantly released. He looked like he expected to hear words of compassion from his friend. Besides, Orestes had just broken up too, only he must've certainly had the upper hand. So he'd have a greater fund to support Harry. Fickle, untrustworthy Harry, who was tottering; who was going to pieces over his break up. This recent, tragic and entirely unexpected turn in his life.

The more Orestes looked at him, the longer it took him to speak, the more Harry's dismay and despair heightened. The more it appeared he would lapse into describ-

ing his situation again, go into greater detail about the devastating, unthinkable thing that happened to him. He could hardly contain himself. And if something kept him and made him hesitate, it was only the anticipation of a word, of a supportive word, a special and comforting word from Orestes.

And eventually that word came. Orestes had been working on it for a long time, as if he knew this would happen, as if he expected it. And he had worked on what he'd say, so it would suit the occasion perfectly. So it would be sincere but also comprehensive. Effective without being simplistic, explicit without being superficial. And after months of incubation, after he managed to compromise the multiple and tricky elements necessary for comforting Harry, it was at last time to utter those words, confident he would be able to offer emotional support to his bosom buddy.

So Harry was right to anticipate. He was right to struggle to keep himself from coming completely undone. The redeeming words Orestes had so artfully crafted flew now through the air between the two, went past Harry's eardrum and were already being processed by the appropriate section of his brain.

“The hell with her, Harry,” Orestes said. And after a brief pause, brief but sufficient for Harry to fully digest the first and most important part of his exhortation, he added: “that dumbbell, stupid honeybee dumped you and instead of celebrating you got rid of her, you’re ready to fall apart!”

Harry finally saw the light. And found the redemption he sought. First he uttered a reflexive, a hollow “Yeah, Or-

estes, but..." He was unable to find something to add to it though, to complete the second part of his reasoning. His face twitched and took on odd shapes as a weird succession of emotions fleeted over it.

Until a look of tranquillity eventually chased them all away and settled on his features.

Passers-by had to halt again, and a few cars also this time. And the more envious among these, pedestrians and drivers alike, shook their heads at that endless hug which seemed would never unlock.

\* \* \*

They then took a long walk, very much like Orestes' recent, endless wanderings. Only, this time Orestes wasn't tormented by Anna's ghost, he wasn't accompanied by loneliness, but by his best, his childhood friend. Orestes had dropped out of his old world, for months. He'd lost touch with Harry even longer. He had a lot to tell him then about the new land where he found himself. So he talked about that. And although Harry had just returned from a long journey too, his seemed like a bad, an empty dream. He didn't have much to say. So Orestes did the talking, and Harry the listening. He talked to himself, like he did then, to hear his own narrative. But this time he was also talking to Harry.

Harry hardly put in a word of his own during those long hours. He felt his personal adventure not worth mentioning. Best forget it as quickly as possible, exactly like Orestes urged. Orestes' strange narrative made the unworthiness of Harry's experience seem even greater

in comparison. His soliloquy helped Harry realize things. It made his disengagement even more self-evident and easy.

Of course it wasn't easy for Harry to understand. Orestes' story wasn't a common, a predictable adventure. His story was like Anna's fractals. The beautiful pictures of Orestes' story were random, chaotic, unexpected. And as much as Harry tried, as much as he made questions and occasionally asked his friend to clarify a point, he saw it would take a long time, perhaps it would never happen. For him to fully understand, that is, everything Orestes had lived through, the scars it left him. That's why, after a certain point, Harry stopped asking questions. He realized they didn't help. On the contrary, they distracted Orestes from the path where his soul led him, they sidetracked his attention to insignificant details. So Harry stopped talking and asking questions. He only listened. To Orestes' long narrative.

And that helped Orestes concentrate on the essence, describe the chain of incidents and emotions as best he could. Without trying to analyze, to justify them. Orestes' knew by now that he'd never be able to do such a thing. He'd treaded that unending path all these months like a suppliant. And having survived the ordeal, he was rewarded a gleam of wisdom. It was now part of him. He lived with it; he was reconciled to it, without suffering any more.

\* \* \*

There are things which don't have an explanation. Or per-

haps which you can't focus on, zoom in on them, to actually see the explanation. It amounts to the same thing. That was Orestes' gleam of wisdom. The essence of his path.

\* \* \*

Hours later the narrative stopped. There was a sudden breeze that seemed to blow through Orestes' soul and changed his mood. He suddenly smiled. He turned and looked at Harry.

"Tell me, Harry, back then, when we were kids, with Rinoula, back when our imagination ran wild, were we ever together? I've never asked you before."

After the hail of surprises he was treated that evening, Orestes' unexpected question about those faraway times didn't have the power to unsettle Harry. But it was a great opportunity for him to stop listening for a change and say something. To add something to their common experience. So he answered rather blankly, almost proudly.

"What do you think? We were together Orestes, of course we were! How else?"

\* \* \*

It was late when they arrived at the coffee bar in Monastiraki that night. They ended up there without realizing it. As if Orestes' footsteps had chosen the way. And Harry followed, just like he followed all the many steps of Orestes' soul that day.

The soliloquy ended when they sat at a table. They fell

silent. They ordered a couple of beers. It looked like the waitress Orestes met the other day wasn't there.

\* \* \*

Now Harry speaks, for the first time in hours. "I don't know what to do. I'm trying to feel glad about the remarkable things you've been describing for hours. And as soon as I feel glad, I then feel sad about the way things turned out, about the end that came so unexpectedly at your greatest moment, about the incredible torment you went through afterwards."

Harry pauses a moment, sips some beer and continues.

"My joy keeps wavering, Orestes. But I'm extremely proud of you. As for me, I wish I could feel shame over the way I treated you. But I feel so many things inside, for you and for me, that it's like there's no room for the shame I ought to feel."

Orestes looks at Harry. "We were always like two drops of water, Harry. And look how things turned out! How different our stories are. But that's the magic of life, isn't it? There's no room for shame or pride between us. Only joy over the other's happiness. That's the only suitable feeling, Harry. I couldn't feel happy over your relationship with Helena, you know. And I admit that ate at me. But I'm very happy you broke free from that petty affair. Like I'm also very happy we found each other again."

Orestes sobers up; his thought passes over Harry's remark and turns to Anna.

"As for the other thing you asked, yes Harry, you should be glad, that's the only suitable feeling. It doesn't matter

how it turned out in the end. It's difficult to understand, I know; you find it strange. I suffered for months before I reached that point myself. Feeling so intense, so special about what we had with Anna, without being excruciated that it's over. The pain might recur sometimes, in the future. That's what someone told me. But Anna lives in me; she lives as a light, not a haunt. And I'm twice happy because I know the same goes for her too; exactly the same. That's why the only feeling it deserves is joy, the greatest and purest joy. And that's the only thing I ask of you, my brother."

\* \* \*

The spring breeze that began to rise earlier brought on a new, sudden but pleasant gust. It also brought Orestes the memory of the episode with the waitress. He smiled and turned to Harry, to tell him how rude he'd been his last time here, the first day of his return. He was about to speak when the very same waitress appeared from inside the shop. Apparently she'd only just started her shift. She recognized Orestes, moved in his direction and smiled at him.

"Today, yes, it's nice to sit outside; but the first time you were here, a few days ago, I found it so strange! Perhaps it was a bit rude of me to disappear so selfishly and suddenly; I practically ran into the shop."

Orestes smiled. "I guess I was coming from a very cold place and I didn't feel the cold the same as you that day. I must've startled you with my hard stare. That's the way I remember things. I'm sorry, I'm truly sorry," he re-

plied. Then he stretched out his hand kindly, politely. “My name’s Orestes and this is my friend Harry.”

\* \* \*

“Pleased to meet you Orestes, Harry,” replies the waitress. She turns to Orestes. “I hope you’ll drop by sometimes, when you’re not off to that cold place,” she says. And then rounds off her reply by introducing herself.

“My name’s Anna.”

The next table asks for the bill. Anna’s attention is distracted for a moment. Orestes leans back against the seat. He smiles.

“Have I zoomed in, Yiorgos? Is that it? Did I zoom in?” he says to himself.

Harry looks at him baffled. “Zoomed in where man, where have you zoomed in? What are you talking about?” he asks.

Orestes looks at Harry. “On life, Harry; I zoomed in on life!” he replies.

Orestes stares into the distance.

“Now let’s see about that last bit, Yiorgos. That last thing you said, that there’s always something that stays with you, something that haunts you. You were right about everything else. Spot on!”

Harry keeps looking at him in bewilderment. Anna returns to their table.

“Are you talking to me?” she asks with a smile.

“I’m talking to an old friend. Something reminded me of him for some reason,” he answers.

“And what are you talking to him about?” Anna asks.

“What am I talking to him about, really? I guess I’m thanking him for the help he gave me. Some time ago,” Orestes replies.

Then his look changes, his attitude becomes warmer. “But let’s forget all that now. Come join us, as soon as you have some time. What would you like to drink?”

Anna smiles meaningfully. She casts a look around; there’s no customer looking for her. She sits at their table.

“A double black Greek coffee,” she replies.