

The Feast of Feasts

by

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ABSTRACT

A novel about an Orthodox priest who seeks solace in Greece after the death of his wife. While Father Christopolous struggles to find forgiveness and restoration in the Paschal celebration, he grows increasingly entangled with a young priest-activist and his striking, self-destructive wife. Amid the tumult of a country in political upheaval, he unravels the secrets of his hosts and confronts truths about his own marriage that threaten his faith and his place in the world. Set over the course of Holy Week, the novel explores the tensions in the bodily experience of faith and in the dichotomy between the knowledge of the mind and that of the heart.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.
But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.
- Matthew 24:12-13

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CHAPTER 1

APRIL 18, GREAT AND HOLY MONDAY

As Father Christopolous waited to be fetched from the dock, he catalogued bodily discomforts he'd never even noticed on previous travels to Greece. He'd contracted a low-grade migraine during the fourteen hour flight. The pollution in Athens had caused an allergic reaction and the ferry motion-sickness. As Christopolous stood amongst his bags, the same boat churned away from the dock, pluming hot, diesel clouds in its wake. It was warm for April. Haze shimmered over Sifnos in the distance, obscuring it from view. The water in the bay panted at the dock, and the white houses of the Chora blazed up in the sun.

Sweat prickled in the beard he'd let grow for his trip and under his wool cassock, and he found himself resentful of the Orthodox costume he had to don on the island. A blister had bubbled up on the inner web of his right thumb. He'd forgotten his wristwatch: as a result, he could not say whether he were early or his host late for their rendezvous. He was a litany of complaint, the degree and number of which made him feel old and petty and passive, as if he was less a person than a perpetual response to stimulus. But since Eleithyia's death a month ago, Fr. Christopoulos felt like this all the time: cloudy-headed, lethargic, beset by minor discomfort.

After a long while, a Renault hatchback trundled up the dock. Even from a distance, the enormous swathe of black in the driver's seat suggested a priest. This would be Fr. Metrios, Christopolous thought. He was only surprised by the man's bulk. Hunched over the steering wheel with the black fabric of his cassock billowed about him and the flat top of his kamilavkion scraping the interior roof of the car, he reminded

Christopolous of old-fashioned cartoons of big men in clown cars. He issued a few friendly blats from the car's horn and raised a massive hand from the steering wheel in greeting. When he'd driven to the foot of the dock, he left the car running and unfolded himself in parts from the car. "Brother Christopolous, good to see you!"

Christopolous was surprised by the booming volume of this man's voice and, again, by the force of his grip. Nothing, it seemed, about his bishop's grand-nephew was diminutive. His head was massed in black curls hardly contained under the brim of the kamilavkion that had been knocked askew as Metrios squeezed from the car. He had luxurious eyebrows and sideburns that flowed into a glossy mustache and a beard so thick it had separated into ringlets one could stick a pinky finger through.

Such a mass of hair would have swallowed up the faces of most men, but Metrios was possessed of proportionately outsized features. So large and dark were his eyes, that even in the brilliant sunlight, they seemed all-pupil. His cheekbones were driver-heads wedged under his skin, his wide nose, with its flat and downward-angled tip, was a block-eraser. He had a wide mouth and the plump lips that some would call sensuous. Only three aspects of his appearance struck Christopolous as ill-chosen for such a man: his ears, which were small with the lobes stuck to the side of the head and his teeth which, though even, were also small, and his nostrils, which because of the slant, pleasing on its own accord, of his nosetip, had been squashed into apertures the size of tangerine seeds.

But taken altogether, Metrios' face was not unpleasant to look at, but suggested, rather, an abundance of earnestness, good will, and physical vitality. At the moment, it was flushed a vascular red and bisected, many times over, by rivers of sweat. This excess of perspiration, which would have been repellent on other faces, struck Christopolous as

more evidence of this man's miraculously good health. One couldn't look at his glistening face without thinking of uncontaminated headwaters and of the hurdles that toxins would have to get over in order to penetrate his body. Nor, as he pulled Christopolous closer, turning the handshake into a full embrace, did he smell particularly like sweat. Instead, he had the almost-odorless smell of carbonated water.

When released from the barrel of Metrios' arms, Christopolous saw a girl slumped in the backseat. He'd not seen her before. Metrios saw him looking.

“Joanna,” Metrios said, across the rust-pocked roof of the car, “my wife.”

Christopolous was astonished. Metrios was young and he looked young for his age – it was the facial hair, which in its mass seemed exuberant, a boy's first beard - but Christopolous had mistaken his wife for a child. Hunched in the back seat, she was slight, her features oversized in her thin face. Like her husband, she was dressed from head to toe in black. The hatchback was only a two-door, so the only way for Christopolous to greet her was to extend his hand through the vee between driver's and passenger's seats.

“Thank you for your hospitality, Presvytera Joanna,” he said.

When she took his hand, hers were freezing. Her knuckles rose through the skin like the backbone of a plated fish. Fr. Metrios pounded the clutch, the engine whined, and they shot away from the harbor. As the little car sped along the coastal road, a hail of debris pelted the chassis, and the pungent odor of tar scorched the inner rims of Christopolous' nostrils.

“New road, paved just in the last month. It's been hotter than usual here, so it's not setting like it should.”

Christopolous had never been to this island before, or to any of the Cycladic islands, although they comprised the chain closest to Athens, where he'd spent two weeks ten years ago. To his right, houses, few and far between, were splashes of bleach on a dusty patchwork of terraced hills. Dirt roads and old, old stone walls stitched together the mountainous landscape. The gorse and the thyme were already in bloom and alternately checkering hillsides in yellow or purple. To his left lay the rocky coastline, and beyond that, the Aegean which was white with reflected light, like a big bed turned down to its sheets. Occasionally, Fr. Metrios paused in his enumeration of recent improvements to the island's infrastructure to call Christopolous' attention to something specific: a new water retention facility, the new fish hatcheries. Christopolous, who was struggling not to nod into the seatbelt, experienced Metrios' attempts to engage him as blows to the head.

Didn't it occur to his host, he wondered, that he'd just been traveling for eighteen hours? It had been a mistake for Christopolous to let his bishop arrange this stay with his brother's son's son, a village priest Christopolous had never met before. In the home of strangers, how was he possibly supposed to, in the language of the Very Rev. Kastanakis himself, "process his grief," as if grief were some raw material to be trucked into the belly of a factory and turned back out in neat cans on neat, shrunk-wrapped pallets? If only he could be alone, like he'd been ten years ago, rather than being yoked to people he didn't know.

Joanna sat right behind him, and Christopolous felt uncomfortably aware of her, Metrios' wife, who hadn't gotten out of the car to greet her husband's guest, and who hadn't contributed a word so far to level out the one-sided conversation. He thought that

he'd like to get another look at her face when they all got out of the car. It hadn't stuck somehow. Not like her husband's face. Christopolous felt that he might close his eyes right then and there and describe Metrios' face with a good deal of accuracy. Hers, he'd have to see again to describe.

She'd been a model. Kastanakis had told Christopolous this much about his grand-nephew and his wife: they'd married young, several years before Metrios had taken orders, and they'd been struggling now for some time. In the middle of Metrios' priestly apprenticeship, Joanna had apparently run off, going to London and giving herself over to such hard and fast living that she'd exhausted herself in two years. She'd pushed herself to actual physical collapse, until she'd had no choice but to allow Metrios to come get her. They'd lived on Serifos together for two years in relative quiet, but they could not heal the wounds of the past. He did not trust her, and she would not give up the self-destruction that had proved so seductive in that other world. Metrios, Kastanakis said, was trying to do a significant work in his parish, and on the island, but he and Joanna were neither of them being helpmates to the other.

Kastanakis had always shown a particular investment in Christopolous out of the half-dozen priests he oversaw in the diocese. He'd invited Christopolous' confidence regarding his own marriage and had been the only one in the world to whom Christopolous had revealed his and Eleithyia's struggles. With clear-sightedness and sympathy, Kastanakis had sheperded Christopolous through some of the most difficult times in his life with his doctrines of forgiveness, of turning the other cheek, of opportunities in trials, and of the refining fires of pain. And now, Kastanakis had hinted,

because of Christopolous' own experience, he might be able to offer these young people some counsel in the matter.

It was clear also that the bishop had paired Christopolous with these distant relatives in order to give him a project, a *raison d'être*. For it was impossible that losing his wife of thirty-four years should not leave a sudden and enormous void in Christopolous' life. And in his current state, Christopolous could not succeed Kastanakis as the bishop of the diocese. It had been all but ratified by the Archbishop that, upon Kastankis' imminent retirement, Christopolous would take this position for which the death of his wife had made him eligible and for which he'd always been particularly suited by the conscientious balance of form and substance in his religious practice, his diligent peacemaking, and his humility.

In the car, he began to feel something at his lower back that could have been a bony knee as easily as a shot spring in old upholstery.

“Do you need more room back there? I'd be glad to scoot up if you like.”

Craning around to see through the headrests, Christopolous saw features he hadn't perceived before resolve out of an oval face: large, almond-shaped eyes, a strong nose bumped in the bridge, a small but full-lipped mouth. She was a pretty woman, but there was something, though hard to pinpoint, not-wholesome in her prettiness. They were Greek features she had, yet something in them jarred him as foreign.

“I said I'm fine,” she said, making an impatient, almost-shooing gesture with her hand. He realized that he'd been staring.

But as soon as he faced himself forward again, he itched to have another look. There had been something striking in her face that he could not put his finger on. Some

disharmony in it that kept her from being wholly pretty but made her – he could think of no other word – striking. Perhaps it was the hair, which was cropped and close against her jawline. It was shorter at the crown of her head, with asymmetrical lengths about her face. It was pin-straight and luster-less: it was not Greek hair. But groping for it only pushed farther away a mental image of her face.

“You speak English well,” he said, craning into the back seat for the third time, “with an accent I can't quite put my finger on -”

“I was in England for a while. In London. I did some modeling there.”

Switching to Greek, she said, “But Yianni doesn't like it when I use English.”

Metrios said, “English is for the English, Greek for the Greeks.”

“A lot of people use English, not just people from England,” Christopolous pointed out.

“So?” Metrios asked, but before Christopolous could clarify what he meant, he said, “Exactly, that’s exactly what I’m saying! Greeks must speak their own language. Why should we speak any other country’s language?”

“I only meant to point out the difference between language identity and national identity,” Christopolous said, or tried to say. His own Greek, he found, was too rusty to tackle questions of identity in the abstract.

“For example,” he tried again, “I myself speak English and Greek, but I guess most people would identify me as an American. But none of those things fully define me. Or anyone. They’re just -” he could not, for the life of him, think what “label” was in Greek, “things we say about people.” Metrios said, “What, are Greeks so ashamed of themselves that they can’t use their own language anymore?”

Metrios was not understanding him. Or, Christopolous thought, he himself was utterly failing to communicate.

But before he could try again, Joanna said, “Yianni doesn't know any English.”

“Well, why should I know it? I’m Greek, not English.”

He sounded as if he were angry now, and Christopolous said, “So let me make sure I understand. It is your position that Greeks should only speak Greek, yes?”

“Yes. Exactly. Are we a nation of free men or not?”

Christopolous glanced at Fr. Metrios, whose jaw was visibly grinding under his beard. He simply did not understand what he’d done to so outrage his host - and within an hour of meeting him, too - but he was reluctant to pursue the issue.

“Okay, Greek for Greeks, I understand.”

“Greek for Greeks,” Metrios muttered.

Christopolous shifted in his seat. In the sudden quiet of the car, his cassock resettled around him with a deal of noise. It made him feel frumpy, like a fat chicken rearranging itself over its eggs. He had the obscure sense that he’d been cheated, that someone else was determined to rob him of comfort, although he knew it was his fault alone that he’d brought no other clothes except for the old-fashioned robes. He’d packed for himself. He wasn’t used to anticipating his own needs, and he’d done it badly.

“Oh my, it’s warm in here,” he forced lightness into his voice, “May I open the window?”

“I wouldn't,” Metrios said, “unless you want asphalt in your mouth.”

##

From the southeastern bay of Livadi, where the ferry had docked, the Metrios' house was only a twenty minutes' drive to a southwestern peninsula. They lived on the less populated side of a sparsely-populated island. The main signs of human presence were grand villas and little clusters of cottages perched on the hillsides, yet when they drove closer to them, Christopolous observed that many of them were in a state of suspended construction, their rebar skeletons exposed, their roofs yawning toward the sky. Many of the properties were cluttered with construction equipment, portable cement mixers, stacks of two-by-four and rebar, as if the workers had fled moments before, at the sound of a car's approach. Metrios explained that the bust of '08 had dried up the capital for a lot of the building around here.

“But that was three years ago,” Christopolous exclaimed.

“You see the problem,” Metrios said.

After fifteen minutes of driving along the newly-paved coastal road, they dropped onto a dirt road that switchbacked to a lower elevation. They were drawing closer and closer to the sea – Christopolous could make out a marshy smell creeping underneath the hot odor of tar – but each descent further obscured their view of it. The road was flanked here, unlike the scrub of higher-up, by riotously overgrown stands of bamboo, rushes, and oleander. The profusion struck Christopolous as untidy and inhospitable – the fringe of it stabbed the sides of the car as they passed – and he was relieved to finally emerge from it.

The strange beauty of the place they'd come to momentarily took Christopolous' breath. Shin-high grass, already whitening in the heat of this freak-summer, stubbled an expanse as large as a football field, beyond which the land dropped dramatically away to

the sea. From the road, the edge of the bluff seemed so clean as to erase spatial distinction between lower and higher. The illusion brought the sea right up to the edge of the bluff, making it look as if one could step from the bluff right into the water. It put the sky behind the water. The sun had swung into the southwestern quadrant of sky, but it remained diffuse, like egg whites separated from their yolks and beaten across a skillet, and the resultant light gave the land the unreachable quality of landscapes in dreams.

“Here we are,” Metrios said, “Home sweet home.”

Christopolous' focused his attention on the house in the foreground. It was small, two-storied, and square in construction. But for a small, slope-roofed wing to the right side, it was remarkably symmetrical and therefore looked smaller on the outside than it likely was inside. The front door, in the recess typical of the island architecture, was blue, as were the shutters on the flanking windows and the shutters on the parallel, second-story windows. The exterior walls were stuccoed and whitewashed. The main roof, gently sloped, was tiled in slates of a pale red. Altogether, the house looked less Greek than Italian, and it reminded Christopolous of the Dutch flag.

“Would you get the gate?”

The property was enclosed by a stone wall that was clearly newer, probably by centuries, than the walls that had demarcated ancient pastures and farmland. Those walls, which had withstood the wheeling of the seasons and the vagaries of countless generations of animals and human, had been painstakingly fit together by hand. The dimensions of each stone picked to couple with those already laid. The gaps, if any, chinked with smaller rocks. In contrast, this new wall had been grouted with concrete. It was already crumbling.

“Father?”

Only then did Christopolous realized that he was being asked to get out of the car and open the gate. But of course. Joanna would only be able to get out of the two-doored car after Christopolous had vacated and folded down his seat. Christopolous felt watched and, therefore, clumsy as he slid the heavy latch out of its cradle and tugged the gate over the gravel. After Metrios pulled the car past him, he returned it, with a deal of scraping and groaning, back to its place. He walked the dozen yards up to the house, where Metrios had already parked the car in front of the lean-to wing.

Christopolous would have preferred to be taken to wherever it was he'd sleep in the house, but he allowed Metrios to show him around the grounds, such as they were. The back of the house had been extended by an open-sided portico floored in flagstones and roofed with a latticework of curiously spiny, well-weathered sticks. Ocotillo, Metrios explained. It was Texan in origin but grew fantastically in Greece's alkaline soil. Next to an adobe-oven, a quartet of chairs surrounded a glass-topped table and beyond the patio, a view of the sea that filled Christopolous with an unusual covetousness.

“This is Joanna's kitchen garden,” Metrios said. Joanna herself had disappeared into the house. “Look at the amazing job she's done with it.”

Christopolous obediently followed Metrios through the mulchy rows, assenting as Metrios pointed out fava beans, avocado, spinach, summer squash, beets, leeks. He didn't know enough about gardening to say which vegetables belonged to the stalks working their way up stakes, which to the low, leafy mounds, which to the creepers tangling over the ground. The one thing he recognized was the waist-high cylinder of chicken wire

barely containing a proliferation of kitchen scraps: egg shells, the pinkish rinds of grapefruit, pale curls of carrot.

But the smell – which he registered as soon as he saw the garbage - was more complex than the one he remembered from Eleithyia's composting endeavors. The sea's bright smell, which seemed to pulse in waves over the hot, still land, complicated the benign odor of vegetable decay. And underneath the smells of sea and land both, moiled a darker, animal smell.

Christopolous had been warned of Metrios' extraordinary industry on his land. He was endeavoring to start a local economy movement on the island. It was his goal, Kastanakis had said, to make the island self-sufficient, to reduce the local dependence on the state, which was in turn, dependent on international organizations which did not have at heart any interest for Greek people.

“You explored some political work like that, didn't you?” Kastanakis had asked.

Christopolous had understood that Kastanakis was manufacturing opportunities to entangle Christopolous with the world, to make him useful. Nor could Christopolous blame his bishop. Since Eleithyia's illness, he'd all but renounced his ministry. Although, he'd reminded himself, one did not renounce a duty: one abandoned it.

“I tried,” Christopolous said.

It was Eleithyia, mostly, who'd gotten invested in a back-to-the-land thing. She'd been scrabbling for a sense of purpose and had found it in the mission of a Northwestern dropout who, even back in the early '90's, was already a recognizable parody. He wore Birkenstocks, cargo pants, and old “Sol(ar-powered)stice Festival” t-shirts and tied his long, dirty-blond hair back in a leather thong. His casual speech was peppered with

words like “energy” and “karma,” words which Christopolous interpreted, respectively, as signifying “a willingness to embrace Michael's views” and “a system of punishment and reward meted by the cosmos in response to acts that were inimical or beneficial to Michael.” Rather than responsibility, Michael valued “receptivity.” He eschewed conscience for “consciousness.”

For all of her normal sensible-ness, Eleithyia would not see the domineering hypocrisy of the man or of the group, which was comprised of old hippies and bachelor conspiracy-theorists and stay-at-home mothers and one or two young, doe-eyed community college students. In that period, Eleithyia had purged their house of nearly everything built or sold by a corporation, replacing it with artisanal furniture that cost a fortune. She'd crowded the kitchen with hanging kombucha colonies and the bathroom with products that scratched like sawdust-paper and smelled like rendered animal fat. She imposed a vegetarian diet on them and bought all their groceries from farmers' markets, toting them home in hemp-bags and serving the vegetables to him with dirt still clinging to their roots. Christopolous had been little generous toward her efforts, something he regretted now.

A chicken bolted out underfoot as Christopolous and Metrios approached the garden's center. Its squawk of indignation raised an echo from the compost heap, and another chicken, with a beating of wings, launched over the chicken wire and barreled in the direction taken by the other.

Metrios stooped for a handful of pebbles and chucked them at the birds. “Joanna's pullets. They know better than to be in here.”

Besides about thirty laying hens, they had three nanny goats, he said. He pointed out a squat, clapboard poultry house at the garden's far corner, and, some distance below the house, an open-sided, tin-roofed shed where the goats would shelter when it rained. When Christopolous asked where the goats were at the moment, Metrios gestured down the long, scrubby decline to the sea. The land was riven with cracks, the moist, freshwater interiors of which were carpeted with the sweet grass the goats favored. In the evening, Joanna would round them up and extract the milk that she would later turn into cheese, yogurt, and kefir.

“But what do you do with such an abundance of dairy during the fast?” Christopolous asked.

“I'll take it to Athens,” Metrios said, “come Friday. You can go with me.”

##

Christopolous was extraordinarily grateful to be shown to his room at the Metrios' house. It was monastic in its furnishing. The bed was a shelf built into the wall and covered with a long, blue cushion. There were two sheets folded at the end of the bed and one pillow. Next to the bed was a cupboard and, on top of it, a lamp. At the east end of the room was a window, with its shutters thrown open. He stood at the window for a long time, gazing down the hill toward the sea.

Only as he unfolded in front of the space did he recognize the extent of the claustrophobia he'd felt in the car with his hosts and on the ferry. He'd travelled for eighteen hours, and the entire time, he'd shrunk from encounters with other people, like a piece of paper crumpled into a pocket.

His wife had spared him this knowledge of himself. She had borne this weakness for him, ministering to strangers on his behalf. He was getting better at using the past tense than he had been: she had been blessed with the gift of hospitality. Three or four times, they had hosted brothers from Greece, and she was tireless in meeting their needs, although not in a way that would obligate them to notice. She would nudge new glasses of coffee, a second plate of mezedes, toward someone's fingertips. She would make extra linens, forgotten toiletries, humidifiers – even prescription glasses, once, with the right resolution - miraculously appear in the guest room when needed.

He was startled from the window by a knocking at his door. It was Fr. Metrios.

“Want to come to the service, Father?”

“Is it time already?” Christopolous asked, surprised. The room was without a clock, but based on the quality of light, he'd have said it was four or five in the afternoon, and vespers would not usually be till eight or nine. Metrios glanced, frowning, at his wristwatch. It's already seven, he said.

Christopolous had forgotten how elastic time was in Greece. Back in Mt. Pleasant, dark would have descended two hours ago. The day there was clearly divided into afternoon and evening, light and dark; the sunset was easy to miss. Back there, he would glance out a westward window one minute and the sun would be high in the sky and the next it would be plunged below the horizon. Here, the sun could descend for hours. For hours, it could saturate the landscape with the deep golden light that transforms things.

“I've just taken my shoes off, I'm afraid.”

“I can wait.”

Christopolous stared at him: was he joking? Maybe he did tend toward a mechanical view of the world. Maybe he was not overly endowed with imagination, but surely it didn't take a highly-developed empathy to know that travel was tiring.

"We've still got a little time," Metrios said.

"I've just been two hours on a ferry, and an hour's taxi ride, and a trans-atlantic flight. I -"

He didn't finish. He didn't respect people when they disclaimed whatever they were about to say next: if you don't want to say it, then don't, he always thought, nobody has a gun to your temple. He already heard - and didn't care for - the aggrievance in his own voice.

Metrios held up his hands, big palms outspread. "I thought you might want to meet the congregation, is all."

"If I don't get a little rest right now I honestly feel I might fall asleep on my feet."

"Okay, sure. You should get some rest."

"I will."

"Good. Sleep well."

Metrios left, closing the door behind him, and Christopolous stripped to his underwear and laid down on the bed. He closed his eyes, but he could not sleep with the light battering the window. After being so long away from Greece, he was unsettled by the persistence of this nearly-solid light, which he associated, back in the Midwest, with its own disappearance. Back there, the pleasure that he took in it was mingled with melancholy. He did not like twilight, which filled him with a sense of boredom so great that it was like despair.

As uncomfortable as the brief negotiation to skip church had been, Christopolous understood that he would have been absolutely unable to negotiate church itself. *I thought you'd want to meet the congregation*, Metrios had said: what in the world had put that thought into his head? Could there really be people who actively looked forward to putting their hands into the palms of countless strangers? Could Metrios himself be someone who relished the idea of impressing himself on people he would never, after seven days, see again in his life? Christopolous blamed his exhaustion for his being angry at a man he'd just met, one who'd invited him into his own home.

Like wave after wave of substance and motion, the light acted upon Christopolous. He felt as if he were a stone in tidal shallows, too heavy to be dragged out to sea but subject to countless tiny displacements. Christopolous rose from the bed and dug his cassock from his bag. He went to the window and rose to his toes, meaning to drape it over the glass, when he became aware of movement overhead. He stood arrested for a moment, his makeshift-curtain suspended away from the glass, until he realized that the cacophony in the walls was water coursing through pipes and a water heater chugging away somewhere near him on the first floor. Someone up there was showering. He had to chuckle at himself: he had darkened the window at the exact moment that the upstairs bath had squealed into life, and he had thought it was him responsible for some disaster in the house.

Pretty soon, the water shuddered off, and a tremble ran through the ceiling and stopped right above him. Literally, right above him, the creak of floorboards betrayed the acts of balancing that getting dressed required. He didn't know how he felt about being housed under a ceiling that was so vocal. Who was it up there, he wondered. Were there

children that he didn't know of in the house? Did a parent live with them? Or perhaps he'd misunderstood Fr. Metrios: he'd thought that they were leaving for church at that very moment, when perhaps he'd only meant to give a warning. Christopolous listened to the floorboards tilt away from him, to the sigh of a threshold being stepped over, and to the huff of a door shutting.

He was not kept long in suspense, though. A figure soon appeared on the hill below his window. The short hair slashing about the face, the dark clothes snapping, like semaphore, against a slight breeze: he recognized her instantly. He was only surprised by how thin she was in profile - angling away from him, she was a leaf of carbon paper - and by the realization that she hadn't accompanied her husband to the service. He thought again about her behavior in the car. *He doesn't know any English*, she'd offered from the backseat. In retrospect, the rudeness of it was shocking: husbands and wives did not point out each others' deficiencies to strangers! But it had been more than his not knowing English: she had divulged his insecurity about not knowing it. *He doesn't let me use English*, she'd said, *because he doesn't know any*. She'd made him look a little weak and also a little tyrannical, a little like a dictator too dumb to realize he's on the way out.

It occurred to him, suddenly, that she must have sat in the backseat all the way from their home to the port. How strange, he thought. What had that ride had been like for Fr. Metrios?

All was quiet on the hill below the window. He steeped in an afternoon in which the rest of the world had gone to church. He was in no state to find solace in images of fig trees blighted forever for one season's failure to bear fruit, nor was he likely to look

upon Job as the exemplar the service meant him to be. The liturgy which he himself had served so many times, and which Metrios was right then serving to his congregation, rose to his mind with no more effort than a thought, the words of the Gospel tolling loud as church bells hammered into shape inside his own ears.

He curtained the window. The light prickled through the dark wool like crops just budding in a black field. He took the pill he'd neglected to take that morning, and he put himself back to bed.

##

In fact, the money for Fr. Christopolous' travel had come from the church's relief fund. In its original conception, the money had been gathered for the sustenance of the elderly, and the defrayal of funeral expenses for the widowed, and for the relief of the poor in the congregation's midst. But the parish had long been comprised of third or fourth-generation families who'd had plenty of time to grow their newsstands into multimedia entertainment stores, their soda counters into drug-store chains. They'd long not required the assistance of the church, which had diverted the funds to people for whom paltry amounts of money still had the power to make lives better. Every year, they purchased toys for the children of IDOC inmates. Through a private-sector foundation, they channeled money to refugees in border camps on the African Horn and to malarial children in Tanzania.

An army of mosquito nets they could've gotten with the money that had sent Christopolous to Greece. He would never have taken money from the children if he'd known. But he hadn't, until his heartfelt thanks to the bishop for his generosity had embarrassed out the actual facts. By then, tickets had been purchased and lodgings

secured. Arrangements had been made that Christopolous could neither unmake nor resolve to repay.

Eleithya's illness had wiped out his savings and plunged him into debt that made a laughably irrelevant matter of the 12,000 dollars he'd liquidated, with much attendant guilt, ten years ago, from his retirement account. He and Eleithya both had had decent health insurance, but the uncovered expenses had mounted with a rapidity that was incomprehensible to Christopolous. What he owed had now gone so far beyond his ability to produce that he could not comprehend it as more real than the pieces of paper that kept arriving in his mailbox. He was perilously close, but not quite to the point, of dissolution, and his day to day living had not been transformed yet by the disappearance of all short-term credit.

For that reason, he'd allowed a miasma of denial to settle on him. Paper had no power to hurt him, he thought again and again. And yet, he'd found himself surprised, horrified, when he was cleared through O'Hare's passport control: surely they must know, he thought, how delinquent he was. How strange it was that they didn't publicly mark him, that they would actually let him leave. And sometimes, at night, he thought anything would be better than being dunned in this inhuman, unreal way. He'd almost rather be besieged by real men, raising real fists at his door. Better to be collared and flung at the feet of his creditors than to suffocate in this mass of unlistening, unspeaking paper. If only there were a person into whose eyes he could look and say, please understand, I don't have it, a human being whose will for him he'd have to submit to.

CHAPTER 2

APRIL 19, GREAT AND HOLY TUESDAY

He slept for fourteen hours, and in the morning, Metrios woke him for breakfast. The simplicity of the meal disappointed him. When he first saw the bread and the single dish of sliced tomatoes set out on the table on the patio, he did not think there would be enough for the three of them. Eleithyia would have found a way around the fast to offer guests a substantial repast. She would have accompanied the bread with honey and with jam. She would have set out pastries and cereals and with that milk of hers that was wrung somehow from the meat of almonds and was therefore, technically, exempt from the fast. She would have hand-squeezed oranges and brought out juice thick with pulp and seeds. And what else? In this landscape, she might perhaps have ornamented the plates with clusters of the pink oleander blooms, their stems swaddled with paper towel to keep the poisonous sap from leaking onto the bread. For guests, she would have found a gesture of hospitality to surprise even her husband.

“You flew into Athens. Did you witness the protests?” Fr. Metrios asked, as he sawed at the bread.

Fr. Christopolous had spent his four hours in Athens at a Piraeus cafe, waiting for his ferry and ordering espressos to mollify the waiters. He thought about the newspapers that would, in his week of absence, be added to the pyramid of them, jacketed in frost, on the front porch.

“I’m afraid I don’t know much about it.”

“Well, I’ll tell you.”

The bread that Fr. Metrios distributed was sliced large, and Fr. Christopolous noticed Joanna reducing it to smaller chunks, each the same finicky size. He himself was ravenous.

“In Syntagma Square, there's thirty or forty tents set up. And the protestors, all day, they just sit outside their tents and drink retsina and strum on their guitars.”

“Well, the spirit of revolution is in the air,” Fr. Christopolous said. He remembered, now, a BBC image or two of young Greek people crowded up against police shields. And there had been that fracas in Egypt a while back. There'd been something brewing in Tunis, and now Libya. Now that he thought about it, while he'd sat still as a stone for hours on his back porch, the whole world had been aboil.

Metrios objected to Christopolous' word choice. Real revolution, he said, was about trying to change reality, not just trying to escape from it. What those kids were doing in Syntagma Square wasn't making life any better or easier for anyone except themselves.

“It's as pointless as your Woodstock, what they're doing.”

The tomatoes were a little green still, the seeds entrenched in the pithy centers, and they did not spread well.

“Do you have any coffee?” Christopolous managed to ask, through the dry mass in his mouth.

“It's brewing,” Joanna said.

On a startlingly bodily level, Christopolous had been looking forward to the Greek spread that he remembered from ten years ago. His hotel had not been particularly luxurious, but the breakfast had been lavish. Two tables in their own room had been

required to bear the burden of food provided for breakfast. There had been ladles plunged into tureens of Greek yogurt and of fruit swimming in syrup. He remembered decanters of honey and preserves, hard-boiled eggs in ceramic egg cups, pyramids of breads and pastry, silver trays of cold meats, cheeses, olives, tomato, pitchers of cream and milk, and one waiter to replenish the food and to cook eggs in the style one requested and another to produce, from a gleaming, silver machine, espresso in the European style, with thick caps of foam and a cube of raw sugar on the saucer.

At that point, it had been more than five years since Michael had defected from the group and moved to Brasilia to help a corporation build dams and since the group had collapsed due to infighting. Since then, Eleithyia had mostly reverted to the patterns of consumption which Michael had so disrupted. But in one thing, she remained firm. She would never again eat meat. It made no sense, she'd explained to him, to relearn to need what one had worked so hard to learn to not need. But she'd never liked to spend time in the kitchen, and he'd always suspected that she resented laboring over meals that only the two of them would eat. A vegetarian diet was easier, and there was an emblematic deprivation that might have appealed to her in the raw kale, the split peas, the brown rice she heaped in from of them.

In those breakfasts, he found a way to strike back at Eleithyia. He luxuriated over them for an hour, and when he left, he loaded his pockets with pastry that he often wouldn't even eat. There was such an abundance of food in the streets. Slabs of coconut meat on sticks, roasted ears of corn, brown paper sacks of cherries, gelato. Food was thrust at him wherever he walked, and he took whatever was offered. Upon returning to

his hotel room every night, he would turn his pockets into the wastebasket, relishing the waste that Eleithyia would have abhorred.

When Joanna rose from the table, Christopolous experienced a stab of anticipation. Metrios was saying that the protests would make no changes by abandoning their jobs and sitting in the square, shouting things. It was an economic crisis, he said, and nobody solved an economic crisis by dropping out of the economy.

When Joanna brought out a glass carafe with the coffee, Christopolous had to restrain himself from licking his lips. He always relished the first sip of coffee, the moment in which his vision was circumscribed by the rim of the cup and the aroma and warmth expanded into him. When he set the cup down, he steeped his hands over it, admiring their half-translucence in the bars of light that fell through the ocotillo latticework. He was a little amazed by the shining hairs on the back of his own hand, the pale suggestion of his own wrist-bone. In the light, they were not the hands of a man who was sixty-two.

Even yesterday, after he'd arrived but before he'd un-muddled himself from the traveling, Greece was still an abstraction, a thing to be done. But this, now. The dry, aromatic odor of Greek soil was in his nostrils. The coarse dregs of the coffee clung to his tongue. The sun was huge in the sky, and so close: he could feel the light and the warmth making inroads into his blood. The sea had blinkered him: everywhere he moved, turquoise was in peripheral vision.

Metrios brought him back to the conversation by thumping of his fist on the table. Christopolous startled at the rattling of the coffee service against the table's top. He'd

been drifting. Metrios was saying, almost-chanting, “Buy Greek, buy Greek, buy Greek.”

“What should they buy?” he ventured.

“Vegetables, fruit, meat. Food, everything we eat, we could produce right here.”

Metrios speared a tomato from the plate and thrust it at Fr. Christopolous.

“Ours,” he said, “but the rest of the island buys Spanish.”

“My wife -” Christopolous began to say, but Joanna interrupted him.

“Greek coffee,” she said, raising her cup in a mock-toast, “made in Indonesia.”

To Christopolous, Metrios said, “She has to have her coffee.”

“It's good coffee,” Christopolous said.

She winked at him. This alone would have surprised him enough - in his experience, women did not wink - but then she fluttered shut her eyelids and pursed her lips to meet the rim of the cup. For a pregnant moment, she cradled the cup against her mouth and pulled the liquid into herself - Christopolous hypnotized by the contractions in her throat - and then she lowered the cup, shivered, and smiled. Her lips furled back over white teeth - not a coffee-drinker's teeth, - and she skewered him with a smile.

“Sumatra's finest,” she said.

Christopolous chortled, a little relieved. He got it. He saw what she was doing: a parody. She was good, although her husband wasn't charmed. Ignoring her, Metrios began to list all of the foodstuffs native to Greece, even to Serifos.

“But it's also the case, no, that man does not live by bread alone?”

Christopolous' quip met a stone wall, and he had to explain himself: he'd only meant to say that there were likely things that Greece didn't have the natural resources to

produce. He mentioned specialization of labor and global economies: honestly, he was bored by it. He'd gone with Eleithya once or twice to the farmer's market, and the root vegetables sheathed in dirt and tumbled out over plastic tarps on the ground had not struck him as particularly aesthetically pleasing, especially not in comparison to the gleaming pyramids at the grocery store. He'd also gone to three or four meetings of her all-organic, all-local group, which had mostly suggested to him the unfortunate dependence of most kinds of passion on ego.

Metrios, however, seized upon the global economy. Greece never should have joined the European Union. If he could point to a single thing responsible for the economic crisis, it would be the Euro. They simply could not afford to trade with other countries, which made it all the more crucial for Greece to make itself self-sustaining.

“And we can, too. There is nothing that Greeks need that Greeks can't make themselves.”

“Clothes. Cars. Computers,” Joanna ticked things off on her fingers.

“I'll repeat myself,” Metrios said, and then he did, putting an emphasis on the word 'need,' and making Joanna roll her eyes.

“To survive, humans need food, fresh water, and shelter. Since when did people need DVD players or designer handbags?”

“Medicine? Medical technology?”

“We have so much extra stuff now and we're so obsessed with it that we don't even know how to take care of our basic needs.”

“How about -”

“All these neurotic relationships,” Metrios interrupted Joanna, “we have with our food, for example. They're a direct result of having too much of it and everything else.”

Metrios' volume was a steamroller Christopolous suspected few could withstand, and Joanna, driven to silence by it, glared at him. They glared at each other. It was a familiar impasse between them: Fr. Christopolous could sense that much.

“Well, Spanish or Indonesian or whatnot, it was a lovely breakfast,” he said.

As she got up to clear the table, Joanna shot her husband a glance that seemed to say, “See?”

Metrios stretched, cracked his knuckles behind his head. He would take Christopolous around the island to meet some of the others.

There was no sign of Joanna, and Metrios made no effort to seek her out or to signal their departure. The car was warm again and, as soon as they turned out onto the main road, spiked again with the hot smell of tar. Metrios rattled on about the local economy and about the social climate on the island, about people's resistance to change and the “shocking gap” between their hospitality toward tourists and their generosity toward their neighbors. Christopolous gathered that the men they were going to see were local taverna-owners “on the cusp of real involvement,” but it was hard to pick out names amongst the roster of “committeds” and “not-committeds” that Metrios scrolled out for his own benefit.

Fr. Christopolous again found it easier to look at the roadside brush flashing by than to try to swallow the vast pastoral beauty beyond the road. A cluster of beehives on a ridge made Fr. Christopolous think about the sleepy droning of bees and about honey languorously drizzling from a honeycombed spoon, like in cereal commercials. He

thought of Joanna's little performance during breakfast and of the studied way that Metrios had ignored it. After thirty-four years of marriage, he knew that it wasn't always easy to be patient with a bit one had seen before, especially one put on for the benefit of a third party, but she really had been quite good, even getting him to crave, for a moment, what he'd forgotten was right in front of him. And Metrios and his wife were young yet, and she was pretty. Eleithyia hadn't been pretty – she hadn't been ugly, either, simply plain: well, he'd certainly never been strikingly handsome either, - and he'd wondered, sometimes, whether intriguing features wouldn't have extended the runs of certain of their public routines.

Then again, he thought, they were no pantheon of beauties, the couples he'd known to be kindest to each other. The Fetfadzidis, long-gone at that point to Missouri, God bless them, would never have taken any prizes for beauty. But when John would tell his stories, Sophia would nod knowingly a half-beat before each significant turn and would fasten upon new listeners' faces for the reaction she knew he'd provoke. She made it a source of pride for herself, that she already knew the punchlines. Sometimes, she'd even act an impresario of sorts, stirring up performer and audience alike: John's going to tell you about - just wait - tell them John - I promise you, you'll love it.

That afternoon, they visited four tavernas in five hours. Their visits took them around the entire island. After they left each one, Fr. Christopolous felt his afternoon slipped a little more away from him. And Metrios himself grew increasingly incommunicative. It wasn't just that he met with little success in extracting a promise from the men to buy local only, but it was the way in which they thwarted him. If Christopolous had learned anything from Michael, it had been that certain personalities

were always spoiling for a fight. Disagreement fueled them. Like certain microbiotic organisms, they could only thrive in heart-of-the-earth heat. And the taverna-owners were beyond polite. They sat with them out on the verandas of their restaurants, even when tourists began to arrive for the afternoon meal. Though noncommittal, they were unbelievably indulgent.

They offered, and Fr. Metrios declined, an astonishing array of food: Greek salad sans feta, hummus and thick-crust bread, zucchini flowers fried in vegetable oil, calamari. In lieu of alcohol, they offered Sprite and Pellegrino and good Greek Coffee, all of which Metrios declined. It wasn't good manners to turn down food, but perhaps he sensed an appeasement in the food. Certainly, Fr. Christopolous sensed that their very politeness bespoke their unwillingness to do anything. He knew that people only argue where they have no stake in the outcome; they do not stand to make speeches on the secret things in their hearts.

Driving away from the third, Metrios said, bitterly, "They only think about their own profits."

He was not exactly disheartened by Fr. Metrios' being thwarted. Nor was he altogether surprised. To Fr. Christopolous, the imperative to support local farmers, to stimulate the local economy and make Greece a self-sufficient economic community smacked of the austerity measures against which the people were revolting, at that very moment, in the capital. It smacked of self-sacrifice and of assuming others' burdens when they could barely shoulder their own. At least, he could see how these men, in their dirty aprons and fishing caps, following their waiters – nephews, most likely – with their eyes, outwitting Fr. Metrios, might perceive his program as one of austerity. He would

have to change his language, Fr. Christopolous thought, if he wanted any success with these men.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose that’s the way the world’s going.”

“Nobody cares about anything except themselves. Everybody’s selfish, selfish, selfish.”

This, too, was absolutely characteristic of Michael’s group. Everybody always assumed that the problems, the will to misunderstand, the intent to sabotage, lay with others. But it gave Christopolous an imperative to examine his own self for blame. And, in fact, Metrios’ accusation cored him like a rotten apple.

“Ah, well, self-preservation’s in human nature. But you might use it in your favor. Get them to do what you want, not because it’s the right thing for Greece or for Greeks, but for them.”

“But it is the right thing -” Metrios protested.

“Sure, but in and of itself, that’s not enough to motivate people to action. To change, no? People don’t like to change. They won’t unless it’s in their best interest.”

“But it is in their best interest.”

“Exactly. It is. So you have to show them it is. Use rhetoric. That’s one thing we Greeks have in spades, no?”

He hazarded a grin at Fr. Metrios, but it was not returned. Fr. Metrios glared straight ahead, squinting, his jaw visibly shifting under his beard. They were bearing west. Light burst across the windshield like something solid.

Displacing the silence that had expanded in the car, Metrios said, “I’m very sorry for your loss, Father.”

“My wife, you mean?” Christopolous asked, surprised by the sudden turn in the conversation. Metrios said, “I probably should have offered you my condolences when I met you from the ship yesterday. It must have been strange for you, wondering if I knew or didn't know, but it seemed more strange to greet you as the man who'd just lost his wife.”

Christopolous was touched by this consideration.

Metrios continued, “Of course, my uncle did tell me, but I imagined that you must grow weary of being defined that way.”

“Yes, thank you. It's very kind of you,” Christopolous said, and added, after a moment, “questions of definition seem unavoidable, though, after a marriage of thirty-four years comes to an end.”

If Metrios had only asked him what questions! But of course he didn't. Instead, he said, with a firmness which he probably meant to convey solidarity but which effectively acted as bookend, “I'm sure.”

After a moment, he said, “Me and Joanna have only been married eight years, and it's already almost impossible to think of living without her.”

“Yes,” Christopolous murmured, “I'm sure.”

“We were separated for a while,” he said.

“Oh?” Christopolous glanced at his fellow priest with interest. Light converged on Metrios through windshield and driver's window both, hammering his pupils into hard little pebbles.

“But you knew that, right?”

“I had no idea,” Christopolous said, the quickness of it making it sound forced, and false, even to him, even though it was true: Fr. Kastanakis had not mentioned a separation.

“For eight months,” Metrios said, and then, after a pause that seemed calculated to draw Christopolous into what he didn't know (a confession?), he said, “a twelfth of our marriage we've spent apart from each other.”

Metrios turned to look at Christopolous. His pupils did not immediately soften upon being withdrawn from the direct light, and Christopolous felt them like hail on his face. He had a feeling, a strange one that he would not have dared to try to put in words, that the young man wanted him to express horror that he'd dared a separation. It was something in the set of his jaw that made Christopolous think he hoped to elicit judgment, that he was daring Christopolous to try to chastise him.

“Literally, in different countries.”

The feeling got more acute, and even less articulable, that Metrios wanted something from him that he just could not, would not, give him.

“Oh? Was that when she was modeling in London?”

Christopolous had sensed that it could be a fraught subject – he'd meant to nudge Metrios out of offensive mode - but he was shocked by the effect it seemed to have. Metrios' gaze swung toward the road. He laid on the horn with the heel of his hand, and an incongruously cheerful series of blats issued from the little car. It took Christopolous a moment, to see, through the sunbursts on the windshield, the moped zipping into the road in front of the car. It was a brilliant cherry-red, and it bore a man and a woman. Her

hair streamed out of the bowl of her helmet, and his hand rose from the handlebar in a one-fingered salute.

“Stupid tourists,” Metrios growled.

“You know they're not from around here?”

“They've all descended on us to observe our oh-so-quaint Paschal celebration. Like nobody else in the world has ever shot off fireworks to mark an anniversary.”

“Besides,” he said, after a moment, “Nobody here would flip the bird to two priests.”

He turned the car onto a side road that lazily switch-backed down the hillside toward the sea. As they descended, the land flushed greener and greener. The gorse-scrub and the twisted little junipers of the heights gave way to oleander bushes, medlar trees, great stands of rushes, which in turn gave way to terraces, the reddish dirt exposed in its neat rows, and pale-green grape vines trained over rebar-trellises. At the very bottom, a complex of buildings, their metal roofs blinking in the sun, crowded a sliver of white sand. The sea beyond was a brilliant turquoise stippled with darker patches suggestive of the tufts of coral around which the fish congregated.

“Is this the last one?” Christopolous asked.

“Yeah, we're running out of time. But I really wanted you to meet this last taverna owner. He's one of the good eggs, one of the best actually.”

The neat vineyard at its back and the extensive animal-pens to its side gave this taverna an appearance of being well-off which the others hadn't possessed. When they entered the restaurant, the interior darkness rendered him blind for a moment. Groping

after Fr. Metrios between tables topped with upended chairs, he was unable to immediately identify to whom Metrios called.

“It's me. I'm here with Father Christopolous, from America.”

An indistinct answer reached them, and Fr. Metrios said again, “Father Christopolous. America.”

Once he'd absorbed enough darkness, Christopolous perceived two men rise from a booth. One of them shuffled forward and took Christopolous' hand in his.

He leaned toward Fr. Christopolous, and asked, loudly, “American, eh?”

Fr. Metrios introduced them. This was Dimitris. He had a face like a coffee-filter left so long in the machine that the grounds had dried into its pleats. His gums, when he smiled, were pitted with holes. Like the men they'd just come from, he wore the traditional jacket and the fishing cap.

“Yes, Greek-American. I was born in Kos.”

Dimitris appeared not to hear. Still gripping Christopolous' hand, he turned to clutch at the sleeve of the younger man.

“America did he say?”

The younger man resolved out of the darkness. He was tall and slender, good-looking but somehow womanly. But not like a womanly woman, like a manly woman who'd been told enough times by enough people to believe that her corded neck was beautiful, that her facial structure was startling, that harder was indeed better than softer. His clothes, too, defied categorization. He wore blue jeans, cowboy boots, a double-breasted western-style shirt: they were machoistic and foppish at the same time. The boots were tooled, and the shirt had mother-of-pearl buttons: in the States, people would

call it 'gay' fashion. But Phryxis' clothes were clearly well-worn, with dirt clinging to the cuffs of his shirt and to the knees of the jeans.

“And where from in America?” Phryxis asked Fr. Christopolous in heavily-accented English.

“Iowa.”

“Go Hawkeyes.”

“You know college football?”

“I lived in the States for five years, Washington.”

The older man tugged at the young man's sleeve, so that the young man had to lean toward him and repeat, in Greek, “He's from Iowa.”

Phryxis asked what had brought Christopolous to Serifos. He answered Christopolous' slightly rusty Greek with better English. It embarrassed Christopolous, but Metrios clapped Fr. Christopolous' back and said, “Our brother is with us again after an absence of many years.”

These hands laid on him filled Fr. Christopolous with an unfamiliar warmth and with a resolve to be patient with and, if he could be, helpful to Metrios.

“Fr. Metrios tells me that this is a fraught time for Greece. He tells me there is rioting.”

Phryxis said, “They are angry at the European Union, but they are rioting against the Greek government, smashing Greek statues, ruining the Greek tourist industry. Fucking with my business, pardon my language, Fathers.”

Phryxis grinned, baring strong teeth with remarkably long canines and suggesting very little remorse.

“Disgraceful,” Fr. Metrios cried.

He launched into the matters which they had driven there to discuss, and Christopolous slid into the booth, careful to leave the two men's erstwhile seats unoccupied.

“Oh, please, please,” Phryxis said, “Sit.”

“I'll get the lights,” Dimitris announced.

When light – warm pools from faux-tiffany lamps suspended over individual tables - flooded the restaurant some minutes later, Christopolous was surprised to find himself in a dining room that could've been in Indianapolis, Cambridge, or Phoenix. Dividers cleverly configured and overlaid to look like real stone created the illusion of private dining space, and Greek memorabilia hung on the walls. All of the text was in English. Christopolous wondered what Metrios would have to say in private about corporate artifice, the nowhere-hood bar and grill, etc., the kind of concerns that had occupied that group back in Mt. Pleasant.

The smell of lamb drifted from somewhere in the restaurant, making Fr. Christopolous' stomach contract. Dimitris appeared, shuffling through the mazy floor plan. The light revealed his garb and his incongruity with the artifacts on the walls: framed sepia photographs of crews casting out to sea in rowboats, crossed oars, a vintage harpoon gun. The difference, though, did not seem to him to be one of authenticity so much as of preservation. All of the stuff on the walls had been well-preserved: Dimitris had not. He was old, and he looked it. Another objection Christopolous had, though he tried not to dwell on it, to Metrios' vision: living from the land was hard, from the beginning, agriculture had been penance.

When he returned to them, Dimitris did not take his original seat, but instead lowered himself next to Christopolous. His clothes, as they resettled, exhaled odors of fruit left out in the sun and of sweet, browned animal-fat. Dimitris must have gone to the kitchen to flip the breakers, and now he'd brought a phantom lamb right to their table. Christopolous could not help commenting on the smell.

“It's wonderful. I haven't smelled it in forever.”

“What was that?” Dimitris asked.

“The lamb. It's been a while since I smelled it. The fast.”

Phryxis and Metrios had remained standing, and at the mention of the fast, Phryxis glanced down at Christopolous.

“The tourists don't fast, Father. They want lamb, we give them lamb. It's just business.”

“Oh sure, of course I understand. I'm from the Midwest, and you don't tell Midwesterners to give up meat.”

Phryxis turned back to Metrios, and Christopolous wondered what had made him so voluble. Sure, he'd not wanted to offend their host of the moment. Sure, he'd never been a man of accusation and chastisement. His policy had always been one of availability: he would not demand confession of anyone, but he would be there for those who wanted to unburden themselves. All of that was fine, but for some reason he'd talked himself into insulting his own congregation and himself, too, as their shepherd. Now Phryxis and Metrios would assume that his parishioners were dumb gluttons – a big, bovine mass – when, in fact, they could be ornery and selfish, like anybody could be, but they were complex individuals who made their own choices, and many of them – the

entire young adult group this year, in fact – observed the fast. And as for him, the truth was that he had – well, if he hadn't told his congregation to make a proper fast, for he was a priest and not a parent, and he had no illusions about making anyone do anything they didn't want to, well, he had sought to share his own experience of fast with them, to suggest that it was a beautiful thing, to frame it as a voluntary reaching for empathy, as a leap of the individual imagination.

He might have brooded longer, but was saved from it by Metrios' getting up to go. They shook hands with Dimitris, and Phryxis walked them out to the car.

“Partners?” Metrios asked, one hand already on the door-handle, the other outstretched to Phryxis, who grinned, once again exposing his astonishing canines, and clasped Metrios' hand.

“Partners forty, sixty.”

It might have been laughable how quickly the grin slid from Metrios' face, but he was all earnestness as he assured Phryxis that he wouldn't take any share of any profits from anyone: he was only a facilitator. This was for them, Greeks helping Greeks.

Phryxis interrupted him, “I kid, Father, just kidding, a joke.”

As they drove away, Christopolous commented that Phryxis was quite a pragmatist.

“Yeah, he'll survive the Euro, no doubt.”

Encouraged by his tone, Christopolous said, “That's quite a restaurant he has there.”

“All built with bailout money. One hundred and ten billion euro from the EU last year, can you believe it? How many zeroes is that?”

Christopolous thought just long enough to allow Metrios to exclaim, triumphantly, “See, you don’t know!”

“Well, a billion’s nine - ”

“Ha! Wrong. It’s ten.”

But he added, due perhaps to Christopolous’ expression, “But it’s not like you’re the only one. Even Papandreou, I bet, can’t count it except on his fingers.”

“So how did Phryxis get his hands into that pot?”

But Metrios had ceased to be interested in the taverna owner. Instead, he jugged onto the subject of the new debt, given to Greece by the EU, in order to repay the old debt.

“We didn’t need it! And now the EU’s got us by the wrist and it’ll never let us go, not when it can slap us all it wants for being a bad borrower at the same time it’s making absolutely sure we’ll be borrowing for the rest of our lives and paying out the nose for the privilege, too.”

Christopolous’ attention drifted toward the sea. It was warm in the car, and he imagined what it would be like to be here during the summer, to slip into the warm, green bath of the Aegean. Perhaps he might return later and engage a private room somewhere. A bath, a bed, somewhere he could close his eyes and be alone.

“How would I get down to the sea from the house?”

The interruption surprised Metrios, who had been quantifying the burden of interest on the debt. They would never be rid of it, he’d been saying. After thinking a moment, he said that the nearest beach was Dio Gialoudia. Christopolous could get there from the house by getting back onto the peninsular road and taking it another three

kilometers down. Right next to a church was the head of a staircase that descended down to the beach.

“It’s a forty-five minute walk from the house. I could drive you there in about ten, but I need to get to the church early tonight, so I need the car.”

Oh, of course, Christopolous said. He didn't want to be a bother. It was only that he'd thought there might be an easy way to get there. He thought he'd seen Joanna on a path down there. Metrios knitted his brows for a moment, and then he said that shepherds had once driven their goats along below the house, although very few people on the island free-ranged goats anymore. So much of the meat that people eat came from a single factory farm on the southwest side of the island, he said.

“And it's a couple of Italians that run it, too. As far as I can tell, they don't have a single good idea for how to deal with all the waste their goats are producing. You can smell it all the way out to the house when the wind's right.”

He wrinkled his nose as if the stench had penetrated the very car at that very moment. Almost as an afterthought, he asked if Christopolous had said he'd seen Joanna down there.

“I think it was her. I could be wrong, though.”

“No. She's hard to mistake.”

He then asked if Christopolous had a deacon or an assistant priest to serve the Paschal liturgies to his congregation during the week that he was away. Christopolous sighed to himself, and looked back out the window, to where the sun pooled on the stone walls like paint in the pits of dominoes stacked end-to-end.

“Yes, for the last year, I've had the help of a very enthusiastic young man.”

“Good, good,” Metrios said.

And then, as Christopolous contemplated the turn toward the fundamental, toward literalism without any interpretation, that his youthful assistant-priest had been so busy about while Christopolous had been otherwise occupied, and which he now found himself unable either to embrace or to quite summon the energy to resist, Metrios murmured, to himself, “If there's a goat-path down there, it's probably real overgrown by now.”

When Metrios drew the car in front of the house again, Christopolous asked if he might go for a walk before church. He wanted to gather himself a little before the service, he said.

“You never have to ask my permission,” Metrios said.

But Christopolous had hardly begun to descend the hill back of the house before Metrios, changed into a t-shirt and orange parachute pants, flung open the back door and called out after him, “You want some company?”

“Sure. I don't mind.” He was in no position to mind.

Metrios overtook him, and when he'd gained the thread of path, he made a show of carelessness in waiting. He turned toward the sea, gazing out at it with one hand visored over his eyes. Christopolous, meanwhile, struggled out of the thorn bushes he'd blundered into and retacked down the slope. He'd barely stepped from the back patio into the surrounding brush before he'd remembered the deceptive nature of the Greek landscape. From a distance, the hills looked soft enough to spread a picnic blanket on. But in their midst, the going was rough, choked with nettles and slippery with shale-patches.

It was a tricky business to avoid the spiders that had spun themselves into the scrub. The silk cables of the webs only materialized, trip-wires too pretty to trigger, when Christopolous was right on top of them. And besides, Christopolous was wary of the spiders. They were big, black ones, seemingly too heavy and too ugly to occupy the delicate geometries of their own creation. They seemed bloated, and Christopolous cringed to wonder what had made them so fat in a landscape of such dry extremity.

“See how dense it is,” Metrios said when Christopolous joined him.

Christopolous stooped to pluck the most obvious burrs from his robes. Metrios' shiny orange pants were ideal for this kind of walking. Christopolous asked which way to the water, and Metrios turned them to the right around the rocky edge of the peninsula.

He was not surprised when what looked like almost like heather on the slope turned into the leafy tops of oleander trees. A deep and wide ravine choked with shrub jagged across the path, and Metrios wondered out loud how they would get across it. When they gained the lip, though, they saw a staircase built into the clay walls. Once, the stairs had been whitewashed, but the lime had flaked away, exposing the concrete. It was cool and dim at the bottom of the ravine, and it smelled like mineral deposits and mud and the peculiar, bitter sap of the oleanders. In a recess at the bottom, they found an old stone trough with several inches of water in it. Metrios was triumphant. This was where they watered the goats, he said.

When they climbed out of the ravine on the opposite side and picked up the path again, it took them to the seamost point. There, the vegetation and the path both dwindled into great rocky slabs of headland. Christopolous walked to the edge of the bluff and stood, his hands clasped behind his back, against the sea. Perhaps two stories

below him, the water boiled over the shoals. The sunlight had concentrated in the western reaches of the sky, withdrawing the glare from the surface of the sea. The exposed rock glowed copper. Where it braceleted the land, the water was a marvelous gemstone color. Even the hill they'd just scabbled down with such difficulty was turned back into a surface smooth as the skin of an unpickled olive. Christopolous inhaled the landscape. In great breaths, he stretched his lungs around all the things he saw.

Back home, Fr. Christopolous swam three or four times a week at the YMCA. He could manage a fifty-minute 800-meter, which was not fast, but he liked the illusion of speed he got from the royal-blue chevrons tiled into the pool bottom and from the alternation of red and blue floats down the lane dividers. When he'd glimpse, from the corner of his goggled-eye, his left hand flash through red and blue and red again on its overhand route back into the water – he only ever swam a crawl-stroke and only ever breathed on his right side – the blur of colors gave him the sense that he was speeding past the markers. The YMCA pool was maintained at eighty-one degrees year-round. In a few months, the Aegean would be that nice. Nicer, because of the body's natural buoyancy in salt water.

Those swims had been one of the few indulgences he'd allowed himself during Eleithyia's illness. He'd felt guilty for leaving her in that awful hospice bed in the dark living room, but he'd just needed to get away from the odor of dying and the pop of bubbles at the corners of her mouth and the incongruous strength she saved, until the last, in her fingers. He'd thought about those swims as armor: it was with the solitude those lane markers imposed on him and with the solace of his own motion that he girded himself for both of their sakes. And he'd also rationalized that for all of the years of their

marriage they'd allowed each other their private spheres and that it would be a greater mercy to maintain the life they'd built together than to hover at her bedside every hour of every day.

He'd met her, in fact, as the secretarial assistant to his thesis advisor, and she labored on in that awful position long after he had the means to support them both. He'd wanted her to quit, but he hadn't forced her hand. And then later, he'd encouraged her in her work as a school counselor, and in her return to school to obtain a degree for this. And in the year and five months between her retirement and the discovery of the cancer, she volunteered at the Friends of the Library bookstore and, sixteen hours a week, made cappuccinos for money at the Brewing Grounds, and he'd never held against her the time she wanted to spend away from him.

“Do you still want to swim?”

Metrios' voice boomed at him as if they were standing right next to each other, but he seemed to have disappeared into the landscape. Christopolous gazed around. No sign of Metrios.

He called, and Metrios hollered back.

“Hang on, I'll get a ways out and maybe you'll see me then.”

In a minute, Metrios hollered again and Christopolous finally spotted his brother. He was treading water down below him, the sheltered waves tilting him back and forth. His shoulders poked as pale as butter out of the water. His face had a strange, insect look it took Christopolous a moment to identify.

“How'd you get down there and where the heck did those goggles come from?”

“Come on, let's swim.”

“How'd you -?”

“Hang on.”

To Christopolous' greater consternation, Metrios dove under again in a boil of kicking and splashing. When the water cleared, Christopolous could make out the pale shape of Metrios wavering and shrinking into the deep, and Christopolous shivered, imagining the layers of cold he was worming through. When he popped up again, he whooped at the cold, and he shouted at Christopolous to jump right in, he'd checked that it was deep enough.

No, he didn't have anything to swim in, Christopolous said, and Metrios said, that's all he needed, nothing.

“Just as God intended,” he hollered.

Funny, Christopolous thought, that this was the first time he'd heard Metrios invoke God's name and it was in reference to being naked.

“I don't have goggles.”

“You can borrow mine. We'll share.”

It was not an awful leap to the water where Metrios bobbed. Christopolous judged that it was probably twenty meters or so, significantly shorter than the platform he'd dived from in high school. The shale littering the ledge where he stood posed a greater danger than the height itself: if he slipped and didn't get enough clearance, he might bash himself on the rocks before ever hitting the water. But the jump alone would not have stopped him. It was the jump coupled with his having no clothes to swim in, and not being entirely comfortable with swimming naked – he was American, for goodness' sake, and Americans had hangups about nakedness, everyone knew that – and

not having goggles, and not knowing exactly what he'd do once he was in the water with Metrios: he didn't talk to anyone during those swims at the YMCA, after all, and nobody tried to talk to him. You go on, he said, and Metrios urged him to come on, be a sport.

“Go ahead. I don't feel like it at the moment.”

“Do you want me to show you where I got in at? I can show you.”

“Not right now.”

Metrios seemed about to protest further, and Christopolous gritted his teeth. To his surprise, though, when Metrios yelled up at him, it was to ask if he would hang around while he swam. He wanted them to go back to the house together. Sure, Christopolous yelled down, he'd relax and watch. As soon as it was out of his mouth, he was afraid that Metrios would hear sarcasm – in fact, Christopolous was truly gripped by the urge to just be still – but he needn't have worried. Awesome, Metrios called, and flashed him the thumbs-up sign.

He crawled off toward the opposite side of the cove. He had a strong stroke. From where Christopolous sat at the edge of the bluff, it looked a bit unschooled – his elbow-work was asymmetrical and he breathed every stroke – but he had power and he was absolutely without fear in that sea-water. Christopolous' path would have traced out the circumference of the cove, but Metrios shot right out across its diameter. As Christopolous watched, he plowed through the aquamarine shallows – relatively shallow, the water at Christopolous' feet was the exact color of Listerine in the advertisements, and it was probably fifteen feet - into the dark depths. Only once did he stop. Christopolous saw his pale arms flash out of the water, and for a second his heart was in his throat. But

he was only waving, and once Christopolous had stood up and waved back, Metrios returned his head to the water and plowed on.

Christopolous was touched by Metrios' making sure that he was still there, still watching. He watched – of course he would watch! If something as simple as that would make another person happy, of course he would! - as the young man became smaller and smaller in the distance.

He would have been a good father. He would have been proud of a child without unduly pressuring him. He would have shared everything he had with a child without trying to shape him into a smaller version of him. He would have loved him so, so much, and he would have let him go when the time was right. Funny, he thought, how some losses were so great that they could never be trivialized by later, probably larger losses but instead remained separate, and stubbornly primary.

Metrios returned back over the middle length of the cove, disappeared from view under the lip of the bluff again, and finally emerged from a fissure some fifty yards away from where Christopolous sat. He was practically thrumming with energy.

“Church time,” he sang out.

“Already?”

Metrios, fully clad again in his crazy-orange pants, shagged his hair and his beard with his hands to get the water out.

“Don't you have a watch?”

Christopolous admitted that he'd forgotten to bring it, and Metrios unclasped the one around his wrist.

“Take mine,” he said.

Metrios wouldn't hear Christopolous' protests. He had another one at home, he said, and it was important – nay, essential - to be on local time. Christopolous accepted finally with an embarrassed gratitude.

As the two of them turned back toward the path, Metrios cast one last glance at the waters he'd just risen out of. Christopolous was surprised by the weak chin that revealed itself, under his plastered beard, in Metrios' profile. In fact, in the emollient light, all of his features sagged within his skin. Christopolous was astonished, and strangely moved: tall, vigorous, big-voiced Metrios, underneath that magnificent mane, had a baby face!

“Wow, that was a good swim,” he said, “Did you see it?”

Christopolous smiled at the young man, but the lump in his sternum contracted and then expanded, squeezing his breastbone.

“I saw,” he said, “An excellent swim.”

##

Fr. Metrios' church was a modest one on the ridge of a hill overlooking the sea. It was topped with a single orange dome, which shone. The building's size belied the congregation's, and Christopolous was surprised to find himself pressed into a crowd that spilled all the way out into the narthex. He was relieved that Fr. Metrios did not press him to assist in the service nor introduce him to the congregation.

Metrios read the Bridegroom service from Matthew 22 and 23. He read the passage that likened the Pharisees *unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness*. Few other passages could have been more applicable to Christopolous, in whose heart flourished a

veritable garden of bitternesses. And amongst all those weeds, the whitewashed sepulchres: no wonder the roots had fattened so, with such fertilizer. And yet, the old familiar words barely even stirred the dust on his bones. He could not help but think how different it might be were he hearing them for the first time. Of course, it was not the first time he'd considered how the intimate knowledge of the liturgies was the particular burden of a priest. Nor was it the first time he'd reminded himself that it was the joy, too. He had, many, many times, with the grace of God, plumbed old words and found new meaning in them.

But Fr. Christopolous was hungry – there had been no time for a meal after the visits to the tavernas - and his mind wandered. The air inside the church was warm and suffused with the smells of old incense and with the not-wholly unpleasant smells of human heads anointed with their own natural oils and of human mouths feasted on not-blessed bread and wine. Above the altar, candles flickered in the vigil lamps. Shafts of light punched through the tall, narrow windows – westward-looking windows through which native sons might once have slotted rifles, aimed at Turkish invaders or at pirates – and dazzled from the silver and gold-patinaed icons on the opposite wall.

Christopolous' own church in Mt. Pleasant had been built as a Baptist place of worship and, to Fr. Christopolous at least, there still seemed something impermanent in the Greek Orthodox features that had been imposed upon it late in its life. The iconostasis looked a little unstable, like a strong wind might blow it down to reveal an old raised pulpit and old choir stalls, Protestant features. The icons seemed vaguely idolatrous on the stern wooden walls, while the stachios seemed vaguely devised for torture in comparison to the velvet-plushed pews the diocese had ultimately decided

would be a waste to gut, and the stained glass windows depicted the impersonal saints of the Bible – John the Baptist, of course, and the apostles – rather than the ones congregants had been linked to since birth. In Fr. Metrios' church, Christopolous felt as if he were part of a waking dream which had been dreamt continuously for centuries.

Fr. Metrios passed through the congregation toward the front of the church, thurible clinking, smoke guttering from its silver bowl, and Christopolous thought that in the clouds of incense, he could taste the ionic discharge from far-off lightning. Fr. Metrios' congregation observed the old separation: the men stood to the right and the women to the left, each group so carefully observing the invisible line down the middle of the church, that as Fr. Metrios bore the censer up to the front, he passed between them with nary a person having to step aside to make room. As he drew abreast of Christopolous, Christopolous glimpsed Joanna amongst the women beyond him. For a moment, they aligned through the tripod of silver links. She sought her husband with her eyes, but he did not see her. He was hungry. In his younger years, it had not been so hard to abstain from meat, dairy, oil, and wine during the week. In the past, he'd embraced the fast as a reminder of all things in their good time. He'd been grateful for the sense of natural rhythm they gave him, and when people in the States began to haul out plastic trees and to grapple with strings of electric lights, to ritualistically complain about the carols piped into the stores, and to shop, he'd felt privileged that the turning of the seasons was not something merely thrust on him by outside sources but, rather, was something he experienced within his own body.

He would have tempered the occasional craving with the knowledge that physical hunger was sharpening his sense of taste: whatever he ate after an absolute fast,

regardless of how simple it was, would taste good. Early-season fruit, brown bread with a smear of honey, the things produced by the earth became marvelous when they were not forced to compete with food that had been chemically enhanced to provide pleasure. And he would have spent Great Lent in perpetual prayer: even when he was not talking with God, or actively making himself receptive to hearing Him, he would have perceived the bodily effects of the fast as a low-level, divine murmur in his thoughts. But he'd not honored the fast that year, and he was paying for it with the cravings that beset him, that dulled his perception of God's voice. And now, the liturgy that was so apt for someone in Christopolous' position stretched out in his mind as a sequence of time blocks between him and his next meal. They occupied time and space without living in it. They held a shape without filling it.

He'd also taken one of the new pills before church, and on an empty stomach, and he wondered if it was this making him long for the service to be over. He wanted, needed, to eat, and each call and response, each gospel reading, even the Eucharistic, was a sheet of cardboard served to him in place of the meat and eggs and cheese he craved. Since beginning them, he was always finding himself anxious, and his body anxious on his behalf. Sleep, eat, move around, sit down, drink water, urinate, don a sweater, shed it: he was bewildered by the demands his body was making on him, its continual promise of some infinitely, indefinably better state that would be his if he were to do only one thing.

He wondered if this uncharacteristic impatience was also an effect of the medicine. During the first two weeks of taking it, he'd wanted to die, but he'd been warned by Dr. Ferris to expect this. A deeper depression than before was an ironic side-

effect of the serotonin flooding his brain, the doctor had said, and he'd cautioned Christopolous against beginning the treatment so soon after his wife's death.

But Eleithyia had always urged him to take an anti-depressant medication. She'd been insistent, in fact. A year of education had emboldened Eleithyia to diagnose him with clinical depression, and their marriage during the 90's had been characterized by her telling him that he had problems and his telling her that she wouldn't fix their marriage by inventing problems for him. For he thought, initially at least, that she was trying to shift the blame for their failures as a couple to him alone. He thought that if he admitted that if he'd been depressed, then she'd consider herself absolved of everything. And at first, he didn't even give much credence to what she said. He got blue now and again, sure: everyone did. He struggled to make friends and to sustain conversation: well, men weren't as social as women, and had she ever considered that his conversations might be more substantive than hers?

When he'd returned from Greece, though, he began to silently reconsider her point. Around that time, he began to see commercials for psychotropic medication, and he wondered if he might, in fact, have a condition of some sort: at least he had some of the symptoms listed in the ads' voice-overs. When he was a child, he'd been afflicted by great spells of boredom. In the evenings, his father would leave for his work at the textile factory and his mother would take up her lacework, and young Stamos would not know what to do with himself. His mother would eventually send him outside when she grew unsettled by him: the worst for her was when he'd lay on the rug in the center of the room, gazing up at the ceiling, sit up occasionally to search her face, and then collapse, in whimpers, back onto the floor. I'll find some work for you if you make me, she'd

threaten. She did not understand that Stamos suffered, not because he had nothing to do, but because of his absolute surety that everything had been done before, not by him perhaps, but by people in the world. Between the end of the industrial revolution and the advent of television, boredom must have been common in children. Much later in his own life, in fact, Christopolous would even read the work of media theorists who argued - against television - that such boredom was essential for childhood development. But Stamos' boredom had an existential dimension that his parents just didn't know what to do with, and he never exactly outgrew it.

But he did not like the idea of taking pills to change his personality. Perhaps he did struggle more than other people, but it was better for him to accept it as a peculiar burden - and a peculiar chance to grow - granted by God. He wouldn't necessarily have urged a congregant in his situation to endure as he did - he was no admirer of self-flagellators or of eager martyrs - but he felt that it was within his own ability to endure, that he would not become less useful if he continued as he always had. Perhaps in some way his chemical imbalance lay at the root of his calling - a proposition with all sorts of interesting theological consequences - because surely he'd been drawn to faith as an antidote to boredom. Mystery as the nature of God had spoken to him as had the conundrums at the heart of the religious experience.

For years, he'd resisted and rationalized, until, all of a sudden, he was sixty-two and alone in the world. Wracked with regrets, he went to his physician and was prescribed a 100-milligram dose of Sertraline, the generic equivalent of a drug Christopolous had seen advertised. The expected referral to a psychologist, the various proofs of need which would be demanded, the talking - yes, most of all, the talking and

talking about his inner life: Dr. Ferris dispensed with all of these in favor of a prescription scrawled on a Cialis-logoed notepad. The ease of it shocked him into a reckoning.

When he put the twenty minutes he'd spent in conference with Dr. Ferris on a balance pan and weighed it against the one laden with all of the hours he'd squandered in wondering if he would have married her if he'd known all that was wrong with her: well. For the first time he thought about the question in reverse. Was it fair to her that he'd grown up with parents who hadn't married for love, unlike hers? That he'd been attracted to her helpfulness more than to her body? That he'd been flattered by her attention?

No, it hadn't been. Though it had hardly been fair to him when she'd had an affair and kept it secret for years after it had ended. Not fair of her to confess it right before their twenty-fifth anniversary. Not fair of him to take the passport that he'd gotten with her, in preparation for their anniversary gift-trip to each other, and tear his plane ticket away from its mate, advancing its date, for an extra nine-hundred dollars, by a month. To leave her a note with his flight number and the date of his return, although without any itinerary, and flee to Greece.

But their marriage had always been conducted with quiet gestures. They had begun it quietly enough when Christopolous was a student in seminary and Eleithyia was a secretary for his advisor, and when they discovered that they couldn't have children, they managed their sorrow quietly. Against their childlessness, which was probably the greatest failure of their marriage, Eleithyia's infidelity had been less evil and, most likely, caused by it. By going to Greece without her, Christopolous had counterbalanced her

crime and restored equilibrium. A crisis of the sort that infidelity triggers in most marriages, had been averted.

CHAPTER 3

APRIL 20, GREAT AND HOLY WEDNESDAY

They breakfasted on the patio again. The day was mild, with a breeze that fluttered the grasshoppers in and out of the milk thistles that fringed the patio. From this vantage point, he could see the faintest tracing of the path. Fr. Metrios was talking about the next task he'd set himself.

“Once we're self-sustaining, we can think about exporting,” he said.

Fr. Christopolous let his gaze drift beyond the rim of the cup, and he perceived an indigo blur, the sea in the distance; his peripheral awareness of it gave him a jolt of pleasure.

“Tomorrow, I'll take you to try the local wines. They make a beautiful, totally exportable rodites here.”

“I'm not familiar with that brand.”

Fr. Metrios laughed. “It's a grape. Many wineries in the Cyclades produce it. It's like, say, like your pinot noir.”

Fr. Christopolous laughed with him at his own ignorance. He mostly abstained from wine.

“When it comes to wine, I know red and white,” he said, “I don't drink it much.”

“Oh, Father,” Fr. Metrios said, “But Christ elevated the grape at Canaa.”

“Yes,” Fr. Christopolous smiled, “perhaps it was even this rodites that he produced.”

“Now which wine he produced is a question for theologians and connoisseurs alike,” Fr. Metrios said happily.

Although she had spread the same lavish breakfast for them as yesterday, Joanna had been sullen this morning, barely speaking.

“What do you think, Joanna?” Fr. Christopolous asked, “What wine do you think Christ might have made the water into?”

“Retsina?” she said, shrugging.

Metrios said, “No. Absolutely not.”

He explained that retsina was the wine that the western world associated with Greece.

“Try it if you want to get drunk quick and you like the taste of petroleum.”

When breakfast was finished, Metrios asked Christopolous if he'd like to join him at church for the reading.

Joanna paused in her gathering of the dishes and said, “I'm not going.”

“Yes, you told me last night,” Metrios said, impatiently, “I'm asking Fr. Christopolous.”

Fr. Christopolous said, “I would like to, Father, but I am not feeling wholly well.”

“Did the travel make you sick? Joanna can take you to the clinic.”

The concern in his voice roused Fr. Christopolous' conscience, “No, no, it's nothing of significance. Lingered jet lag, nothing.”

“Are you sure?”

Joanna said, “He said he's fine.”

Fr. Metrios engulfed Joanna's elbow with his hand.

“Let's talk inside before I leave,” he said.

She seemed to resist the help he gave her up from the table. She had been toying with the dish of olives – tracing her finger around the rim – and the movement made her tip the bowl. A few, fat olives tumbled once or twice over themselves before coming to rest on the table.

##

Once Christopolous retreated to his room, he positioned himself at the window in the room's one chair. He heard the sputter of a little engine - Metrios leaving for church - and he was not sorry to think about the close, warm cave of the church at sixth hour. When the car chugged out of his hearing, he propped his feet up on the sill, hitching up the skirts of his cassock so that the breeze could eddy around his ankles. The hill beyond his window was bright and sparking with insect life. A large grasshopper launched itself onto the sill and preened itself, back legs bowing its body, right next to Christopolous' ankle. The sky had a blue, skim-milk tincture, and it was packed with full-fat clouds. After some time, he saw Joanna bearing west on the path below him. She wore black pants, a loose, black shirt. He thought her feet were bare before he caught a glint of metal between her toes. The black clothes emphasized her thinness. Against the dust and olive hillside, she was a leaf, seen sideways, of carbon paper.

Fr. Christopolous' first impulse was to pull his feet back in the window, to tug his robes back down around his ankles. An instinct for camouflage, he guessed, kept him still. She moved quickly, striding ahead without looking to either side. In minutes, she had passed beyond the frame of his window. When she disappeared, he felt the emptiness of the house yawn out behind him. The human silence magnified the smallest stirrings from the yard outside and from the house itself. Fr. Christopolous became aware

of a soft, brushing rhythm. It was the sound of a soft-bristled broom being whisked back and forth in a distant hallway, and yet Fr. Christopolous was certain he was alone.

Why, he idly wondered, did Fr. Metrios and Joanna antagonize each other so? What had their love looked like before their marriage had soured? He'd never been good at discerning the real nature of people or of their relationships, not like Elethyia had been.

“The Petridis are becoming disenchanted with the services,” she would say three weeks before the family left the congregation.

“Helen and Sofia have split for good,” she would say, and then the women would publicly denounce one another.

She was decisive, and always right, about family feuds and sibling rivalries and wayward children. She predicted marriages and as they grew older and Christopolous' congregation grew more secular, divorces. This vision of his wife's was baffling to Fr. Christopolous, and his blindness as baffling to her.

“Stamos, how can you not see? It's clear as day,” she had cried when he would not believe her that the daughter of some of his most faithful parishioners was pregnant.

“She's only sixteen,” he said.

“What of it?” she demanded, “All of the teenagers are having sex.”

Six weeks later, Stephania's belly swelled into visibility, and Fr. Christopolous had to concede to his wife.

“Psshhh, if even you can see it, then her parents will certainly, too, and now they will make her get rid of it.”

“They won't do that,” he cried. Fr. Christopolous had always purposed that, if a woman should come to him for counsel, he would share with her his private belief that

contraception was a gift from God to be used with wisdom. He did not believe, as some did, that God meant children to be wrung from women as the punishment for Eve's sin; no, each child was a blessing and meant to be born as one. But abortion he hated the mere idea of.

“Of course, they will. A sixteen year old can't raise a baby herself, and they already have three children. They don't want to start again with the diapers and the feedings. If they can get rid of Stephania's mistake and get her off to college, they're at the finish line,” Eleithyia said.

By then, she only had poison in her heart for those who took children for granted.

“I will talk to Stephania,” he said.

“They'll beat you to it,” she said. “You'll see.”

Of course, Eleithyia was proved right. The girl had continued to appear in church, under the aegis of her parents, for two more years, until she left for Purdue, and she had no child. Had he tried to intervene, she would likely have been proved right in that, too. But he had not talked to Stephania.

Years ago, he had begged the Lord's forgiveness for his failure to reach out to the girl and her unborn child, and the Lord had eased the burden away from him. Not that he had not occasionally reflected on the past with sorrow: he had. But the Lord in His graciousness had delivered him out of wretchedness about it. Six years after the event, he was wretched again about it. It was Eleithyia's death, he guessed, still exhuming things he had not known remained in him.

Again, the sound of distant sweeping penetrated his consciousness. The broom did not advance across the floor. Back and forth it went over the same floorboards. It

couldn't be Joanna – could it? - he suddenly wondered. He saw her, suddenly, arrested by reverie over her broom in the hallway right outside his door. The image was so concrete – she was wearing a paisley headscarf, which was red, in comparison to her black clothes – that it shook his surety, so concrete only moments ago, that he was alone in the house.

“Joanna?” he called into the hallway.

On the threshold of his room, the sound that had driven him to the door was inaudible. In its stead, he heard other small creakings and shiftings.

“Father?” he called.

Nobody answered. He wandered down the hallway, past the front room, which was empty. He peeked into the kitchen, and it was empty, too. He glimpsed, in the sink, the dishes from breakfast. As he returned down the hallway to his room, he paused at the foot of the stairs that led to the second story.

“Anybody home?” he called up the stairwell.

When he received no answer, he found himself mounting the stairs. The walls were bare, like the walls of the house in Mt. Pleasant. The handrail set into the wall was lustrous with the oils of all the hands that had glided over it. When Fr. Christopolous reached the landing, his heart was pounding. He knew he was betraying the hospitality of his hosts, and yet his fingers still trembled toward the doorknob of the upper story's only closed door.

The door swung open, and perfume enveloped him. From where he stood, the disarray of the room seemed inviting. The bed was unmade and clothes were strewn everywhere. He noted that there were two reading lamps, as in the Mt. Pleasant house, one at each side of the bed. The lamp to the right was draped with a gossamer fabric – it

had been left switched on, and it gave the room a warm red glow - and the table was littered with all sorts of things; that must be Joanna's side, he thought, with a little convulsion of pleasure. It was wrong what he was doing, and yet he drifted forward into the perfumed cloud; he wanted to survey the trinkets on her bedside table – the tubes of lipstick, the baubles, the little female tokens.

He almost lost his balance on the magazines littered at the side of the bed. His right foot shot out from under him, and he staggered backward into the bed. The springs groaned under his weight.

What have I done? he thought with a horror that became ridiculous as soon as he'd righted himself. *It's only a magazine*, he thought. There must have been thirty of them, fashion magazines. Intrigued, he picked one up from the heap on the floor. Several pages unpleated into additional pages as he did so, releasing a faint perfume into the air. *Aha*. He brought the magazine up to his face and inhaled. The alcohol in the insert stung his nostrils. He turned away from it in disgust and saw what he hadn't before.

The eastern wall of the room was one unbroken mirror. It made him almost nauseous with fear. What if Joanna or Fr. Metrios had been standing there, and he'd been as blind to their presence as to his own reflection? They would have seen him exactly as he saw himself in the mirror: an old man crouched over a glossy magazine. He recoiled from his reflection. Yes, in the room's bordello light, he looked old and corrupt.

And when he moved to flee the room, he became aware of another reflection behind his own in the mirror. In his fright, he dropped the magazine, but a moment's stillness, matched by the dark figure's stillness, revealed it to be merely a reflection of his back. When he'd first entered the room, he'd cursorily noticed the bathroom kitty-corner

to the bed: he'd looked only long enough to ascertain that it was empty and certainly not enough to see the large vanity mirror mounted over the sink. He turned slowly, but the figures in the mirrors did not trade positions. His face-forward reflection remained in the foreground while, behind it, hulked the reflection that revealed his stooped back and the inroads that the last year had made into a head of hair that might once have rivaled Metrios'.

Paranoia compelled him into the bathroom to double-check that he was unobserved, that nobody crouched in an angle of the bathroom that the mirror could not reveal. He was alone. Once across the threshold, he was drawn by the smell of burnt hair to the counter. He discovered, plugged into the wall and still hot, a metal-plated iron which he guessed Joanna used to press her hair into straightness. What a ritual, he thought. His eye was drawn to a handful of medicine bottles, and amongst them, a plastic ring of pills which he recognized from television, sitting next to the sink. He traced a finger over the collapsed plastic buttons that had held her birth control: he'd always considered himself liberal, but Metrios was certainly a new breed of priest, and in the mother country of Orthodoxy, too.

One by one, he picked the other bottles up to examine their labels. Vitamins and supplements most of them, but one leaped from his hands like it had been charged by electricity. Horrified, he dropped to his hands and knees to gather the pills that had scattered when the bottle hit the ground. When he'd rounded them all back into their bottle, he double-checked the label just to make sure. Yes, Joanna was prescribed the same medication in the same dose that he was. He returned the cap to its unfastened position just atop the bottle, replaced the bottle amongst its fellows, drew the curtain back

from the large whirlpool tub to ensure that nobody huddled there, holding their breath. He was still alone.

He had barely returned downstairs and closeted himself in his own room again, when through his window, he saw Joanna and Fr. Metrios returning together along the path that Joanna had taken on her own. Dizzied by a sense of the peril he'd placed himself in, he groped for the chair and dragged it underneath him. The pair were laughing. He could hear Joanna's satirical laughter spiking above a man's bass. They walked close together. They had reconciled, apparently, since breakfast. When they drew abreast of Fr. Christopolous' window, though, he saw that it was not Fr. Metrios who walked with Joanna.

When Fr. Christopolous made out the man's features, he pushed out of the chair and away from the window. Standing up so quickly made him light-headed and he stood in the middle of the room for a moment, steadying himself against the rush of blood to his head. But perhaps they still saw him? They had the light behind them. They would be able to see him better than he could see them. Perhaps they wondered what he was doddering at, just standing there. He laid down on the bed, but he immediately felt foolish, like a child slapping his own fingers in front of his face and thinking that he's hid himself.

She should not be walking alone with him, he thought. It was not right when she and her husband had parted in such discord this morning. And where had he come from? Had they met by accident or had she left the house with the intention of meeting him? The questions punched a strange adrenaline into his gut.

He laid there, straining for the unlatching of the front door. The voices dwindled, though, and she did not return to the house. In the new silence, the sound returned: whisk, whisk, whisk, the sound of a woman with a broom. He fidgeted and fretted and finally rose from the bed to look out the window again. There was no sign of the pair. He hovered at the window, anxious for what he was not sure. He was compelled to the bathroom to root amongst his toiletries for the bottle he'd secreted there that morning. Yes, Joanna's prescription had borne the same brand name, and in English, too. All of those magazines had been printed in English, too, he realized. He wondered where she got them from on this small, not-cosmopolitan island, if she subscribed to them. He tried and failed to draw the address on the blank label on the medicine bottle stored in his memory. He returned to his room, to the window. He looked out at the landscape without seeing it.

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When he finally heard the front door grind over the threshold, he twitched back into his body. He realized that small red ants were scurrying over his knuckles, that they'd been feasting on him. He shook them off, but their poison had already weltered beneath the skin on his hand. He heard the thumps of things being ritually shed – keys, shoes, a purse perhaps. He tried to tidy himself. For a moment, he wished for a mirror in the room before remembering, with a shudder, his reflection in the mirror-wall upstairs. He wondered if they made love in front of it. How could they not, though? If they made love in the bed their reflections would have to make love in the mirror. But did they look? Were they unable to look away?

He found Joanna in the kitchen. Her feet were bare. She was on tiptoes, groping into one of the cupboards. She was humming to herself.

“Can I help you get something?”

At the sound of his voice, she whirled around. A container of something tumbled out of the cabinet after her. A white cloud puffed into the air when it hit the countertop.

“I didn't see you there,” she said.

He apologized for startling her, and she turned back to her mess on the counter. She scooped the white stuff into a mound and dusted her hands on her pants, leaving snowy streaks on her thighs. They were leggings, he realized, tight things that revealed her hip bones. He asked if she was making something for the Paschal feast, and she told him that it was Turkish Delight. He asked if he could help.

“I can do it,” she said, and then, “I like doing it.”

“May I sit with you then?”

“Be my guest,” she said, gesturing to a chair behind an island in the middle of the kitchen-space.

She began to hum again as she leveled ingredients into a large pot and stirred them vigorously over low heat. She was transformed. He did not think she had been so pleasant since he'd arrived. With a pang, he recalled the light that had shone from the triangle formed by their shoulders, hers and Phryxis'.

He said, “I'm glad to see that you have not let the sun set on your anger.”

“Well, there's still many more hours before the sun sets, Father.”

“You're still angry at Father – at Yianni, then?”

He observed that the muscle in her arm stayed taut, even when she paused in her stirring.

“Why would I be angry at him?”

She forced a light laugh as she asked it, but the question itself was a laden hook dangled in front of twitching whiskers. Because division is in your shared history, he thought. Because he is warning strangers not to believe the stories you tell. Because you're seeking out the company of men who are not your husband.

Instead, he asked, “Why so much Delight?”

“If we don't eat it, the tourists who come to the church will. It's not like they do the fast.” *Do the fast:* it was a funny, American-sounding phrase, which made Christopolous recognize that they were speaking in English again.

“That's generous of you, to accommodate them like that.”

Sarcastically, she said, “It's the least I can do to help the flagging economy.”

Joanna stirred the pot, and Christopolous watched her stir. Under her ministrations, the pot clattered on the range, and bubbles swelled and then exploded when she beat them back into the folds of caramelized sugar.

When a silence presented itself, he asked, “Did you observe the fast when you were abroad?”

“That's a bizarre question.”

“Well,” he said slowly, “it's hard to be in a new place and surrounded by new people with their own values, their own rituals. It can be hard to be disciplined, and faithful to -”

“Why, Father, have you been itching to break fast since you got on that plane?”

To his own reproach, he found himself as much flattered as needled by the wicked little grin she flashed him.

“In fact, -” he began, but she interrupted him to say, “actually, Father, I was a good, good girl in London. Ask my husband, if you want, if I ever let a morsel of animal fat past my lips on a fast day.”

After Eleithyia's funeral, in March, right past the threshold of the Lenten season, his parishioners had brought him salad and pasta and vegetable casserole, and he'd resented them for it. In the state of mind he was in after Eleithyia had been returned to the earth, he'd drive an hour up to Iowa City in order to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken from the drive-through.

He frowned and spoke with an impatience that was not characteristic of him, “I have no interest in the letter of the law, nor can I quite imagine that God, with all of the past, present, and future spinning about him, is tallying up your grams of fat consumed on a given day. Can you? Is that what you imagine?”

Sullenly, Joanna said, “Well, why'd you ask then?”

He craved company in his guilt, that's why, he thought. He said that he was curious if it had been hard for her to be away from home.

“Are you kidding? I had friends there, my work was there. I told you, didn't I, that I was a model?”

“You mentioned it, but I didn't get a good picture of what that meant, exactly.”

“Pictures? You mean my portfolio? Well, I would show you but Yianni refuses to have a computer in the house. Do you have one? A laptop? We could go into town. There's a cafe with internet access.”

Christopolous felt himself intrigued by the idea of Joanna having a portfolio – he wondered if they'd turn out to be glamor shots, schmaltzy-sexy ones like they took in the mall, and he wondered who'd taken them – and actually disappointed that he couldn't produce any laptop for her.

“Is there any chance you'd like to go to the cafe anyway? I'd love to perhaps get a coffee.”

“I can't, but you go.”

She didn't look up from the pile of pistachios she was flagellating with a two-handled knife. Fragments of nuts went pinging across the counter, mortaring Christopolous' arms, and he got the distinct sense that she wanted him gone.

“By any chance, do you have any hard copies of the pictures?”

“No. Yianni burned all the hard copies I had.”

“No, he didn't,” Christopolous said, and he heard himself, oh Lord, sounding just like one of the old biddies with whom Eleithyia had exchanged church gossip.

“Yes, he did. You saw the oven in the back, didn't you, right behind us when we were eating breakfast? He lit it up and dumped all of it, all my photos, all my contacts, everything on it.”

“I just can't see him doing something like that.”

“Well, he did,” Joanna said.

She looked so grave that Christopolous had to scrabble for the grains of salt slipping between his fingers. But where exactly did she model for, Christopolous asked.

“Oh, you know, small shows, single-designer things, department store circulars, tv spots, that kind of thing.”

His disbelief must have shown on his face, because she dropped the knife and planted her hands on her hips.

“What? You don't think I'm pretty enough to be on tv?”

He thought she was volatile, and self-centered, and probably not to be trusted, and, yes, although he couldn't see her on tv, he thought she was pretty. No, there was some strangeness in her appearance that kept her from being altogether pretty, but made her lovely. She was better suited for film.

“Whatever,” she said, picking up the knife again and saving him, “Yianni doesn't seem to think so either. But I was on the verge of a big contract for Kohl's right before I left.”

But she didn't have a face for Kohl's! Eleithyia had shopped one of their big-box stores in Muncie, and their catalogs had come to the house: he couldn't remember their women exactly, but he thought they'd been wholesome, hearty-limbed women with permed hair and silly poses. Thinking about Joanna amongst those women made him snort, and she misunderstood him.

“I did. They wanted me for their fall European line. They wanted me, and they would have paid me a grip,” she said, with something approaching real hurt in her voice.

“Why did you leave then?”

Her parents died, she said, but her sarcasm nearly turned it into a question: “Um, my parents died?”

“Both of them?”

Again, her sarcasm drove her reply into a question: “Um, yeah?”

He was so sorry, he cried. To be so young and lose both of her parents, what a loss for her!

“I’m twenty-eight, Father,” she said, in the way that a six year old patiently corrects someone who’s failed to note that he’s six and three quarters.

No wonder she required the anti-depressant medication, he thought.

“What an awful loss! Oh, I understand.”

“It’s not quite the same, though, is it? You kind of expect your parents to die when you reach a certain age, I mean.”

“Oh no, Lord no. My parents passed over years and years ago. It’s my wife. She - I just lost her.”

“Just?”

“A few weeks ago.”

It had taken him a few moments to understand her, and now she stared at him for some moments, too, trying to locate his loss.

“Oh god,” she finally said, “I had no idea.”

“Didn’t your husband tell you she died?”

“He didn’t tell me you were married.”

He thought for a moment and asked what he had told her.

“He told me to get the guest room ready for one guest, seven days.”

“That’s – huh, it’s, -”

“Inconsiderate? Yeah, he never tells me anything.”

After Eleithyia’s death, he had grown accustomed to women making much of him. How was he holding up, they asked him. Was he eating enough? Could they bring him

anything? He was used to women assuring him that his wife had been a good, good woman and that he must miss her terribly. Joanna's only concession to these mothering-rituals was to ask if he would line the baking pans with wax paper.

He did, and they got an assembly line going. He creased the sheets into the pans, and then she smeared them with butter. The butter – a stick of real, salted butter, the paper sleeve of which she folded back over the end - she held like a crayon, chasing it into every corner of the wax-wrapped pans. The smell itself of sweets was so thick it pressed into his ears and vibrated his eardrums. He wondered that he'd never heard such a domestic cacophony when Eleithyia had been in the kitchen: had she cooked with less ire than Joanna or had he only been too far away to hear either way? That house had always been too vast for just two people.

“How long were you married for?” Joanna asked suddenly, and he told her.

She repeated the number with the incomprehension of the young, and then, “Kids?”

“What, Metrios didn't tell you?”

Christopolous had been surprised earlier by the hurt that accompanied Metrios' tiny sting of betrayal, and he was surprised now by how salved he was by Joanna's sound of disgust.

“Pfftt, I told you. He doesn't tell me a thing.”

“No, no kids,” he said, all the rancor gone out of his voice: he guessed that she had enough for the both of them.

“I’m not going to have kids,” she said, with a tone that Christopolous could have sworn was boastfulness. But perhaps she was only trying, in a strange way, to console him. He asked why not.

“I can do plenty of things besides produce babies.”

She could not know how hateful it was, her accusation that women who had children couldn't do anything else, that they gave birth out of sheer desperation to be useful. She was young still, Christopolous told himself. Age and experience alone granted certain kinds of knowledge, not that he would wish his experience on anyone. He asked if Metrios would like to have children.

“Since he wouldn't be the one having them, it's not really his decision, is it?”

Staring at her, he saw her face undergo a miraculous change. Her lips stitched together over her teeth and tension fissured her skin into a web of wrinkles. She'd brought a rancorous old man into her features, and Christopolous realized that her face – yes, an actress' face! - had changed to reflect the dislike that must be on his own. He'd gone to great lengths to integrate liberality into piety, and he was flabbergasted by her ability to arouse the cliché in him.

“My wife and I would have done anything to have children. It would have been the greatest blessing in the world to us.”

“Was it you or her?”

“Me or her who, -” but even as he spoke, he understood what she was asking him, “She couldn't.”

He felt his expression slipping away from his control again, and he tried to tell himself that it wasn't this woman in front of him that he loathed. Even though she'd

shamed him in some obscure way by assuming first that he was celibate, that, like his neutered Roman Catholic counterparts, he'd never known or wanted to know a woman, and then implied that he hadn't been physically able to produce children, Joanna wasn't the one who would throw a dead woman on the altar of her own vanity. How, he wondered, had this vanity remained so vital when his faith and compassion had been nearly all but crushed by certain experiences.

“Then why didn't you adopt?”

“It wasn't that simple.”

“Sure it is, in the States especially, you go to the agency and promise to be good parents, and voila, you have a kid.”

He was angry at her flippancy, which was worse than ignorance in his mind, and he said, “I saw you earlier today, with that taverna owner.”

Joanna had taken the pot from the stove and, gripping the handles in kitchen towels, was pouring the sugar into the first of the wax-sheathed pans, and it gratified Christopolous to observe the pour arrested for a moment in mid-air. In fact, the sight fascinated him: the rope of syrup, with the fat bead at its end, springing back toward the rim over which it had just flown.

Christopolous hadn't want to adopt because, he'd told his wife, they were getting too old. They'd married late and had struggled to relinquish the idea of their own children for too many years. He'd been forty-three, and Eleithyia a year away from fifty, which had truly seemed then like an unnatural age for such a blessing. What foolishness it now seemed to Christopolous, laboring to fill those long years with squabbling and silences, with recrimination and petty vengeance! How easily the years would have

expanded around the lives of little children. Back then, though, he'd been enjoying much fulfillment in his church, and Eleithyia had her little children at the school, and if the last fifteen years hadn't been a lesson of some sort then he didn't know what would be.

If all that was a lesson, Stamos, I want my gold star, she'd said with real pathos, and he'd taken her hand in his and said that he thought that perhaps the lesson was one of graciously accepting failure, and she'd said that if he wouldn't adopt children with her, she would divorce him. That's the sequence he remembered, but they'd had that conversation so many times, and the gold star and the threat of divorce were only the salient bits of all the conversations they'd ever had. She said she would divorce him, he pointed out that no adoption agency wouldn't give a divorced *woman of fifty* a child, she told him that plenty of men would marry her, and he'd asked, with an incredulity she'd ape with devastating precision later on, who exactly?

“What taverna owner?”

“Phryxis, I think his name is. I happened to meet him yesterday, and then I thought I saw him again today. With you.”

“Oh, him. He's a neighbor.”

Her casualness struck Christopolous as studied, and then she tapped the flow of syrup back into the pot, which she set down, cast-iron bottom ringing against the granite.

“Can you pour the rest? This thing is heavy.”

To his embarrassment, when he rose from his stool, his vertebrae popped like a Roman candle. This Joanna refrained from commenting on, but when the caramelized sugar slugged out of the pot with a greater force than he'd anticipated, sending the wax-papered pan slithering across the counter and a good foot of syrup coiling onto the

counter, she huffed in exasperation. She leaped to his side, and for a moment, her cool fingers, her skin like a slab of marble in an underground vault, closed over his on the handles.

He felt the towels shift under his fingers and he cried, “Hot-hot” at the exact same moment that she yelped, snatching her hands to her chest.

“Oh my Lord,” he cried, “are you alright? Quick! Get your hands under the faucet.”

She turned to the tap and blasted the water, and Christopolous in his haste thumped the pot onto the counter, right onto the sludge he'd just spilled onto it.

“I am so, so sorry,” he said, hovering at Joanna's elbow, trying to make out through the water sluicing over her hands the extent of her burns.

At his voice, she glanced toward him and reached to turn off the tap. She was fine, she said.

“Are you sure? Oh Lord, I am so sorry.”

Inspected the pads of her fingers and the webbing between fingers, she said, “Not your fault.”

Not thinking, he reached for her wrist and pulled her hand toward him, gently rotating her palm up into his vision. He had just enough time to see the blush on the thumb and the index finger before she freed herself from his grip. She used her other hand, and in the gesture of a woman wriggling a bracelet from her wrist, pushed his fingers over and off of hers. It embarrassed him, and perhaps her too, because she glowered at him, but sheepishly it seemed, and said that he really should have had kids, after all.

“You have a mother hen in you somewhere,” she said.

“I suppose so,” he said. He was retreating to the mess he'd made of the counter, when Joanna said something that flushed the heat creeping behind his ears into the open.

“Is that why you stayed home from church today? So you could check up on me?”

He was just about to carefully respond, when a mechanical wail sounded through the kitchen.

“Oh, shit!”

Both of them jumped. She excused her language to Fr. Christopolous. It was only the laundry, she explained. She'd forgotten that she'd thrown a load in earlier.

“Did you hear the ancient things banging away earlier?”

He was about to say no, he hadn't, when he realized that he had. Not waiting for an answer, Joanna bustled out of the kitchen to the laundry-room. It was down the hall from the kitchen, on the same side of the house as his bedroom. Yes, it had been the sound of the machines which had driven him out of his room and upstairs. He heard the mouth of the dryer fall open and the crackle and snap of clothes being tugged out of their super-heated vault. Trying not to think of static electricity crawling along Joanna's tights, he dried his hands on his robe and picked up the pot, careful to use the towels. An acrid smell engulfed him, and he realized that the drippings had blackened onto the pot's bottom. He was trying to chip the crust from the counter – Joanna remained in the laundry room, having been there for what seemed like a long time – when Metrios swept in the front door.

“What's that smell?”

His volume rattled Christopolous, who had just been indulging himself in an exploration of all the ways he felt not-right. A helium balloon scraped against wool was what he'd just articulated to himself. His head bobbed on his shoulders like it was held there by nothing more than charged ions. It had been a strange day, a strange week. His senses seemed hyper-tuned. He seemed not to be making choices but impelled, rather, by someone making choices a long way off from him. He probably hadn't shaken the jet-lag yet. He should sleep before church. In Mt. Pleasant, he would already be asleep. He should eat something.

Metrios appeared on the threshold of the kitchen.

“Smells like burnt plastic,” he boomed.

Christopolous had the urge to hush him. *Inside voice, please*, Eleithyia had used to whisper at people in the library. Wondering what Metrios would do were he scolded like that – what'd you say, he might holler in a clearly not-inside-voice – made Christopolous giggle.

“You must be feeling better then?”

The time it took Christopolous to remember why he'd been home that afternoon was just enough to reexcite his guilt about his trespass into his hosts' bedroom.

“Yes, much better. I laid down earlier. I feel much better. Thank you.”

Just as he was asking where Joanna was, she emerged from the little laundry room, a basket of linen on her hip.

“Joanna, make the Father some tea, will you?”

Christopolous protested that he didn't need any tea, but Metrios insisted that Joanna had some tea that was a sure cure for a headache.

“Yeah, sure,” she said, “I’ll do that after I fold these sheets and finish the Turkish Delight and clean the whole kitchen.”

He frowned and asked why she'd made so much. She ignored the question, but he barred her way up the stairs.

“I told you a dozen times that the church is getting sweets from the Goulas.”

She thrust past him, using the basket to give herself weight, and he said she better not think she was bringing any of that onto church grounds. Halfway up the stairs, she turned to glare at him.

“I didn't make it for the church. I made it for us.”

“Are you going to eat it all? Because there's no way me and Fr. Christopolous are eating it.”

As she whirled back toward their bedroom, he called after her that it smelled inedible, too. She disappeared, and he threw his hands up as if to say good riddance. Christopolous tried to apologize for the smell, but Metrios brushed it off.

“I’ll make you some tea,” he said, “it really is powerful stuff.”

Christopolous said that really, he was fine, and Metrios brightened. He pulled a package from a plastic bag he'd brought in with him and, grinning like a kid, thrust it at Christopolous.

“I got these for you. Now we can swim together.”

They were goggles, high-quality Speedos, brand-new and most certainly imported. Metrios laughed away Christopolous' thanks.

“Let's go then,” he said, clapping Christopolous on the back.

Right now, Christopolous asked, wonderingly. It really was remarkable how Metrios had regained vitality once Joanna had physically disappeared. Let me clean up a bit first, he said, making Metrios scowl.

“She made the mess. She can clean it up.”

They scrambled down the thorny hillside behind the house without speaking, but when they had gained the quiet of the ravine, Metrios said, “I guess you're probably thinking that I was a huge jerk to Joanna earlier.”

Christopolous began to protest, but Metrios stopped him short with an outburst of ire. He'd told her not to make any dessert, he said, explicitly told her not to, and she would go ahead, against what he'd explicitly told her, and squandered a year's ingredients on Turkish Delight that no one will eat. She's certainly not going to eat any. Watch her. Just watch. Not a single bite.

“Well, people do funny things after they suffer a loss.”

What did he mean, Metrios demanded, and Christopolous explained what he hadn't been able to earlier, about his own violations of fast after Eleithyia's funeral. Metrios flinched as Christopolous painted the sordid little picture of the night-lit fast-food joints, but to the younger man's credit, he did not pass any words in judgment.

“Okay,” he said, but then, against his credit, perhaps, he said, “but what losses can Joanna possibly blame?”

“Why, her parents!”

“No. Not that I blame her, though. Her father was not a good man, and his wife was too much in thrall to him to be a good mother. But she didn't care a whit about them when they died.”

Breeze souged through the oleander canopy overhead, and water from somewhere trickled into the recessed goat-trough.

“Perhaps,” Christopolous said, but when he perceived Metrios ready himself for protest, he hurried on, “of course, you must know more about her family history than I. But, surely, dislike, disharmony, does not equate to detachment?”

Surely you must know that, he wanted to say. The disrespect with which Metrios and Joanna spoke of each other, and to him, a near-stranger: he'd never heard the like of it. Not that he was one to point fingers. No, he too well understood the conundrum of unhappy intimacy.

But Metrios only insisted that she wasn't attached. She hadn't even seen them in nearly a decade. Why did he think they'd married so early, he demanded.

“But she came back to Greece to bury them. And then she stayed in Greece. You don't think her parents' death affected her to that degree, to stay, when it sounds like she liked London, like she'd established some kind of support system there?”

Metrios stopped on one of the landings that divided the staircase, and when Christopolous drew abreast of him, he demanded if that was what she'd said, “a support system?”

“That's my language,” Christopolous managed to say.

The climb had gotten his heart racing. Phosphorous spots popped at the edges of his vision when he looked at the dramatic fissures shearing away from the staircase. Erosion had sent the red dirt streaming away from the stairs, exposing their concrete foundation and rendering the growth of anything impossible.

“There wasn't a single person in the world who cared about her in that place. Hedonists and predators, all of them. She came back to Greece when she understood that.”

“Because she's surrounded by people who care about her here?”

“I know what you're thinking, Father. But just because we separated doesn't mean I didn't still love her. I did. We reconciled, and we came back here together.”

Christopolous was thinking, in fact, of Phryxis. For reasons he couldn't quite define, he wanted to shake Metrios. Like young Manolio, he had a matter-of-fact explanation for everything – explanation, warranted or not, might be his sub-priests' only mode of communication, in fact - and, now, Metrios' insistence on how his wife had interpreted her own experience – was the final accretion to a pile that Christopolous suddenly longed to reduce to rubble. Your pretty wife is secluding herself with a handsome man, he wanted to say. If you don't watch and listen, she's going to prove you wrong in ways you can't even anticipate.

“All I'm suggesting is that –“

But he didn't trust himself enough to say what was in his heart. The only evidence he had for inciting Metrios to suspicion was the one observation of them laughing together, an observation hopelessly filtered through his own experience. And, anyway, he'd never been a maker of accusations, a caster of stones.

“Listen,” he tried again, “have you lost your parents?”

“What does that have to do with -?”

“Have you?”

“No. But so what?”

The question had flustered Metrios, and Christopolous got the sense that Metrios wanted to win, that he did not want to be bested even in this strangest of arenas. He resented, even at the expense of his parents' lives, being proved without personal knowledge of grief.

“People grieve in different ways.”

“Father, she didn't grieve at all for her parents.”

Metrios huffed in frustration, and Christopolous was on the verge of matching it, when Metrios said something to seal his exhalation in his throat.

“It's all a big ruse, Father. Every time I approach her about anything, she hides behind this fake grief. Surely you've seen it before. You must have. Someone's boyfriend breaks up with her at the same time her aunt who lives in – in Chicago, so she's seen this aunt maybe twice in her adult life – the aunt dies, but it's the boyfriend she's really upset about, see. But she's not going to get any sympathy for moping and wailing about this guy she's known for two weeks, so when someone asks why are you so upset, she says my aunt, my dear aunt died.”

Metrios must have mistook his silence for incomprehension, because he continued, “I'm not saying that only bad people do it. Everybody does it. People explain their actions in the way they think others will identify with, or accept. It's just human nature. Surely you understand, Father.”

Christopolous said, “I see what you're saying.”

It was the only thing he could force himself to say, and he could tell that Metrios was unsatisfied but unsure how to get whatever it was he wanted. Nor was Christopolous satisfied, though.

They climbed out from the dripping darkness of the ravine. Hot light absorbed the spots in his vision, and adjusting to the change in light was like having a white sheet whisked away from him. Metrios' initial complaint having branched into such tangles in his head, Christopolous was surprised when Metrios muttered, again, "She won't eat any. Not a bite of all of that waste. Just watch."

##

When the sea lay right below them, glittering like the just-licked edge of an envelope, Metrios showed him the chute he'd used to get down the bluff. Whatever water had carved it had contracted into a trickle black as tar, but it had left behind a succession of fissured boulders that made a natural staircase down to sea-level. There was no beach to speak of anywhere. The boulders simply tumbled right into the water, and the suck of waves into and out of crevices between them gave Christopolous a far greater feeling of vertigo than the twenty-meter drop from the bluff had.

"I feel like one rock is going to go, and then all of them will," he said to Metrios, who'd let him go in front, "it really makes you think how an island's nothing more than a big pile of rocks stacked up on the sea bottom."

Ever literal, Metrios explained that the island was igneous, formed by volcanic eruption. He was already stripping. When he'd pulled his head free from the neckhole of his distinctly non-clerical shirt, he gestured Christopolous back toward him, a few feet above water-level. They should put their clothes up where they wouldn't get wet if the tide came in, he said. Christopolous slowly unbelted his cassock and shrugged out of it and the lighter, cotton under-cassock. Next to Metrios, whose hair matted his chest and belly, he felt like a plucked bird and pale as one, too.

Metrios, who had the uncanny uniform darkness of people who use tanning-beds, scrambled past him as he was securing his clothes under a rock.

“Watch this, Father,” he whooped.

What Christopolous saw banished all of his self-consciousness. He actually had to gulp down a laugh of pleasure: Metrios, arms thrown wide, seemed to be striding on the surface of water.

After he'd gotten a few feet away from the rocks, so it did really and truly look as if he were held up on the skin of the water, he turned to grin at Christopolous. In the process, he slipped and scrambled for his balance with a great pinwheeling of his arms and a crying of woah, woah, woah there, that was so slapstick that Christopolous couldn't help laughing.

Metrios said, “Just watch out for the algae and for all of these urchins.”

Christopolous waded onto the slick shelf of rock just below the surface of the water, which was so transparent that he could see the spiny creatures stuck here and there to the rock.

The water clasped his ankles as he canted down the shelf and then his waist, with a chill that was invigorating.

“This is fantastic,” he called to Metrios, “it's like a natural ramp.”

“Here's where we get off, Father,” Metrios cried back, and then he arranged his hands as in a prayer in front of him and did a funny little dive that made Christopolous think of all old Popeye cartoons. When he reached the point where the rockshelf really did drop off, he kicked away from it and swam with breast strokes out to Metrios. The expansion of his rib cage with each pull seemed to welcome cold into clefts of his body

that had never known it before. When he made it over, Metrios asked if he was okay with going out to the western end of the cove.

“You can set the pace,” he said.

“Oh, don't wait for me. I'm slow, real slow.”

“We can go slow.”

Christopolous wished Metrios were less accommodating, but he shrugged as well as he could treading water, pulled the goggles over his eyes, and immersed himself. The water shocked his scalp and bored spikes into his inner ears. He gasped, and the cold found the interior of his mouth. It crystallised on the hair in his nostrils. It stung his lips like masking tape suddenly ripped away.

The miracle of vision was what made the cold bearable. The brand-new goggles resolved the underwater blur into a blue landscape. He could make out individual rock formations, stands of dark grass, the sea bed itself a mere ten or twelve feet below them. He began to crawl forward, and they showed him his own pale wrists turning into the green water. And then, just as he'd promised, Metrios moved into position a half-stroke behind Christopolous.

Christopolous' right hand arced through the water. At the corner of his eye, he saw Metrios' right hand reach for his shoulder. Christopolous' left hand arced through the water. He glimpsed the slight roll of Metrios' shoulder toward him. He breathed on his right side, just like Christopolous did. Christopolous stretched forward with his right hand. Metrios followed with his right. Christopolous breathed on his right side, and he saw his left arm's mirror rise from the surface of the water as his own was just turning down into it.

So long had it been since Christopolous swam in tandem with someone that he kept being startled by the pale hand arcing again and again through his peripheral vision. Metrios breathed twice as much as he did, but otherwise their movements were identical and exactly half a stroke staggered. Metrios could almost have been the phased out version of Christopolous, except that his hands did not slice vertically into the water like Christopolous' hands had been taught to do so long ago. Rather, they bellied into the water like planes landing. Christopolous locked his fingers, but Metrios' fingers splayed and curled slightly outward, as if he were flexing out muscles that had cramped. His wrist was white, his knuckles thick with hair. When Christopolous held his breath on their left-stroke, he glimpsed a flash of gold trailed by bubbles: Metrios' wedding ring. The ring-finger of Christopolous' own left hand was only banded by paler skin.

Far below them, sea-grass furled and unfurled against currents they could not feel at the surface. Where it had been more shallow, the grass had risen in great, isolated stands, like underwater bulrush, from the rocky seafloor. Deeper, though, the grass multiplied and spread. Massed so tightly, it became black: as far as Christopolous could see, a thick, black carpet moved below them. A fish or two flashed out of grass now and then, but the grass always absorbed them back into it. Christopolous wondered how deep it went. He thought about that ravine, how from a distance and from above too – in a photo taken from a satellite perhaps – it looked simply like a differently-colored patch of level ground. One would not know what it is was until one was right upon it. It gave him the willies, thinking about what those fish knew, that he didn't.

On and on they swam. Christopolous' internal clock began to insist that the carpet below them show some sign of thinning, that the seafloor begin its ascent toward surface,

that the color of the water shift, through ever so slight increments of green, toward gold. In fact, though the water at their depth was an inky blue – ink implying sediment and the separation of heavy from light, and Christopolous could clearly make out the eddy of pigmentation toward the bottom - Christopolous began to perceive the water around him as white, white, that most paradoxical of all colors, embracing all colors to appear without any of them. When he broke the surface to drag in a breath, the bit of sky he could see irradiated him with its whiteness, too. Shafts of sunlight perforated the surface of the water, and Christopolous began to feel like he was deep, deep within the sea. Cerebrally, he knew that he was on the surface of the water, but his body told him that everything in the world was water except for those watery columns of sunlight: they were big, blue, oxygen-flush skies and when he'd broached their dazzle and gotten inside them, he could breathe. They were like mirages, though, always moving just beyond where one could insert oneself into them.

He always got a little batty during his swims at the YMCA – which was why he liked swimming; it was like dreaming with a little more control – but his disorientation was so advanced it was frightening. Only Metrios, the pale field of his body illuminating the water to the left of Christopolous, kept him anchored to anything. So much had he come to depend on Metrios' hand parting the water at his shoulder, in fact, that when Metrios stopped, the absence of him nearly choked Christopolous with fear. He thrashed around, searching, filling his mouth with sea water.

At his elbow, Metrios said, “Sorry about that. My goggles got so fogged up, I couldn't see light.”

“Yeah, good thinking,” Christopolous said, tugging his own goggles off and spit-cleaning them. When he'd cleared his head, fleets of cumulonimbus clouds sailed back into a blue sky, and the the land sprung back out of the sea. From their vantage point, he could see that bluffs, the afternoon light melting down their rocky shelves like butter on pancakes, rimmed the length of the cove. Above the peninsular spit they'd started from, he spotted the Metrios' house. Whitewash flamed from it, and the symbolic suggestion of a beacon filled Christopolous with gratitude, if not love, toward Metrios for taking him into his home.

His euphoria lasted just as long as they floated there, still and silent. Then Metrios said that he was ready to go.

“Just let me just adjust these -”

Christopolous fitted his goggles back on, and he dunked his head underwater for a minute to make sure that they would not leak. Metrios, his legs languidly scissoring in the water, was naked. So was he. Also, a whole world, populous and textured, lived under the surface of the water. These facts, which had been so astonishing when they first got into the water and which had at some point been rendered moot by their grueling and disorienting swim, were astonishing once again.

No wonder Metrios had glowed, Christopolous thought. He was so white that one could see the whole spectrum of color in his skin: bruise-yellows, the translucent gray of teeth stripped of their enamel, the lavenders and greens that gather around one's eyes during illness. But his own body was worse. He came out of the water, gasping, and Metrios said, laughing, “I know, you want to stay down there forever when you first get your vision back.”

Christopolous asked if they might change the system, if Metrios would take the lead while he followed. They could turn back, Metrios said.

“Would that be okay?”

Metrios frowned, as if it had been a purely formal offering he hadn't expected Christopolous to accept. Perhaps they should swim together to the end of the cove – it was so close, he said, and it was true: Christopolous could make out the buoys warning boats away from the shallow headlands there – and then Christopolous could walk back along the bluff to where they'd left the clothes. But how would he get up to the bluff, Christopolous protested, if it was climbable it looked like an awful hell of a climb. It was fine, Metrios assured him, he'd been there yesterday and seen a way up.

“I'm absolutely not going to walk around the island naked,” Christopolous said. Although the goggles obscured their expressions, they locked eyes for a long moment, and then Metrios laughed.

“I guess that could get us in trouble.”

He laughed again, louder, as if he'd at first only been testing on the laugh for size, and found it fit just fine. Of course, he said, they could go back together.

A double-dipping of *deja-vu* socked Christopolous. It was just like yesterday – had it been only yesterday? - with Metrios pushing and pushing until Christopolous longed to shout at Metrios that he wasn't one of his subsistence farmers and that he'd leave if Metrios kept pestering him. Except this time his frustration had overlain panic, because this time he couldn't leave. He'd gotten himself into the middle of the sea, and he suddenly found that he was frightened of the inky currents circulating below him and of swimming without that guide of a pale hand cleaving the water beside him. But, then,

just like yesterday, just when he'd thought the worse of Metrios, Metrios had proved him wrong.

“No, we can go on. It really isn't that far,” Christopolous said, ashamed of himself.

“Really? You sure?”

“Yeah, sure. The buoys are right there.”

“Only if you're sure.”

“Do you think you might take the lead, though?”

“You got it. It really isn't that far.”

##

Christopolous was exhausted during the church service. Altogether, they must have swum a good mile or more, and the return up the hillside had been no walk in the park either. But the exhaustion promised a delicious sleep that night. Oh, it had been so long since Christopolous had earned with his body a good night's sleep. When they had finally pulled themselves back onto the spit where their clothes were heaped, Metrios had said, over his shoulder, as he stuck legs into his pants, “You were a trooper.”

Christopolous admired the copper hue of the water streaming from his own limbs.

He said, “It's so different swimming in open-sea than in the pool.”

“I bet,” Metrios said, and grinned. “Still, though, you gave me a run for my money.”

Metrios himself was indefatigable, a veritable font of energy as he led the congregation in the seven readings from the Gospels and the Epistles and in the seven

prayers. The air in the church crackled with the anticipation involved in waiting, with a sense of checked momentum.

Several people stared at Christopolous, dressed as he was in the clerical vestment: the looks were not hostile, but they wondered openly why he did not help his brother administer the service. The more glances he got, the more he wondered himself why he'd asked to be amongst the congregation. Back in Iowa, Christopolous had always conducted the Sacrament of the Holy Unction amongst priests gathered from the entire diocese. Ultra-orthodox Fr. Contos, pacificatory Fr. Lekos, earnest Fr. Nikolo, dead-pan Fr. Savas and his unlikely best friend uproarious Fr. Toma, liberal Fr. Christopolous, and their dilettante-philosopher bishop, Fr. Kastanakis: in all of their unlike parts, the service offered them to the people as a whole. To Christopolous, that unity had been his own experience of the Sacramental healing of spirit and body, so then why had he eschewed it now?

It was not impossible, he supposed, that he was angry – though not at Metrios - at the fold from which neither help nor healing would come. Oh, certainly, Kastanakis had offered kindly enough to listen while Christopolous unburdened himself. He'd given him a seat in a wing-back chair on one side of a coffee table in the bishop's rectory. A young man came in to serve them with coffee, and Kastanakis had introduced the two by first names. Christopolous could no longer remember the boy's name, but he remembered the coffee – insipid – and the spatial arrangement of their chairs around the table.

But barely had he told the bishop that he'd just discovered that his wife of thirty-four years had been faithless to him than Kastanakis interrupted him.

“How did you discover it, my son?”

She'd told him, Christopolous said.

“A confession?”

“It was one of the last things she ever told me.”

Kastanakis had leaned over the coffee urn, and now he settled back into his own wing-back chair. God has heard her confession, then, and has absolved her of her sins, he said. In fact, Christopolous said hesitatingly, he wondered if it had been a confession.

She'd been so angry. Accusatory. She'd committed adultery with Dr. Eoannis – of anyone in the world, she'd chosen that awful old fool! – and she'd lain the sin at Christopolous' feet. *I fucked him*, she said, *because you never loved me*.

And yet, Christopolous had sat up for hours next to Eleithyia's hospice bed in the living room. He'd laved away the spittle that built at the corners of her mouth. When shivers wracked her sleep, he'd swaddled the heating pad in a towel and tucked it underneath her feet. He adjusted up the humidifer when he detected a rattle in her throat. When she woke, he saw her slit her eyes against the small pool of light cast by his reading lamp, and he angled it away from her bed. In the new dark between them, she whispered that she'd had a bad dream, and he'd taken her hands in his – her fingers had shrunk away from her wedding ring: it sat in a little ceramic dish next to the bed – and pressed his lips to the cold pebbles of her knuckles. Tell me, she croaked, but he did not understand what she wanted him to tell her. It was just a dream, you're okay now? I'm right here, it's almost morning? But he'd been next to her, and powerless, all along, and they both knew that every hour that she was not sleeping was an eternity of pain for her. Tell you what, he'd said, and she'd gripped his wrist with strength she must have hoarded

for this very moment. You tell me, she croaked, and he asked her, a little desperately, what, what should he tell her. The truth, she whispered.

“The form of a confession doesn't matter to the Lord. He knew what was in her heart,” said Kastanakis, and Christopolous could have shaken that gentle old man for giving him an answer so like one that Christopolous himself might have made in reversed circumstances.

“But, Father, it's what I'm saying, in her heart, I don't know that she was sorry.”

He knew that she wasn't sorry, at least not for whatever sexual relationship she'd had with Dr. Eoannis – the extent and nature of which Christopolous would never in his lifetime know: they were dead now, both of them – because she'd scorned his forgiveness.

All of Christopolous' life, he'd held complex beliefs about the nature of truth. He believed in a multiplicity of spiritual truth: how could it be otherwise when Jesus, who himself was a multiplicity, pronounced himself *the truth, the light, and the way*? He believed that God, who was truth, manifested himself in a variety of ways, and that people could recognize and honor God in manifold ways. But he distrusted a human insistence on truth. In his experience, when people claimed that their understanding of the world was the truth, it meant that they wouldn't argue, and, in his experience, people only demanded the truth when they thought they already knew it.

So when his own wife, on her dying bed, asked him for the truth, he said what a whole career of hippy-dippy religion – as Dr. Eoannis had called it – had prepared him to say. I don't know what you want me to say, he said, but I'll say it if you tell me. She'd released his hand and slumped away from him, with an expression that he dreaded seeing

on another human face ever again. Far more than cancer ever had, it twisted her into someone he did not recognize. That's when she told him. And don't bother forgiving me, she'd said. I don't want it, not that you've ever given me a thing in my life that I did want.

“I'm so sorry, Christopolous, that she didn't accept your forgiveness. But you offered it, that's what matters to your spiritual state. And as for her, just because she rejected you does not mean that she rejected God.”

Technically, Eleithyia had preempted his offering. She'd seen what he would do eventually, and she'd mocked him with it. You petty, pathetic man, she seemed to say, with your spiritual ledgers, and your lack of love.

Christopolous couldn't help thinking – another sin of thought, but they were become innumerable - what grace it would have been if that had been it. But instead, Eleithyia's soul had clung to her body for another three days, and Christopolous had taken care of her till the last, proving her right that he was a man of the letter of the law, rather than one with the spirit of love.

“Father,” Christopolous had nearly wailed, “I don't think you understand.”

And Bishop Kastanakis, who had sacrificed marriage for the sake of the Bishophood, had taken Christopolous' hand across the table, and said that he was sure he didn't. For a long moment, Kastanakis clenched Christopolous' hand in a silence which suggested that he did, in fact, know that some things were too tangled up to ever unravel in conversation. He had understood, Christopolous thought as Fr. Metrios led the service of the Sacrament of the Holy Unction: he had sent him to Greece, hadn't he?

“Robert Nozick said something about love,” Kastanakis said, after a while.

He released Christopolous' hand and rose to browse his He handed Christopolous a dogeared copy of Anarchy, State, and Utopia, which he'd bookmarked with a receipt – Circle K, spearmint Mentos, \$1.07 after tax.

“It's yours,” he told Christopolous, pressing it into his hands like one would enfold a child's hand around a rosary.

Incidentally, love is an interesting instance of another relationship that is historical, in that (like justice) it depends upon what actually occurred. An adult may come to love another because of the other's characteristics; but it is the other person, and not the characteristics, that is loved. The love is not transferrable to someone else with the same characteristics, even to one who “scores” higher for these characteristics. And the love endures through changes of the characteristics that gave rise to it. One loves the particular person one actually encountered. Why love is historical, attaching to persons in this way and not to characteristics, is an interesting and puzzling question.

But after Eleithyia's funeral, he had no relish for “puzzling questions,” for he was sure, however else Kastanakis had interpreted that passage that he had preserved and even emphasized that particular phrase. For once, he craved simplicity. He wanted Kastanakis to say that she'd been wrong and he'd been wrong. That they'd sinned against each other. That he must forgive Eleithyia's memory, for God had forgiven her soul even as He gathered her to Him. In the months after his visit to the bishop, the only thing Christopolous could see in the old man's gift was a suggestion that he and his wife had had enough history together to withstand infidelity or perhaps that the infidelity had become part of their history and, as such, had even contributed to their love.

But it hadn't contributed to their love, and their love hadn't been able to withstand it. He longed to return Kastanakis' stupid book to him after he'd scribbled in the margin, this doesn't help, this isn't what I need. The problem was that he found himself unable to say what he needed or even to differentiate between need and want. He supposed he needed a confessor, but he just wanted someone on his side. He needed to figure out what his life would look like now that there was only him to blame for its shape, but what he wanted was to be rid of his past. Need: to be honest with someone about his marriage. Want: to be told that he'd done the past he possibly could have. Need: to be cleansed of bitterness. Want: to stop feeling like shit.

Fr. Metrios was reciting the prayer over the oil, and Christopolous whispered the words along with him, "O Lord who, in thy mercies and bounties, healest the disorders of our souls and bodies." The men closest to Christopolous darted glances at him, but he willed himself insensate to everything but his own need for forgiveness. "Sanctify this Oil," he murmured, "that it may be effectual for those who shall be anointed therewith, unto healing, and unto relief from every passion, every malady of the flesh and of the spirit, and every ill."

When Fr. Metrios called them forth to receive the blessing, they all surged forward together, men and women mingling. Fr. Christopolous was borne with them toward the altar, where Fr. Metrios waited with his salver of oil. It was like the press in the ferry that had brought him here, Christopolous realized, although more communal. Back in Mt. Pleasant, people were solemn and deferential during these rituals. They were not vital parts of people's lives, as they were here.

Christopolous found himself thrust next to Joanna. Their eyes met for a moment, and she rolled hers in the direction of the press of people. The gesture was irreverent and intimate. It invited him to watch her step under her husband's hands. From where he stood, he could not see her face, but she bowed her head ever so slightly into the oil that Metrios daubed in the shape of a cross onto her forehead, cheeks, and chin, and he saw her neck rise out of the neckline of her black shirt. He glimpsed apricot-colored scalp through the hair sheared so close to her nape, and he saw the fine, golden hairs pushed on the outer edges of her ears. Metrios' face, illuminated by the candles that throbbed at his elbows, had gentled beyond any memory of the pans upon pans of Turkish Delight at their house. Christopolous longed to know if her face mirrored his. What would Joanna's face look like in that state of rest?

Joanna stepped down, and someone nudged Christopolous forward to take her place. Metrios solemnly crossed Christopolous: there was no special recognition in his face for the man living among them. Oh, it was no use. The anger in Christopolous' heart was not something to be banished by a mere daubing of olive oil. Christopolous had no faith in symbols. No, forgiving and being forgiven – or rather, accepting God's forgiveness, which was always readily given, and final, unretractable – were not acts cordoned off from daily life. Saying, Lord, I forgive, and Lord, please forgive me: like the vows of marriage, these were mere symbols for the work done in the course of living with another person – or in Christopolous' case, living with himself, - they were nothing unless all the other actions of one's life bore the blessings of that holy state.

When Christopolous returned to the ranks of men on the right side of the church, he easily found Joanna on the opposite side. The setting sun had made furnace-mouths of

the narrow windows on the western wall. Tall, slender Joanna rose like a stake out of the women in that orange and red light. It wasn't as if all the other women were stooped grandmas in the traditional kerchief, either. There were plenty of young women, some of them also in form-fitting slacks and open-toed shoes, and there were ones with short hair, even some who could be called pretty. Just then, she turned to the right and brought her hand to her eyes, as if searching out someone in the light reflected from the ikons. But Joanna was somehow apart from them. Who, Christopolous wondered, did she call friend?

After the service, Fr. Metrios stood outside the outer doors of the church and greeted his parishioners as they filed out. Christopolous wandered a way off, to just where the tiled courtyard met the hillside. Beyond the dribble of electric light from the narthex, the dark was thick, viscous. The headlights of cars and motorbikes needling down the ridge, Livadakia's electric hive to the west, and above him, constellations he'd been meaning for decades to learn names for: anything that was not-dark seemed merely particulate, a stray bit of egg-shell dropped into albumen and suspended there.

Metrios' voice carried easily over the courtyard, and Christopolous could swear that he was asking each family where they'd arranged to buy their Paschal feast from. For all Metrios' scorn of the protestors in Athens, Christopolous felt that his campaign was as self-gratifying, and probably as little useful, as that guitar-strumming in the heart of the city. But his response was automatic, and it was because he was uncomfortable. Yes, he could admit it to himself, not having his own responsibilities here – not having an established role to people - made him very uncomfortable, and, yes, superiority was

easier than discomfort. After all, he realized, at his own church, he would merely be saying, over and over again, thank you for coming and God go with you.

“What's so funny?”

She came up so lightly behind him that he didn't know she was there until she was at his elbow. Nor could he make her out except as a field of more-saturate darkness, but her perfume was unmistakable: Calvin Klein's Obsession, from the magazines on the floor of her bedroom.

“Nothing,” he said, “Just thinking.”

Eleithya would have seized upon this, hounding him for elaboration until he produced a thought – usually from a few hours ago, or days, or weeks: he'd learned to stockpile the good ones – that was specific and shapely enough to convince her of its authenticity. Joanna couldn't seem to care less. To his surprise, Christopolous found himself asking her what she was thinking. He supposed, though, that being a talker or not-a-talker weren't absolute qualities but were contextually dependent. Eleithya had been a talker, so he hadn't been one.

“I'm thinking,” she said, “that this darkness makes my skin crawl.”

“Really? I think it's kind of lovely.”

This surprised him, too. Here he'd been observing the darkness – experiencing it, really – without feeling about it one way or another. But as soon as he said it, the night's loveliness swarmed up around him: the fragrance of thyme rising from the hills, the mantle of insects chirps right on their shoulders and the far-off natter of goat-bells, the pressure of sea-breeze on skin. In his mind's eye, he saw Serifos as the subject of a time-lapsed film, one with a cosmic exposure: it skipped away from the mainland, its brilliant

turquoise waters slipstreaming behind it. It dwindled. Suns and moons wheeled around it with a speed that collapsed them into the same source of light, until finally the sea folded it into itself. He didn't know why this image delighted him so – at other times, the spectre of global warming genuinely depressed him – but it made him downright giddy.

“You should see London at night. That's what's beautiful.”

“Yes, aren't islands wonderful?”

Joanna said, and he could hear her eyes roll, “This is nothing like London.”

“Why not?”

“People live in London, for one thing.”

Predators and hedonists, Metrios had said.

“What was it like to be there alone?”

“You know, -” she began, but Christopolous did not want a flippant answer.

“No, and I really want to. I haven't been on my own in years. Decades, actually. Without my wife right in the next room, I mean. I really want to know what it's like to live by oneself in one of the biggest cities in the world.”

“Okay, well, -” she said, in a way that made him think she was gearing up to be sarcastic. But to his pleasure, she said, “You'll have to give me a minute to think, then.”

“Please do,” he said with an earnestness that made her snort. But she did think, and for a few exquisite moments, they lived together in the life-charged night.

But before she had her answer, boots came clicking over the tiles in their direction, and a voice called into the darkness.

“Joanna? Are you over here?”

“I'm here. With Fr. Christopolous.”

Was Christopolous wrong in thinking that her voice had scaled an octave? Did he imagine that the cloud of perfume rearranged itself around her, concentrating, perhaps, in response to some internal cue or that his own name put a hiccup into the stride of those boots? But Christopolous scarcely had time to question his perception when he was blinded by the glare of a light shone directly into his eyes. He threw an arm across his face, and Joanna said, “Jesus, that's bright.”

“Language!” Phryxis scolded - Christopolous could hear the wolfish grin in his voice, - and “Sorry, Father.”

“So, Father, we'll be having some of my wine tomorrow, yes?”

Christopolous said that he'd heard as much. With a subtlety that would have befitted his own wife, Joanna had turned the three of them away from the view – or what would have been a view during the day – of the sea and was leading them slowly back toward the church. She stepped out only a pace or two ahead of them, but she'd fallen silent, and she might have been yards away. Phryxis did not pocket his penlight but turned the beam onto the ground, filtering it through his fingers. Every now and then, the pinkish beam nipped Joanna's heels. Christopolous said that he hadn't realized that Phryxis belonged to Fr. Metrios' congregation.

“Churchgoer, neighbor, and now, I'm pleased to say, a partner in business.”

“It was my understanding that Fr. Metrios is not in business for himself.”

“So he says,” Phryxis said, as they drew abreast of the church's front door. As the light from the interior fell on them, Christopolous was struck again by how handsome Phryxis was. Even in his youth, Christopolous would not have been in the same physical order of men as him, and the fact that he himself was not above throwing his younger self

into a vanity competition he was bound to lose, inflamed Christopolous' the distaste he'd felt for Phryxis, ever since seeing him tete-a-tete with Joanna, into outright dislike. He looked about for Metrios, but, although most of the congregation had dispersed, Metrios remained clenched in conversation with one last man right inside the door. Glimpsing them, he raised a hand in a just-a-minute gesture.

Joanna heaved a sigh, and Christopolous wondered how many times his own wife had felt the same impatience with him.

"I'm hungry," she mewled.

"Do you want to stop by the restaurant on the way home?"

"Just once," she said to noone in particular, "I'd love to get home in time for dinner."

"I'll get in the kitchen and whip something up. It'll be on the house."

There was no mistaking the fact that Phryxis was addressing himself to Joanna, and Joanna alone, with Christopolous standing right there and her husband right inside the door. It was not abnormal for Greek men to flirt, but this was a brazenness beyond what one could normally get away with. Finally, for the time since he'd joined them, Joanna skewered Phryxis with a look.

"I don't eat before bed. It's not good for the digestion."

With something akin to glee, Christopolous saw Phryxis grimace. Of course, she was a pretty woman, and in London she'd probably had men prowling about her all the time: of course, she'd sharpened her turn-downs. Unless, Christopolous thought with renewed worry, it was all an act for his benefit and for her husband's. He was thankful

when Metrios' final parishioner came past them. He nodded at them. The men nodded back. Joanna said, "Thank god."

After he'd extinguished all the lights, Metrios joined them outside the church. Only a single bulb burned in a mounted above the double-doors. Tiny moons and stars, reminding Christopolous of a lantern in a child's bedroom, patterned their four sets of shoulders. Crickets chirped in the fields beyond the church, and flowers opened themselves up to their night-time pollinators. As he secured the front door with chains and a padlock, Phryxis extended his invitation for a quick, late-night meal again. Metrios seemed to consider it, but Joanna interjected that she was tired, she wanted to go home.

Metrios said, "Well, we'll be seeing you tomorrow."

"True, true," Phryxis said, "till tomorrow then."

He gave all of them a wry, two-fingered salute as he left. Christopolous watched the thin beam of the penlight bob down the dirt road that had brought them up to the ridge. Nothing that he'd seen in the daily life of the Metrios' had suggested to Christopolous that they'd have such an intimate friend, and he said so, as the three of them drove back to the Metrios' house.

"An intimate friend?" Metrios exclaimed, at the same time that Joanna said, "He's not."

"Why would you say that?" Metrios asked.

Well, he'd been the last person at the church with them, Christopolous said. In his experience, people who closed the place down with the preacher were friends of the family.

"Yianni and him have some business together," Joanna said.

At the same time, Metrios said, "He's just lonely."

On this drive, Christopolous rode in the back seat. He'd insisted. Hunched slightly forward under the hatchback's concave rear-window, Christopolous saw the quick glance that Metrios and Joanna exchanged.

"Dimitris, the old man you met the other day, his papou, he's the only family that Phryxis has in Serifos."

"That's unusual in Greece, no?"

Metrios explained that Phryxis' parents were dead. Christopolous glanced at Joanna – the movement was involuntary and he regretted it – and her husband's eyes followed his. Metrios squeezed Joanna's thigh, and then he lingered the one hand. Joanna did not turn from the window, where she'd been gazing out into the darkness, but she found his hand on her and laid her own hand over it, threading their fingers together. The intimacy of this communication impressed Christopolous back into his own seat. What he suddenly felt was a physical force dislodging him from the vee between their two seats and pinning him to the upholstery that, in this ancient car that had never borne children, still creaked and huffed a slight smell of factory when he moved upon it. Nor did what he felt abate when out of the darkness, a motorbike zipped past with two jaunty taps to the horn, and Metrios returned his hand to the shifter.

"His brother," Metrios said, with a slight nod in the direction of the diminishing back reflector of the motorbike, "is in the States, and so is his fiancée."

Christopolous felt too weary to be astonished or to care to look for Joanna's reaction. So Phryxis was a dog, flirting with women in front of their husbands, when he himself was pledged to be married. Well, what did that have to do with Joanna? She'd

herself called all Greek men dogs. And, earlier, she'd given him no encouragement when she'd talked of her digestion. And yet, Christopolous thought, there was something unsettling about Phryxis' seeking Joanna in the dark outside the church. They had been laughing together that afternoon. Twice, in one day, they had, or might have, been alone together. It wasn't wise, whatever it was.

He said, "Well, they better marry soon if they're going to."

Metrios said, "That's his plan."

Joanna said, "I'm starving."

When they got home, though, she announced that she was going straight up to bed. She was already mounting the stairs when Metrios asked Christopolous if he'd wanted something to eat. The three of them were strung out along the staircase, Joanna halfway up, Metrios with his foot on the first step, and Christopolous at the foot, just beyond the threshold to the kitchen. Joanna froze on the stairs, but she didn't turn around, and Christopolous had the distinct sense that if he said yes, she would be expected to prepare the food and, most likely, to partake of it herself.

"I'm fine," he said.

Metrios left the stairs to give Christopolous a warm handshake.

"Tomorrow then, bright and early," he said.

"G'night," Joanna called from her height, "Sleep well."

The satisfied feeling that, in denying himself a meal he'd wanted, he'd done a good thing for both of them lasted only until he'd shed his clothes and crawled between the two sheets on the wall-bed. Hunger coiled in the pit of his belly, and every time he rose even a little above himself into sleep, it seemed to lash around his trunk, keeping

him anchored into wakefulness. And then, when he thought his cravings could not get any worse, the floor above him began to quake.

He turned statue in the bed. In the whole room, only the sheet draped over his chest moved as he strained to make certain that he was right. Yes, the floorboards were shuddering with an awful regularity. Back and forth, they bent toward Christopolous with their load, and, the weight re-distributing, shrunk away from him again. And then, as if there were any doubt, he made out, against the chorus of bed and floor, a contralto: a grunting that he could not identify as either male or female. The ambiguity of those soft, animal noises nearly rendered him catatonic: only the sheet sucked at his naked solar plexus as he struggled to place them in either Joanna's throat or Metrios'. Try as he might, Christopolous could not say who made them, and this free-floating of sound mingled and multiplied what was possible until the room in Christopolous' memory was crowded with figures striking impossibly carnal tableaux in the mirror.

Christopolous was excited and ashamed, both, to feel the first stirrings of arousal. After what seemed like decades of near-dysfunction occasioned by the effort it took not to see Dr. Eoannis' florid face huffing and puffing over Eleithyia, he longed to relieve himself. But the two upstairs were his hosts, upon whose privacy he'd already trespassed, they were young enough to be his children, and he hadn't grown so depraved that he secretly wanted them to hear him. He lay without touching himself for a time – it was a strange pleasure to simply know he could still get hard - when from above him he heard distinctly female laughter. It was a full-bodied, gasping-for-breath laughter, and entirely stripped of irony. It pealed over Metrios' antiphony of shushing - he was laughing, too,

but trying to suppress it - and another sensation joined those pinning Christopolous, still as a headstone, to his bed.

Once, a very long time ago, he and Eleithyia had been like that, laughing in bed out of sheer, shared exuberance. But their honeymoon passion had been short-lived. There had been two entire years in which they had not made love a single time. He did not want to after she'd confessed to the affair with Dr. Eoannis, and for a while, she was contrite and patient with him. She told him that she understood that intimacy, after it had been dealt damage, was a thing that healed slowly. But after a year, she began to press him. When would it be, she asked. She was trying so hard, but she couldn't handle the indefiniteness of it, she told him. Please just give me a timeframe. Please don't do this to me. So much did she besiege him that he found himself apologizing. He was sorry that his heart didn't run on railroad time. He was sorry that he couldn't have sex without intimacy. He was sorry, too, that they didn't have the intimacy that they once had. All of his sorries put her back on the offensive. You're just punishing me, she said at first, but when he was not-moved to sleep with her, she accused him of liking to punish her, and later still, she said that he was happy now that he had an excuse not to have sex with her. Amid a frenzy of tears, she said that he'd never wanted to – why did he think she'd done what she had, she demanded, a rhetorical question better not answered – which simply wasn't true. It was true that spontaneous passion had been dampened by both the military discipline with which they'd tried to get Eleithyia pregnant and the confusion and grief that had succeeded their failure. It was true, also, that he was getting older, as she was, and that he hadn't, for some time, had the libido that would've made her happy. Even before her confession, she'd been not a little concerned by his *lack of sexual drive*, -

how could he have guessed when she stood haloed in Eoanis' doorway, ascetic and plain at the center of a burnt-orange aura, at either her appetite or her extraordinary ability to give voice to it. It was because of his depression, she said. To be fair, she'd suggested the link once or twice before then, but it was only afterward that she grew obsessed with *his refusal to deal with his problems, to make life better for either of them*. Well, of course, he'd rejected her diagnosis when she'd made it tantamount to accepting the blame for all that had gone wrong between them. But it was not true that he'd never made love to her like he loved her body. He had.

He realized, in fact, once they'd pieced themselves back together to a certain point, how many gestures, banished now by the affair, he'd once been compelled by a husband's love to make. Gone was any impulse to slide between her legs and lap at her. Gone the whispered exhortations, in the heat of passion, for her to climb on top so he might see her. Gone the hands gliding over skin like birds borne aloft on ocean thermals. Gone the tender chant that used to loop inside his head as she lay beneath him: *this is my wife's body, my wife's, my wife*. And in their place, the urge to seize the back of her head and force it down on himself, to close his eyes and let himself believe that she was anyone but his wife, anyone but a woman to whom he was obligated to be tender and loving.

Overhead, the ceiling heaved and vaulted, and Christopolous wondered what might have been saved if he'd loved her better. He hadn't thought he was insincere when he'd exclaimed to Joanna, earlier that day, that he understood her loss, that he felt it for her. But he'd never felt sorrow like he felt it that moment. Like formaldehyde, it flowed

through him, rendering the rest of his theoretical life an exercise in waking up and having the grief crush him back into the bed.

His sorrow was real. It felt entire. And yet, to his disgust, his body would not commit to it. His erection persisted even as the rest of him was gripped by regret. He tried to batter it down, but it sprung back up over and over again, a punctuation of disgust at the end of an awful irony. For Dr. Ferris had warned him that the medication might negatively affect his libido. He'd hemmed and hawed and beaten laps around the bush, because he knew that Christopolous had just lost his wife, but he'd finally managed to tell Christopolous that it might have sexual side effects.

"I assure you that it won't be a problem, Doctor," Christopolous had said.

Poor Dr. Ferris, misunderstanding him, had nearly swallowed his tongue babbling apologies and justifications - he wouldn't be doing his "professional duty" if he hadn't told him - and Christopolous had been forced to clarify that he'd never had a high libido to begin with, that he probably wouldn't even notice whatever the pills would do to him.

From overhead, Christopolous heard another volley of giggles and shushing, and it occurred to him that Joanna, too, unless it worked differently for women, must be having an atypical experience with the medicine. That was the last straw.

He meant to slam out of bed, to stage a protest against what they were doing, however intentionally or not, to him, but it was an effort to just put both feet on the floor and to grope for his undershirt. He tugged open the door - and then, irrationally, shut it behind him - and moved through the dark hallway as if through syrup. He passed under the arched doorway of the kitchen and groped his way toward the pantry. Conscious of the sharp-cornered bulk of the island somewhere to his right, he clung to the wall. His

hand glided over a surface cool and humming - the refrigerator - and over the cool and dormant one of the range-top. On the countertop he encountered a granular dusting - the powdered sugar he'd caused Joanna to spill earlier that day.

He'd thought it was dark in the kitchen: the interior of the pantry was a sealed casket. A nascent sneeze convulsed him at the enveloping myriad of spices, and the odors of damp cardboard, the mild decay of root vegetables bedded in cellophane, and, most difficult to identify but the strongest to shake once he had: the singed wings of moths, the dusty filaments of light bulbs long burned out. Turkish Delight had no distinct aroma after it cooled, which meant that he had to crawl his fingers along the shelves in the wall to find it. As they traveled across the ribbed bodies of aluminum cans, the sealed lips of Tupperware containers, a squirmy mass that he was relieved to realize was only potatoes that had sprouted eyes, he was all too aware of his persisting arousal.

Christopolous had absolutely determined not to report this incident to the doctor - though Ferris had suggested that Christopolous might report anything at all that he noticed in that department - but now he began to wonder if this was something to be alarmed about. He had the image, ridiculous but not un-alarming, of him walking about the whole week with a tent in his robe. In the darkness of the pantry, behind the door he'd drawn all but shut, he put a tentative hand on himself. His erection swelled against his hand with an intensity that bordered on pain, making him think, not a little fearfully, of how much it would hurt it if were allowed to persist.

He'd given the shaft one or two tugs, having nearly made up his mind that masturbating somewhere far removed from Joanna and Metrios was the less grotesque of various evils, when he was arrested by the sudden explosion of light in the kitchen.

“Oh god, baby, I love the way you fuck me.”

A few or several times in the last years of his and Eleithyia’s marriage - and before she’d gotten sick, of course - he’d watched pornographic movies on the Internet, and he recognized the purposefully husky breathlessness with which she spoke as straight from the script of a dirty movie. But Joanna said it in Greek, and the resultant intimacy of it was astonishing.

“Shhh, you’ll wake the Father.”

“Why, are you scared someone will find out how good you fuck?”

“Hush, you dirty girl.”

There was a consciousness in his voice that they were appropriating a language not theirs, but a tenderness, too - how sophisticated they were in some respects than he and Eleithyia had been when they first married, how much easier things might have been for them if they’d had a script to perform from at first - Joana giggled and Christopolous heard the soft collapse of bodies toward each other and the soft suck of a kiss being exchanged.

In the pantry, light from the cracked doorway strafed across the floor of the pantry, missing Christopolous by a matter of inches, and up the shelves to the right of the door, where Christopolous could see, clear as day, the pans of Turkish Delight stuck back amid canned beans and bulk bags of staple grains. Right at Christopolous’ right shoulder, in the full flood of light, he saw a pull-cord dangling from a bulb in the ceiling. It swung ever-so-slightly - he’d set it in motion even though he hadn’t been aware of its presence there. Also, he saw the milky slick on the head of his penis, which had thrust through the slit in his boxer shorts, and made it absolutely out of the question to announce his

presence in the pantry. He trembled and held his breath and hoped that they were done with the kind of talk that would indebt him to overhear.

To his relief, he heard them pull apart from the kiss. He heard the faucet squeal into life and water funnel into a glass. But before he could be easy, Joanna asked her husband if he was hungry.

“Yeah, I could eat something.”

“I’ll make it. What do you want?”

Christopolous heard her step toward the pantry. He perceived, his heart seizing, the interposition of her body between light source and pantry door.

“Wait a minute, are you going to have something?”

“I’m not, but I’ll hang out with you if you want to eat something.”

“Let’s both have something.”

“I’m not hungry in the least.”

“But you didn’t even have any dinner.”

“I ate before church.”

“When?”

“When you and him were out doing - whatever it was you were doing.”

“Did you really?”

“Quit it, Yianni.”

In one moment, they’d been happy with each other, and in the next they were not. Just like he and Eleithyia had been in their last years before she’d gotten sick, their shared state had turned digital: no longer a slider moving along a spectrum, but a switch toggling between on and off. Somehow Christopolous was more frightened by this new,

unhappy tenor in their conversation than he'd been by their dirty talk. To be exposed overhearing would be scandalous, no doubt, but he did not think they would hate him, or each other, for it. In the future, they might even giggle about it together. Remember that time, they might ask each other, conspiratorially. And when they made love, the idea of an unseen audience might spur them into more and more admirable feats of physical passion. Christopolous could imagine them being eventually grateful to a voyeur - an accidental one or not - for affirming the sexiness of their relationship. In the worst, they would pity him or resent him: whatever it was they felt toward him, they'd share it, they'd owe him that much. But he could not imagine anything but division and blame coming from a voyeur's affirmation of their unhappiness.

“All I'm asking is -”

“I know what you're asking, and I'm telling you that I did, okay? So you eat if you want to, but I'm going to bed.”

The light prying into the pantry intensified, and Christopolous realized that Joana had moved out of its path just as she passed him in a flurry of linen. She'd wrapped herself in a sheet to come downstairs! She moved too quickly for him to really see her, and he was left with a vague suggestion of a color palette - lavender sheets, brown shoulders, black hair - and an assemblage of features recalled from old movies.

“Wait, Joanna -”

“I'm not hungry.”

He called out from somewhere near the sink, and she answered from somewhere up the staircase. Both of them were beyond his field of vision. Both were loud enough to

have woken Christopolous, if he'd been sleeping, in his room down the hall, if he'd been there.

Some electricity had gone out of the kitchen with Joanna's departure, and he found that he could breathe again. The blood circulated back into his chest, and he realized that his erection had diminished. Christopolous was conscious of being left alone in the kitchen with Metrios.

Metrios muttered, under his breath, "I can't -" but he did not finish his sentence. He moved to the kitchen's door, paused on the threshold, looked into the dark mouth of the stairs, and struck the doorframe with the underside of his fist. The force of the blow rattled things on the pantry shelves and sifted spice into the air, but his own outburst of violence seemed to leave Metrios bewildered. He stared at the glass in his other hand, as if he didn't know how it had gotten there, and he groaned. For a moment Christopolous really thought that he would reveal himself to his brother, that he would come clean about the whole thing, just hoping that Metrios would forgive him, that he could offer Metrios some commiseration, some comfort. But Metrios made up his mind before Christopolous could make up his. He set the glass on the counter closest to the door - the glass didn't even clink against the granite: Metrios' outburst had drained him that much - and then he followed his wife upstairs. He clicked the lights off, as he left, plunging Christopolous into a darkness doubly-stupefying.

The turns of the last several minutes had left Christopolous without appetite. When the coast was, without a doubt, clear, he crept back to his room. He laid down, listening for hissed accusations, demands, the quiet apportionment of blame, but he heard

nothing. The house had turned into slumber. So they'd allowed the sun to set on their anger, he thought, weariness stealing over him, too. He slept.

CHAPTER 4

APRIL 21, GREAT AND HOLY THURSDAY

At breakfast, the salad was drenched in oil. There were dates and honey. Joanna and Metrios were in a more pleasant mood than Christopolous had yet seen them in the morning. Metrios happily speculated over how much wine tourists consumed per annum and how much foreign money, at various pricing schemes, might go into local pockets.

“Mmmmm, wine,” Joanna purred. She stretched, with her hands clasped above her head. This morning, she wore a black dress, black tights, and pale-pink slippers that suggested a ballerina. Christopolous struggled to look away, as she arched her back and unfurled her fingers toward the sun. He wished her husband would do something to check the luxurious display of her underarms.

Phryxis, it turned out, was waiting for them outside. He was pounding stakes out in the dirt lot adjacent to the restaurant. With one booted foot he steadied the base of the stake. He held its top in a gloved hand, and with his free hand he hammered out the bends in it.

“Good morning, friends,” Phryxis called out to them over the clang of mallet on iron.

When he'd finished the one in hand, he tossed it onto a pile against the restaurant and came to greet them.

“You're reusing,” Metrios noted, “that's fantastic.”

Phryxis shook hands all around. Christopolous watched to see if he would pay any special attention to Joanna, but he was all business. As he led them inside, he

explained how he'd taken over his grandfather's business and expanded it from a three-table restaurant to what they saw today.

“The changes have really been remarkable,” Metrios murmured to Christopolous. Phryxis overheard, as Christopolous assumed he was meant to, and smiled.

Joanna said, “Good god, it's Applebee's.”

Phryxis had also, he said, expanded the vineyard: from a single-grape operation that yielded just enough wine for the family, he'd grown it to a not-locally-disrespected producer of four different wines. He'd even hybridized his own white, adapting a grape that grew nowhere in the world except Santorini, to grow on his land.

He seated them at a booth - Christopolous and Phryxis on one side and Metrios and Joanna on the other - and served them a white wine that was so light that Fr. Christopolous could only detect the alcohol in it when he swilled the glass under his nose.

Fr. Metrios said, “This one would be beautiful with fish.”

Phryxis said, “It's flexible. You can pair a rodites with fish, with lamb, even with heavy meats, like pork and beef.”

“I was thinking about the sea-bass you serve, Phryxis.”

“What do you think, Uncle Sam? Better than California wines, no?”

It took Christopolous a moment to realize he was being referred to, and when he began to explain yet again that he wasn't much of a connoisseur of wines, Metrios said, “He knows two kinds of wine,” - he paused at his punch line - “red and white.”

Metrios and Phryxis laughed heartily, but Joanna slanted Christopolous what he understood was a sympathetic grimace.

“Oh my, Phryxis,” Metrios said, “tell him what you think of retsina.”

As Phryxis waxed eloquent on his own wines' superiority to "tourist-wine," as he called it, Christopolous began to understand that Phryxis did know a lot about the subject. He didn't just dabble in it for the sake of impressing others with saying, my vineyard, my wines, my grapes. He had a foundation for his boasting. For reasons he didn't care to dwell on, this realization depressed Christopolous.

Phryxis gave them another white to try. This one was distinctly drier than the other two. Christopolous wrinkled his nose when it hit his tongue, and Phryxis laughed.

"Small sips," he said, "and roll it in your mouth before you swallow."

Christopolous resented the condescension: even he knew that much about tasting wine. He'd seen that film about it. But Phryxis poured more wine into Fr. Christopolous' glass and urged him to try again, and when Fr. Christopolous, to make a point, held the wine in his mouth for an exaggerated time, the grapes burst out of the alcohol. He tasted a hint of dirt, felt seeds clicking against the back of his teeth. Phryxis laughed at the look on his face.

"Now you see," he said.

"Yes, I do like this one."

"Well, don't get too attached. I have more for you to try."

It would be easy, Christopolous realized, not having cultivated any tolerance for it, to get drunk from the wine. Diagonal from him, Joanna cradled her glass between thumb and index finger. She was not drinking. It was strange, Christopolous thought, how she seemed to diminish every time Phryxis was around. Besides her comment on the kitschy décor – a barb which had secretly delighted Christopolous but had drawn no response whatsoever from the other two – she hadn't said a word since they'd arrived.

When Phryxis excused himself to fetch the next bottle from the bar – leaving the opened whites, Christopolous noted, on the table: they were still over half-full -

Christopolous made it a point to ask her what she thought of the wine.

“Not bad, a little acidic. I kind of feel like, if I want a lot of tannin, I'll have a red.”

Metrios asked since when did she know anything about wine. Frowning, she concentrated herself on circulating the wine within her glass without it overlapping the rim. Her comment had surprised Christopolous, too. He seemed to remember Joanna being indifferent when they'd discussed wine the day before. Or was it that she'd merely been indifferent to speculating about which wine Christ had blessed the wedding party with? He wondered suddenly what Joanna's spiritual attitudes were. Sure, she'd married a priest, but she did not seem particularly devout. Did she feel anything when she was touched by the sanctified oil? Was this life of renunciation of the world - a world which she longed for, that much was clear to Christopolous – ever a joy to her? Did they make her feel anything, all of these gestures she did for her husband's sake?

But as Christopolous began to ask her how she'd cultivated her knowledge of wine – her husband's question reformulated - Phryxis returned with a bottle of red.

“If you liked the last one, Father, you'll love this one,” he said, addressing himself to Christopolous. It was an unwelcome *deja-vu*. Just like the night before, a multitude of questions had formed in Christopolous' head, and the quantity and quality of them had invigorated him. But barely had he begun to talk to Joanna when Phryxis appeared.

Christopolous heard the possibility of something interesting happening as surely as if he'd heard a drain slurp down the last of the bathwater.

The red was good, though, and he said so.

“I knew it,” said Phryxis, and, “now I've got your number, Father.”

Metrios leaned across the table and clinked the base of his glass against the rim of Christopolous'.

“He'll make a connoisseur of you yet, Father.”

Christopolous had the strange sense that he'd been thrust into the role that rightly belonged to Joanna: somehow he'd become the center of attention while she was ignored by the men. The intent of Metrios and Phryxis to educate him, to rectify his appalling ignorance in this area, made him feel downright womanly. And whether it was because he was resentful or because he was already so addled by the wine, he could not seem to absorb a thing they were saying. Phryxis rattled on about soil composition and ideal climates and Metrios, on an entirely different frequency, hypothesized about marketing – or, getting the good word out, as he called it – and distribution.

When Christopolous finally ventured to ask if he might have another glass, the two of them were exasperated with him.

Phryxis said, “I don't want to ruin your palate for the next one,” and Metrios said, “Don't forget, Father, that we still have the service tonight.”

Christopolous' face burned. Perhaps they all felt that he'd been chastised, because the table fell silent for a moment, and then Phryxis announced, too-loudly, that he would get the next bottle. As he left, Christopolous sneaked a look toward Joanna, but he found none of the contempt, or cynical bemusement, or sympathy that he'd braced himself for. There was nothing on her face that was for him. Instead, he saw that she was watching Phryxis cross the dining-room.

Along with the cowboy boots that Christopolous had come to expect, the young man was wearing blue jeans tight enough to reveal the switch of his ass and a western-style shirt: double-breasted, paisley-patterned, with mother-of-pearl buttons. Altogether, it was a ridiculous outfit, overly macho, and yet, because of the fit of the jeans and the foppish shirt, somehow feminine. The same was true for his carriage: the slabs of muscle visible under the too-tight clothes could only belong to a man, but the fact that they were so visible at all was unsettlingly womanly. Joanna watched him go, and Christopolous watched Joanna, despising her a little, and Metrios cleared his throat.

When Christopolous refocused on Metrios, a frown on his host's face reshaped itself into a determined little smile.

“Which do you like the best, Father?”

“This one,” Christopolous said, tilting his glass toward himself to double-check that it was really empty, and then, “actually, the second one, I think. Yes, definitely the second.”

When Phryxis returned, he had an unopened bottle tucked under one arm and his papou supported on the other one.

“Dimitris,” Christopolous felt really glad to see the old man, “thank you for your hospitality.”

“What was that?”

“He said thank you, papou.”

Phryxis helped his grandfather into the booth next to Christopolous, a situation – Christopolous noted with dismay – that allowed Phryxis to straddle a chair at the end of the table, right at Joanna's elbow.

“What are we drinking to?” Dimitri asked, pulling one of the opened bottles of wine toward him. Phryxis, who was in the process of uncorking the new one, protested they were going to drink the (...). Nonsense, what will we jamas to, Dimitris asked again, and he poured liberally from the already-open bottle into the three empty glasses on the table. Christopolous could have laughed at the consternation on Phryxis' face: it was a good look on him, a human one.

“How about to friends and family?” Christopolous proposed.

To his pleasure, Metrios looked around the table, his grim little smile relaxing into something more natural, and seconded his toast.

“To those we love both here and in better places,” Dimitris said.

Soberly, they clicked glasses and drunk, Dimitris lifting the bottle directly to his lips.

When he set down the bottle, he cried out, “But why are you not drinking, young woman?”

They all turned to Joanna and saw that Dimitris' accusation was true. Her glass was still filled with white wine. Christopolous looked for traces of lipstick on the rim and saw none.

“But have you not tried any?” Christopolous cried.

“Finish that white, girl, so you can try some of this,” Dimitris said, and he grabbed the newly-opened bottle from Phryxis' hands. Phryxis protested that it needed to breathe, but Dimitris paid him no heed and began to pour the new wine all around.

“Just a minute,” Christopolous said, “We mustn't mix grapes,” and he gulped down the rest in his glass before proffering it to Dimitris to fill.

Christopolous had let slip a little uncharacteristic sarcasm, but to his relief, Phryxis took him at face-value, “Listen to him, you can't mix them, Papou.”

“This one,” Dimitris clicked a long, yellow fingernail against the bottle, “has been in the family for seven generations.”

“Yes, yes, Papou, this wine is and always will be the cornerstone of the family business,” Phryxis said.

Under Phryxis' tone of heavily-taxed tolerance, Christopolous thought he perceived a real affection on the young man's part for his grandfather, and it brought him the closest he'd been yet to liking Phryxis. Nor did he dislike him when he shrugged at Joanna and said that she probably should try the family's secret recipe. Up to that point, Joanna had said that she was drinking, and enjoying it, that she was appreciating it in her own good time, but her protests had had very little effect on the old man.

“I can drink that one off for you,” Phryxis said.

But as he reached for her glass, she clutched it toward her - “No, no, no, not so fast,” she said - and fastened her lips upon it. In a single pull, she downed the glass, much to Dimitris' amusement and Phryxis' concern.

“Good girl, now you can have some of this,” Dimitris said, filling her glass with the family red. Christopolous nudged his glass toward the old man, who topped him off and then proceeded to top off around the table.

“Another toast?” Christopolous asked.

“To family secrets,” Joanna said, and Christopolous darted an uneasy glance at her. Just the one glass had chased fire into her cheeks and glass into her eyes. Of course, Christopolous realized, a single glass, drunk quickly, would intoxicate her, she was so

thin. Nor could he remember her eating much at breakfast. He clearly remembered her blowing to cool a cup of coffee, but had she eaten at all?

Phryxis reached for her glass, but he stopped just short of touching the fingers curled around the stem. He suggested that she wait a minute before having any more. Her eyes flashed at him over lips already pursed to receive the wine, but after a moment's hesitation, she set the glass back onto the table.

“Would you get me some water, please?”

Phryxis' rising from the table seemed to jolt Metrios from the bemused torpor with which he'd been watching his wife be teased. In a voice lowered beneath Dimitris' hearing, he told her that they were there to taste, not to get drunk.

“Tell that to Father Christopolous.”

Christopolous protested that he wasn't drunk, and she said, “Right, you're just enjoying a heightened state of consciousness.”

She winked at him, clarifying that she was just joking around with him. He hadn't thought she was accusing him of drunkenness – her tone had been impish – but the clarification was nice, and he found himself grinning goofily back at her.

“Father Christopolous is responsible for his own actions, but - ” Metrios said, and Christopolous sensed that he would be making apologies to his brother at some point. He felt sure that they'd be graciously accepted, “but -.”

“But what?” Joanna flared up, “you're responsible for mine?”

To Christopolous' surprise, Metrios backed down from this approach.

“But you don't even like wine.”

“I guess I like it as much as you do.”

“Sure you do. It's not the alcoholic content that you care for, it's the aroma and the bouquet.”

The openly mocking way he said this did not sit well with Christopolous. He felt that Metrios would have been better off with a simple affirmative when Joanna asked him whether he was responsible for her. He himself would have said, and wouldn't have felt a bit barbaric about it, yes, husbands and wives were responsible for and to each other, and if one wasn't willing to act in harmony with her partner, why get married at all? Well, they were a different breed of married couple than he and Eleithyia had been.

“Don't get all wine-snobby with me,” she said, “I can play that game just as well as you.”

“You don't know the first thing about wine.”

“Really? You want to bet?”

Dimitris leaned toward Christopolous – again, that whiff of old alcohol and new food – and asked, loudly, what they were saying.

“I couldn't say,” Christopolous said.

Metrios caught his eye just then and colored slightly. He would have been willing to drop it, it seemed, but Joanna continued to demand that he test her, to see if she didn't know as much about wine as he did.

“What about your precious calorie count?” Metrios hissed.

She glared at him, apparently too furious to speak. Phryxis returned, just then, carrying a tray of waters. As he was distributing the glasses, Joanna asked, sweetly, if they could try something.

“Depends on what,” Phryxis said, his gaze shifting between her and Metrios, who'd been harried into pouring and drinking another glass.

“Blindfold me,” she said, making Metrios snort into his glass.

She wanted glasses of the different wines to be set in front of her, in a random ordering, and she, wearing a blindfold, would tell them all exactly what she was drinking, when and from what grape it was produced. She would identify its aromas and its alcohol content, and she would rank them from sweetest to driest. You can even throw in outside wines, she offered, Greek wines, global wines. Make it as hard as you can, she said.

“I don't think that's a great idea,” Phryxis said.

It was the moment that Christopolous knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Phryxis had fucked Joanna. He had to have. Only a man who had already seen her naked would be made so grave by the idea of her blindfolded, tense, her lips slightly parted, ready to resolve a mystery she'd identify by taste and smell alone. To his shame, he felt it in himself, the fear that something inside him would die and never return to life, if she wasn't to be allowed to do this. Dimitris was openly gleeful. Against Phryxis' protest, he went off to get “a feast” of wine, decades rolled away to reveal a kid with the luck so lucky as to be able to volunteer the apparatus for a game of spin-the-bottle.

Only Metrios showed the contemptuous lack of concern of someone who took for granted that he was the only one who was or ever would sleep with her.

“Why not let her try, if she thinks she can do it?” he said.

“I think you know I can. In fact, I bet you wouldn't bet it against never making another comment again about how many calories I do or don't eat.”

“Fine, I will make a bet,” Metrios growled, and Phryxis said, “No, this is not fine.”

But Metrios continued as if Phryxis had not spoken, “If I win, then you don't ever cook seven pans of Turkish delight again. No more cooking like that, ever again.”

Phryxis flinched. Christopolous assumed that he, like himself, had only ever seen Metrios eager and solicitous, his energy at any given time diffused over a variety of different projects.

“But it's my wine,” he said, and even Christopolous knew it for an admission of helplessness. In America, this appeal to private property would have been the ace in the hole, but they were not in America.

“You can't win unless you play,” Joanna said.

“Fine. I'll do it, too.”

“Fine. Good.”

Metrios made butterfly arms and turned his shirt inside-out over his head. Phryxis groaned, as Metrios wrapped one long sleeve over his eyes and knotted it over his head. Joanna tried to worm a finger under the bottom fold, ensuring that it was tight enough, and Dimitris came back, bottles stacked like corded wood in his arms. He was tottering under their weight, but between heavy breaths, he managed to say, “Give the lady your shirt, son.”

“Come on, hurry,” Joanna snapped.

To Christopolous' disbelief, he felt a stab of empathy, and it was for Phryxis. He could see the young man's jealousy in the way his fingers crawled over the mother-of-pearl buttons on his shirt. Oh, Christopolous wasn't sorry when Joanna's only response,

when Phryxis shrugged the shirt off to reveal a hard chest under a white wife-beater shirt, was to extend her hand for the shirt, but he saw a hurt of some sort in the way that Phryxis brushed the slabs of hair out of her eyes before he knotted the sleeve around her eyes.

This was wrong, Christopolous felt it with his whole body, and he sneaked another long, long draught of wine to fortify himself against the excitement and the dread battling in his stomach. If Metrios hadn't been so foolish as to blindfold himself first, he might have seen Phryxis' hand lingering at Joanna's nape as he secured his knot. And Eleithya had laughed at him for failing to see what was in people's hearts! If Metrios wasn't so stupid, he might have seen the flicker of Joanna's nostrils as her face was swaddled in her lover's scent. He might have seen Phryxis' fingers probing his wife's cheekbones under the pretense of checking her vision.

But perhaps Metrios had perceived something, and perhaps it was that glimmer of understanding that had led to this awful little game, for certainly there was something exclusionary in it. Pitted against each other, Metrios and Joanna evinced an intimacy that exceeded any Christopolous had ever witnessed. Greater than a silent hand-squeeze in the car, greater than having sex above a guest-room, this wagering the things they hated about each other in a game each intended to win reflected something greater than sympathy or passion. It was knowledge. It was likeness.

Dimitris pulled corks from bottles, Metrios and Joanna, with a ferocity akin to passion, hammered out the rules that would decide the winner, and Phryxis sank back into his chair – which, Christopolous noted, he'd pulled far out from the table and faced the right way – in dismay and disbelief. As for Christopolous, he drank more wine. He

understood that he'd already allowed the moment to lapse in which he might actually have stopped it. He was drunk. Drunkenly, he watched Joanna's clavicles heave above the scooped neckline of her dress, and he fought the despairing certainty in the pit of his belly that this – with her husband blindfolded and Phryxis in abdication - was the closest he would ever get to touching her.

He watched until he could not stand to anymore, and then he got up. Dimitris near-shouted at him that the bathroom was down a back corridor and to the left, but nobody else paid a mot of attention to his leaving. Joanna and Metrios had both just correctly identified the rodites they'd sampled second. When Christopolous lurched into the outdoors, the brightness blinded him. He took a deep draught of the open air and gagged on it. It tasted like shit.

When his vision adjusted, he saw that he was standing in a causeway between two pens. To his right, a goat peered through chicken-wire at him. Its eyes were yellow and split through the middle, like a cat's. What an ugly creature, he thought wonderingly.

“Hello there, goat,” he murmured.

It shook its head and turned on him. A cord bound the right foreleg to the right back-leg, and it limped away from the fence, her engorged udders banging against her legs. Was it female, though? It had horns, he realized. Perhaps that mass between the goat's legs was testicular. It was massy and indistinctly shaped, alien-seeming to the goat's body. He could see other goats in the distance, but none were close enough to compare to. Perhaps it was only this one goat which had this pendulous mass. It could be a tumor, he thought.

He turned to retreat through the door that he'd come out of, but it had no handle on the outside. He pushed against it, and it would not give. He knocked, anybody in there? Nobody answered, and he felt foolish. He rammed his shoulder into the door, which made his head spin.

With no other choice, he staggered down the lane between the two fences. The taverna and the little buildings clustered around it receded away from him. To his left, the terraced hillside, with its neat plantings, rose above the sprawl of pens. That must mean that the sea, though he could see nothing of it, lay somewhere beyond the pens to his right. When he finally came to the end of the pens, he stood arrested with indecision. Oh, how he longed for the sea. Were he to be offered at this moment a leap from a ledge into bright, deep waters, he would not hesitate. He would fling his clothes away from him and launch himself into the blue sky with a great whooping and a pinwheeling of his arms.

The problem was that he could not make out any path that might possibly bring him to water that he couldn't right now see. To his right, the pens encompassed a couple tin-roofed sheds, several twenty-gallon paint buckets roped together into a watering trough, and apparently the majority of the goats. A big group of them clustered in the mud they'd churned up. They watched him balefully from where their stench was the most powerful, and he had no desire to go closer to them. Beyond the pens lay a ramble of vegetation, some haphazard agriculture, perhaps, amidst cypress trees, oleanders, and stands of bulrush and bamboo taller than two men stacked. As daunting as it looked from a distance, Christopolous knew that it would be worse in the thick of it: it was the nature of the Greek landscape. Better perhaps to head toward the landmark he could see, he

thought. Nor did he have all the time in the world to wander about: he remembered suddenly, and with a little jolt of dread, that he was a guest and that he had an obligation to his hosts. It occurred to him that he might already have overstepped their patience with him, that they might already be leaving him to find his own way home.

He turned left. He could scarcely hurry because there was no clearly defined path alongside that side of fence. Nor, when he finally turned the right angle to travel parallel, and in the opposite direction, to the causeway he'd come up, did the scrub thin or the ground even out. By the time he reached the house, he was sweaty and dusty and so certain that he'd been unaccounted for for such a long time that he was almost shocked to see the little Renault still parked in the gravel lot.

The fence had brought him up to the kitchen garden on the landward side of the buildings. It was a large garden, already towering, in April, with growth. In its center, there were five grapefruit trees, and, under them, he glimpsed a folding chair, one of the cheap, plastic kind that people took to the beach. That did it. He picked his way through the garden, lifting the skirt of his cassock above the vines, and when he verified that the car was still in the lot beyond, he collapsed into the chair. No doubt Dimitris sat here, during the long dusks of summer, while the land cooled off. It was cool now underneath the little bower formed by the trees. The air smelled of citrus and hummed with insect industry. Christopolous began to feel less contaminated.

He was surprised out of his reverie by shouting. Joanna and her husband appeared in the drive. She charged over to the car and wrenched open the driver's door. Fr. Metrios took her by the elbow and jerked her toward him. With his other hand, he

slammed the car shut. She twisted from his grasp, and pummeled him in the chest with her free fist. He pulled her into an embrace, which she resisted.

From his seat amongst the grapefruit trees, Fr. Christopolous watched the spectacle of their fight with horror and a horrible sense of eagerness. Never in his life had he been so anxious for strife to erupt. Never had he been so hungry for chaos. Joanna tried to twist out of Fr. Metrios' grasp, and he responded by pinning her against the car. She was so light that his force lifted her from the ground. One of her sandals dangled from her toe for a minute and then slipped from her foot.

She struggled – Fr. Christopolous thought he heard an indistinct curse – but Fr. Metrios did not release her. Instead, he pressed himself against her, so that her protests were muffled in his chest. Christopolous was entranced by the sight of her slim, naked foot dangled an inch or two from the ground. He was acutely, excruciatingly, aware of the blood pounding in his temples. He felt as if he would go reeling into something solid if he stood up.

Fr. Metrios dipped his head down to Joanna's. The man and woman stood motionless like that for a time that Fr. Christopolous could not gauge. Her husband stood so close to Joanna that his skirts swallowed up the shoe that had slipped from her foot. She moved too soon. Fr. Christopolous could have observed the tableau they made against the car indefinitely. She freed one of her arms and snaked it around Fr. Metrios' back, up to his collar. Fr. Metrios lifted her by the hips so that she was perched on the car's projecting window sill. She wrapped her legs around him.

Fr. Christopolous would have gasped, if he had not become so suddenly self-conscious. The thick, waxy leaves of the grapefruit trees hung all around him. Until

then, he'd felt deep in camouflage, but when Joanna joined her feet – the sandaled one and the naked one – at Fr. Metrios' lower back, he felt exposed. It was like being back in their bedroom, and seeing himself in that awful mirror, seeing an aged, grotesque version of himself.

They kissed. Fr. Christopolous imagined the wine-taste on Joanna's teeth. Dear Lord, he thought, but he did not finish the prayer. Fr. Metrios grasped Joanna around her hips and lowered her to the ground. He was more tender with her than before, even when she tried to pinch his backside through his cassock and when she laughed at him for drawing back. He waited for her, as she bent to slip her sandal back onto her foot. As she straightened, she looked directly at Fr. Christopolous. She seemed to look at him; he could not tell. Still half-bowed, she seemed to freeze for a moment. Her dark hair fell about her face, obscuring her eyes, but then she rose and shook her hair from her eyes and stretched luxuriously, as she had at breakfast. She did not glance in his direction as she accompanied Fr. Metrios back into the house.

Fr. Christopolous lingered in the garden after they'd disappeared. He took several long, steady draughts of the warm, earthy air. He must stagger his re-appearance after theirs. Had Joanna seen him? He did not think so. If she had, she would have stretched in the sun knowing that he was watching. He shivered, thinking of her hands clasped and straining toward the sun, her small breasts out-thrust. Perhaps she had wanted him to see, he thought. Perhaps she suspected that he observed her and Phryxis too closely, and she had staged this with her husband for her lover's safety. What would she do, he wondered, to safeguard her love? For reasons he could not quite divine, he craved Joanna's faithlessness. He longed to discover her capable of such a thing.

When he returned inside, Dimitris hailed him.

“Finally,” he said, “someone comes to help me.”

Christopolous stepped toward him – overeagerly, perhaps: in his haste, he knocked against and upset the chair that Phryxis had abandoned at the end of their table. He was embarrassed when Dimitris indicated that it was the wine he needed help with.

“Help me not waste all of this,” he said, sweeping his hands over the litter of half-emptied bottles. Christopolous demurred – he'd had enough – but Dimitris insisted. No, really, he couldn't drink any more, Christopolous said: sure he could, Dimitris replied. No, no thank you, Christopolous said, a third – and therefore definitive, in America at least – refusal. Please, Dimitris said, you're our guest. Christopolous gave in.

The other three were missing from the dining-room, but while Christopolous had been mucking around with the goats, the lights had been thrown on in the back half of the restaurant, and a clatter arisen of dishes, steam, and men's voices. The odor of a banked fire filtered into the dining-room, and a man in a knee-length apron appeared in the arched doorway. He looked around, presumably for Phryxis, and, when he saw only the two old men, returned to the kitchen.

Dimitris poured some of the family's red into a glass that was bottom-stained and pushed it toward Christopolous. He tilted his own rim toward Christopolous and they drank. Fr. Christopolous felt the onset of a profound headache as the liquid seared its way down his throat. He wasn't, nor ever would be, a connoisseur of wine, but even he could detect a roughness – a certain hair-raising, bathtub tincture - in this one compared to the others.

“It must be wonderful,” he said, after he'd swallowed it all down, “to have a grandson who's been blessed with so much success.”

“He's a good boy. He would have made his parents proud.”

“Oh, poor children,” Christopolous cried, having forgotten until then that Phryxis was an orphan. Just like Joanna. Did they talk about these losses, ever, in between their couplings? Or did they find solace in not-talking, in not having to explain themselves to someone who already knew what it was like to be on one's own, without a single human protector in the world?

“Children?” Dimitris asked.

Oh, he was getting maudlin, Christopolous realized, if he was thinking about a sad-eyed boy and trembly-lipped girl, their arms encircling each other, against buffeting winds. Phryxis was a man, a handsome man, and a dog, and Joanna was a pretty woman who was married to a priest and perhaps had a lover. He asked Dimitris if he'd had the opportunity to meet Phryxis' fiancée.

“Who?”

“His fiancée.”

“A nice girl. His parents would have liked her.”

“When did they -?”

Dimitris interrupted him with the answers to questions that must, Christopolous realized, be exhaustingly familiar to him, exhausting and unwelcome.

“1985. My daughter's husband was killed on the oil-rig. An accident. Phryxis was six.”

Christopolous calculated that if Phryxis had been six in '85, it would make him 32 now. He wondered if his ability to do math had been muddied by the drink, but Dimitris confirmed it.

“Thirty-two and 28 is exactly the same age we were,” Christopolous said, stupefied by the coincidence. Of course, in their case, Eleithyia had been the older of the two.

Just as Dimitris cupped a hand around his ear and leaned toward him, Christopolous saw Metrios and Phryxis enter the dining-room. They paused just inside the front doors, talking in low voices. In the bright wedge of light falling through the door they left propped open, the hostess' stand was a dark slash between them. Joanna was not with them.

“Thirty-two and what?”

Christopolous could not help feeling, as he repeated himself, that his words were carried all the way across the restaurant to the men at the door.

“Oh, they were younger than that. Twenty-one and twenty-two,” Dimitris said.

Who, Christopolous had asked, before he realized that Dimitris was talking again about Phryxis' parents, his own children. He'd lost his own daughter: of course, he'd just said so.

And then, increasing Christopolous' embarrassment, Dimitris asked if he had children. “None. We were not blessed with children.”

“I had a daughter, and then I didn't, and I just can't see what blessing had to do with either of those facts.”

Christopolous could not think of a single thing to say that wasn't a priest's cliché.

“I don't mean to offend, Father, but even before – even when I was a young man, I did not much like the idea of a God who'd take away a man's children rather than lose a bet. And then gives the man seven new ones when the game's over. No harm, no foul, right? Except for the fact that those original seven are dead, gone forever.”

With a shiver, Christopolous realized that Dimitris was referring to Job. Oh, and hadn't he himself had the same qualms about that story? Hadn't he his own private interpretation of that Biblical episode – that they were not different children, pushed new from their mother's womb, but the same ones, brought out of some kind of divine storage once Job had undergone his testing – for God, who is omniscient, would, must, have known that Job would pass the test. Or that the souls had slept the sleep of the dead and been reunited with new bodies. Hadn't he performed all sorts of acrobatics of the imagination to keep himself from being disgusted with either Job or the Lord of that story?

For Christopolous himself had struggled so mightily not to blame the Lord for Eleithyia's childlessness. For seven years, they tried and failed to conceive. They consulted doctors, and they underwent treatment. Eleithyia had to endure the injections, because it was her ovaries that were subfertile, but he had to endure the suffering of seeing her suffer. He was helpless to comfort her. She nursed her pain in private, and would not be dissuaded from undergoing the whole cycle three times, before she would be convinced that it was not to be.

His grievance lodged, Dimitris pulled another mighty swig from the bottle of wine, thumped the bottle onto the table, and assured Christopolous again that he'd “meant no offense, Father.” Christopolous cringed at the irony of this man who was older than

him, who'd lost his children, appealing to him, a childless man, for understanding. For it was an appeal. He would not have called him Father unless a flicker of hope remained in him that someone, somewhere, might make sense of God's will for him.

“My wife,” Christopolous said, slowly, “she could not understand why the Lord had made her unable to have a child. I think she lost her faith because of it. And it did seem so unfair, because if there was ever a woman who would have made a good mother, it was her.”

Dimitris was gazing at him over the rim of his bottle. Tears glimmered in his eyes and Christopolous understood that he'd been right. He had read the desire of this man's heart. Dimitris did not want to be offered solace by someone who didn't know, hadn't undergone, what he had: he wanted it from someone who had. But in the end, he wanted solace. There wasn't a human alive who didn't, Christopolous guessed, and now that Christopolous had offered him something true, he would accept something that was simply comforting.

“But last summer,” Christopolous said, “her belly started to swell.”

He imagined it still, sometimes, round and hard, the skin drawn firm around it like a green peach.

“We didn't have sex anymore, so I didn't notice it for a long time. She kept it to herself for a few months.”

Some instinct for self-preservation seemed to make Dimitris draw the bottle closer to him.

“After years of disbelief, she thought it was a miracle.”

Christopolous thought of her fondling the suddenly smooth skin, the secret growth, convincing herself that God was coaxing her back to his fold. How his heart had cried out in pain for her - how enormous her desire must have been to turn a tumor into a child - and how he'd hated her, all at the same time. When she finally showed him her bloated belly, he hadn't thought for one minute that God had rewarded them for their faithfulness.

“You mentioned Job, but you forgot Abraham, childless for ninety years and then commanded by the Lord to make of his son a burnt sacrifice. And Sara,” - but here Christopolous could not go on with the Bible - “my wife, she only asked me to take her to the doctor because she was having irregular and painful bowel movements. The doctors gave her the news that she had ovarian cancer and less than a year to live.”

Dimitris did not protest as Christopolous drew the bottle away from him and drunk of it. He strained toward him as if there were still a chance the story might end in a restoration of faith. Christopolous had never put much stock in a God gleefully ticking believers' sins off as they committed them, but he could not pretend any longer that his spirit was not corrupt. His wife had been right, when she'd released his wrist and sunk back, her face twisted into what he now supposed was a reflection of his own. She'd said, “You've never loved anybody. You're not capable of it,” and she'd spat, or tried to. He hadn't wiped away the saliva that clung to her chin.

Dimitris' continued look of incomprehension suddenly infuriated Christopolous.

“That's it,” he cried, “the end of the story. That's all there is.”

Dimitris looked ashamed and unhappy, and Christopolous was glad, in a bitter way, until Dimitris made a vague gesture toward his ears, and said, “The war got my hearing all fucked up, sorry, Father. Could you tell the story again?”

##

By the time they left, the moon had appeared in the sky opposite the sun. Flat and silvery, it reminded Christopolous of the aluminum seals used to cap bottles of milk of magnesia. Joanna was already in the car, sitting behind the passenger-seat. Fr. Christopolous experienced a strange sense of *deja vu* – of so much time lost, unhappiness so long sustained - when he saw the oily imprint that haloed her head on the glass. He brushed his fingers against the glass.

##

Every twenty-eight days or so, the moon traveled around the earth. He knew this. But he'd accepted that certain kinds of knowledge resist being reconciled with perception. Like a child, he wanted to perceive the moon as a thing stuck up on the sky. As if it were a piece of felt that could be stuck to and prized off of various backdrops. As if day were a sheet of baby blue felt and night were one of blue-black felt.

He could actively exert his intellect over his perception: he could easily recall depictions he'd seen on the History Channel of a digital moon orbiting a digital earth in its own orbit around the sun. He could summon up even earlier models, ones constructed, and perhaps even by his own hands, though he couldn't remember doing it, out of papier mache and coat-hanger wire. The difficulty lie in making the model in his head merge with the one that he was seeing in the sky.

It was an issue of point of view. Because even the best computer models he'd seen assumed a fixed point of view. They planted the viewer somewhere out beyond the solar system and let him watch the whole thing, in all of its moving parts, as if he himself weren't moving. But he was! For all their sophistication, those computer renderings might as well be plastic mobiles swaying and shuddering over an infant lain on his back in his crib.

And the sea in front of him, rocking back and forth, as if it were a pale broth in a soup bowl. As if the seas weren't pinned down to a round earth by gravity. The gap, sometimes, between what he knew and what his body believed could be dizzying.

But he certainly wasn't being helped by this consideration of cosmic forces. As the car climbed the switchbacks toward the main road, nausea hurtled upon him. It helped to pin his gaze to something immediate. Through the vee between the seats, Joanna's left elbow was visible. The crease of joint between upper and lower arm. Her arms were crossed over her chest, the gap mended between clavicle and underarm. That pale flicker of skin smothered under that strange sweater. Her neck was taut, the tendons at attention. The hollows of her cheeks, the depression between lips and nose, the slight concavity above her left temple had a greenish blush that made him understand, for the first time, why people would use the word olive to describe a certain complexion.

It was the young fruit of the olive tree the word referred to, the seeds and ovaries plucked early from the tree, the greenness of the flesh fixed in the curing process. It was particularly pronounced at her temples, where he saw, for the first time, a furring of down. The fine dark hairs grew in a clockwise pattern, like the ridges on the pad of a finger. He imagined an outsized thumb gently inking itself in the oils above her

browline. Amid these dark hairs, a vein bifurcated, its two tributaries bearing that green, greatly concentrated, into her hairline.

##

As Fr. Metrios performed the renewal of the sacrament – the consumption of the old Host and the blessing of the new one: a loaf brought from Athens, probably on the same ferry that had brought Christopolous to the island and would take him from it – Christopolous felt as if he were floating and sinking both. He was all turned-around, and he felt irradiated by light nothingness on all sides. Like when he'd swam himself into a blur in the sea, a not wholly unpleasant hysteria enveloped him. He felt his body disassociate from his thoughts. Like the pin-thick membrane separating lungs and the infinitely many gallons of water that wanted in them, the thoughts imposed shape on him, without belonging to his shape. They were all that sectioned his body off from the rest of the physical world, from the equilibrium between pressures that nature strained for. He was taken hold of by a deadly curiosity and a fantasy: that something as painless as a tiny little puncture might dissipate all barriers, between the body and the world, between the body and the spirit, between the spirit and all the things unknown and unseen beyond this world.

Yes, he'd sometimes longed for death, and, yes, it was another of the spiritual battles he'd waged over his whole life. He'd blamed himself so much for not being able to see more of what was worthy of love in his life, and he'd struggled so hard to understand why the Lord would call someone like himself to the ministry. He'd borne up under what he'd felt on his wedding day, as he slid the ring onto Eleithyia's finger, what he felt again and again, during their marriage, when he would start awake from vivid

dreams – dreams of rivers, tides, and oceans whose clear, green surfaces he somehow skimmed and wheeled above, bird-like – and would find himself in bed, next to Eleithya, who gnashed her teeth when she slept. He felt it sometimes after they had sex, after the orgasm had twitched through his flesh and left him exactly the same as before, and when he sat in the clinician's waiting room, waiting for Eleithya to come out of the sanctum of the specialist, feeling as if he had sat amongst those plastic chairs and those walls painted in a green they called sea-foam – although Stamos knew that real sea-foam had no color of its own - for his entire life, that he'd still be there, in that waiting room, even when they returned home. And later, when they knew for sure that they would not have children, he felt it when he held Eleithya in bed, as she sobbed and railed, and, later, he felt it when they attended to their own business in separate rooms. Sometimes the certainty that death was the only mystery left in life so overwhelmed him that he suspected it would have been no different for him even had they had children, a thought which made him feel more dead than any other.

Sometimes, life itself was so long that he doubted the existence of heaven. Christopolous had long ago rejected the fundamentalists' hell: he did not think it was logically possible for a good God to relish the physical torment in fire of the men that he had created. A god who was vengeful or petty was one made in man's image. No, the hell-fire in the Scriptures, he believed, was a metaphor for the profound disappointment of God the Father, for that moment when God would forever turn away from the disbeliever. It was the loneliness in the forever-absence of God which would be terrible – far more horrible than the fires, although not an act of vengeance but the consequence of a choice.

In a deep depression, though, he found it equally hard to believe that a kind and loving God would subject those he loved to an eternity of any sort, even an eternity of perpetual reward. Unless completely remade, human beings would not be able to endure eternity, that was certain, and the remaking posed the same ethical conundrum for him as Job's children. He wondered if he offended the Lord when he hoped that they were both metaphors, and then he questioned the doctrinal basis of his beliefs about Hell, wondering if he was abusing theology just to make himself feel better. Oh, he'd squandered hours of his life in fruitless speculation about the afterlife when it didn't matter in the least.

It did not matter. In his – what had Joanna called it? - heightened state, he saw that belief was the scrim between the body and worlds visible and invisible. All of his tortuously arrived at conclusions were simply a barrier between him and the world he would not, could not possibly, know until he experienced it. When he looked at it like that, everything became simple. A barrier would not change what it separated. When he died, he would see whether his beliefs had more or less clearly reflected the reality that lay beyond him right now. Until then, no dogma would alter the spiritual reality that only death would clarify.

He mastered his nausea until the point in the service at which Metrios brought out the icon of the cross. His own sour breath condensed on the feet of the icon as he stooped over it, whispering, please Father, forgive me. All of the kisses laid on it over the years had stripped its gold patina, and a distorted figure swam out of the highly polished wood and pressed lips to Christopolous'. He controlled his urge to flinch from his own

reflection, but when he'd been folded back into the standing crowd of men on the right side of the church, his body was in turmoil.

Even though people were packed shoulder-to-shoulder in the church's nave, they saw his raiment and made room for him. They yielded a path to him in the narthex, too, and outside of the church, where they peered into the service on tip-toes. Only when he'd turned the southeast corner of the church, beyond any parishioner's view, did he feel like he could breathe again. He hurried along the path that parishioners had stomped into the long yellow grass that grew right to the eastern walls of the church. The shadows were long on this side, and the air cool. The purple spikelets of the burdock had already sealed themselves into pale-green buds in preparation for the night.

When he rounded the northeast corner, then, he was astonished into halting by the brilliance on the other side. Seaward, the sun throbbed with an intensity that momentarily turned Christopolous six again. His eyes flinched shut, and when he forced them open again, all he saw was the fleshy, pink color of his inner eyelids. But it was the sky itself, suffused with the last rays of daylight. Like capillaries, inner-lit cirrus clouds streamed toward the setting sun.

Piled up against the exterior wall of the sanctuary, as far as possible from the congregation's entrance, even the trash was transformed by the light. An inexplicable bathtub. A boiler wrenched out of a basement somewhere. Heaps of scrap metal, re-bar, and plywood. Sacks of concrete mix now cemented to the ground. All of it now blazed up in a golden immolation.

Inside the concrete-blocked shed that housed the toilet itself, the light from a single electric bulb fluttered against Christopolous' vision like a bee on the surface of a

swimming pool. He made out a sink with exposed plumbing, above which had been mounted a metal panel that was much too scuffed to function as a mirror. A handwritten sign had been taped over the peg that held the toilet paper. Christopolous had to stoop to read it, an act that made his head spin. In Greek, it read, "Do not flush women's products. Toilet will overflow." How grotesque, Christopolous thought, that men and women observed such a careful public separation within the church when their most private acts were indiscriminately mingled out here.

Although waves of nausea still lapped against him, the urgency that had compelled Christopolous to the bathroom had abated. When he opened his mouth above the toilet bowl, he could produce only a red-tinted rope of spit. His stomach felt far away from his throat. It would take an internal catastrophe, it seemed, to raise its contents against gravity and all the one-way roads of the body.

If only he could eat something. Some of that bread they'd had at breakfast would sop up the alcohol his tissues couldn't absorb, would work wonders in him. But he wanted meat, not bread. The thought of meat sliced right from the lamb, interleaved with fatty shavings, packed onto a skewer, and rotated dripping over coals produced a welling up of more warm, slow spit. In his state, he was not above stealing away from the service to find food. If he could just reconstruct a map to the church, could just pinpoint on it any mercantile strip where there was the slightest chance he'd discover a restaurant or, at the least, someone who would know where one was. He groped for the reassuring ridge of his wallet in the pocket of his slacks underneath his cassock. Yes, he could pay someone to take him to a place where he could eat.

Except that, mired in their own monstrous debt, Greek businesses of all stripes only wanted cash. He didn't have any money, only a plastic idea of it, which would scarcely transubstantiate into cash. Except who would he ask to take him, and where would he ask to be taken? It was not improbable, on this island, that the restaurants would close during vespers, that their owners were at church. Except that an island limited the distance he could travel to transgress the fast. This was not America, where one could drive thirty minutes from one's home in order to conduct one's private rituals of overindulgence before an intercom and a sliding-glass window.

He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. He made himself consider, in all its rankness, the vomit he'd produced earlier. He reenvisioned the goat licking it. Those amorphous genitals, the tumorous clusters under its belly, those clenched fists of flesh. Just like he hoped, his stomach turned. He dropped to his knees, readied himself. But again, only spit emerged. Where was all of it coming from? Its own composition, another of the facts that defied the body's belief. If his body were harnessed to a treadmill and made to a run, it wouldn't shed three-quarters of its weight in sweat: as if the only scientific methodology was violent in nature.

As if a tiling project had been aborted just before the tiles themselves were laid, the concrete floor was whorled in set mortar. A serrated edge had spread the whitish stuff in broad, cake-frosting strokes. Through two layers of fabric, the ridges bit into Christopolous' knees, as sharp as if they were laced with fiberglass. When he'd been standing, he'd smelled the dust scorched in the belly of the lightbulb and the sawdust odor emitted by the low ceiling. But on his knees, he perceived the damp of weeping pipes, of soap going to mush, of water standing around a plunger.

Now he remembered this aspect of intoxication. It never changed. One might plot, mathematically, the emotional experience, the rising toward an ideal state in which one could do anything one wanted, in which there was nothing unworthy of being wanted. One felt good, sure, on this side of the cusp, but the defining sensation was one of hopeful dissatisfaction, of a sense that, with just a little more intoxication, one might feel glorious. And then the cusp itself. Christopolous thought it might have lasted longer when he was younger. More a plateau, less a single point. But at this point in his life, that moment had been compressed out of existence between the asymptotes. One moment he was elated by the possibility of all the things he might do. The next he was battered by shame at all that he'd already allowed himself to do.

And yet, just because he'd tipped onto the other side of being convinced that all consequences would be waived for him, it didn't mean that he was sober. Far from it. He was stuck in a drunk person's hyper-consciousness of his own subjection to physical cause-and-effect. That's why he was in this sweating bathroom, because he was frightened by his own sloppiness. He was paranoid, too. His doctor had told him not to mix the medication with alcohol, and he wondered if chemical reactions were already wreaking havoc within his body, if molecules were linking up, mutating, replicating. Not knowing a thing about chemistry meant that every ache and pain he felt could be an indicator of something unseen and more dire.

He wondered if, after the sex act, Joanna also found herself mired in the mundane details of her own life from which she'd have to wrangle a likely alibi. How long after the orgasm could she keep her husband from her thoughts? Were Metrios' whereabouts, his mood, the questions he'd ask and the responses he'd accept more substantial to her

than the arms of her lover? How quickly did her body turn back from means of escape to means of discovery? What went through her mind as she combed every inch of skin for the effluent, mark, odor that might give her away? Did she regather her things with a care proportionate to the disregard with which she'd shed them? Did scrupulous inventory – underthings, clothes, jewelery – find her things meager, the small change and years-old receipts regiven a parolee?

It was possible that she found these rituals reassuring. They could even be a labor of love, if she loved him. But Christopolous thought they would be tedious and frightening, both. If it was him, he would not want to dwell in those moments fraught with the potential of exposure and unrelieved by the potential of satisfaction. He'd long to be returned to a place where more was still possible, where surfaction remained a titillating possibility. He would want it undone. He did want it undone.

He essayed his index finger into his throat. First, the mutual sensations of ridged fingertip over tongue, of pebbled tongue under finger. Next, the folds over the first joint scraping under the front incisors. The stiff hairs above the knuckles tickling the hard palate. Like steel strings that could be agitated to produce different effects, the ribs of cartilage at the roof of his mouth,. The tongue, that slab of muscle, contracting in anticipation of a sneeze he managed to swallow back down. This is what Joanna does to herself, he thought. Up to sixty times a day, once, he remembered Metrios saying. Was she inured, then, to the sensual aspects of what she did?

He pushed until the corners of his mouth met the webbing between fingers, until the tip of his nail grazed the fleshy bulb at the back of his throat. Fetally, his final two fingers curled toward his palm. It did not escape him, the gesture's obscene closeness to

the Orthodox cross, in which the thumb and the first two fingers joined into a trinity and last two fingertips pressed into the confluence of palm lines that marked the sites of the nails in Jesus' hands.

Heart pounding, he thrust his finger over the the massy root of his tongue. It thumped violently. Slits the thinness of paper-cuts opened in both corners of his mouth; salt entered them. And then his stomach heaved toward his finger with a painful intensity. It was like a hot poker thrust fom his groin to the top of his spinal column. His sphincter grabbed at itself. He felt it in his colon, in his intestines, and in organs more remote: his liver, his kidneys, his spleen. His septum twitched, and tears sprung to his eyes. He rocked back onto his heels, panting.

How horrible! His eyes streamed. A gritty, searing sensation had lodged at the back of his nose. At the last second, he'd gagged most of it back. At least it had felt like that, as if his body had revolted against this useless squandering of its resources. He hawked something into the toilet bowl, something scarcely more fibrous than what he'd produced before. This, for all that convulsion.

He should have done this earlier. He would have had more empathy for Eleithyia. Twenty to thirty times a day, sometimes, she'd vomited. Her body trying without success to turn out the heavy metals meant to heal her. God forgive him, in his weakest moments, Christopolous had been sure, as he rubbed between her shoulder blades, that she got some bitter satisfaction from this visible proof that she was suffering. He'd silently accused her, as he toweled away the sweat that prickled her forehead after such an exertion, of exaggerating it for his benefit. See how wracked I am! God forgive him.

A knock sent reverberations through the soles of his feet which, in the small space, were plated against the door. For a moment, he thought the door would be forced in, that he'd be crumpled against the toilet, that he'd be caught hovering over his own vomit.

“Just a minute,” he croaked. His throat felt raw, splintery. When he rose, fresh sensation surged into the patterns left by the floor. His knees popped, and he pitched forward. He put a hand toward the seat to steady himself.

When he'd washed himself and opened the door, he was confronted by an old woman in a black dress and a lace fichu. He glanced away from her, embarrassed all over again by the necessity that had forced them together.

“A blessed Holy Thursday, Father,” she murmured.

He looked at her again. The sun had ruttled her skin, prematurely perhaps, but her posture was straight, her eyes clear. Some muscle still modestly clad what he could see of her bones, at her jawline, at her wrist. She was not so old, not older than himself, at least. Somebody's wife. Somebody's mother, grandmother, he hoped. Somebody's beloved, once.

“And to you,” he said.

He did not walk back the way he'd come. Instead, he pushed through the grass till he stood beyond the outhouse, at the church's northwestern corner. A breeze planed up the hill, and he dropped his chin to allow it under his collar, and lifted his face to let it rake, like cool fingers, through his beard. The air was laded with thyme, lavender, and savory. In certain churches, on this day, they'd be consecrating the Holy Chrism. Fifty-seven different elements, in proportions argued over by theologians for centuries, would

be united to produce the perfume that represented the gracious bestowing of God's gift of the Holy Spirit on his followers. So much effort, he thought, to concoct this physical representation of God's earthly presence, when one might simply be in God's earth to perceive his presence. But, he had to reason with himself, not all believers could live on a Greek island.

Behind him, he heard the thud of the door and the swishing return of footsteps through the grass-lined path. His stomach felt stilled. He should go inside. He lingered, though, admiring the clarity of the atmosphere. In the time that he'd been closeted in the toilet, the clouds had been burnt off and the moon vaulted into the sky. He couldn't think of the last time he'd seen the moon without obstruction. In every memory he could summon, he saw it foregrounded by the brighter orbs of streetlamps, crosshatched by telephone lines, fleeing toward the corner of a car window. It seemed to him that he'd peered, his whole life, upward at it through pylons and the winter-skeletons of trees.

Come true dark, the sea would reflect the moonlight back into the sky, but for now, the water stretched to Christopolous' left neither reflected nor absorbed. The dusk simply lay atop the uniformly indigo water, as if they were substances of irreconcilable density. Toward his right, dusk had purpled the escarpment and silvered the flickering leaves of the olive trees at its base. Closer at hand, the walls of the church had softened from white to a dove-gray. Fifteen minutes earlier, if he'd stood in that same spot, the sunset would have flung his shadow on and over the walls of the church. Now, he had none to be flung: all things had equalized with their shadows.

It took an effort to return along the path he'd just pushed through the grass, back past the outhouse, from which drifted the odors he hadn't noticed before, in his haste, of

solvents and urine-soaked cardboard, and when a thread of a path, which he'd also overlooked, materialized at the northeastern corner of the church, he took it without even thinking about it. Down a grassy dip toward the escarpment, his feet took him away from the church before he'd told himself he was going.

All of a sudden, the air rippled around him. It took him some moments to recognize the disturbance in the air as bats, ventured, no doubt, from the caves that visibly pocked the hills above the church. They were so quick in their zigzagging courses that Christopolous saw them more in the darts they left in the grass and in the scattering of insects in their wakes. Except for the bats, he wouldn't have noticed the pale drift of wings over the grass. Pollen, he might have thought, but they were tiny moths, tantalized away from the soil by the cool onset of darkness.

He felt both elated and bereft. It felt good to be alone outside, and yet he felt a terrible sense of loneliness. He might disappear into the darkness, had disappeared, in fact, for when he looked over his shoulder, the dome of the church was just a dark smudge over a ridge. He'd descended into a hollow he'd never perceived between the church's hill and the base of the escarpment. He was glad for the physical exertion of climbing out again toward the olive trees. The rush of blood in his ears, the gasp of his own breathing: you're not dead, they told him. For the ground muted his footsteps, and the bats were all but silent as they stiched together the spaces around him, their communication entirely inaudible to him. And he'd gone beyond range of hearing the people in the church, all those people he could not make love him or miss him when he were gone.

Even the Lord's voice, which he knew could not be contained to a mere building, felt far away and impossible, now, for him to perceive. Passing under the limbs of the first olive tree, he tried to pray, but the words simply bounced around in his own head, his own voice coming back to him. *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* He was so sick of the one-noted cacophony of his own self-consciousness. It was a curse, truly, the true fruit of the tree that had tempted man to his own expulsion from paradise: this is me, this is me, this is me.

He did not see Joanna and Phryxis under the olive trees until he was right upon them. For all of his absorption in his own thought, though, he had the advantage over them. For what seemed like an eternity, though it must have been moments only, he perceived them without their perceiving him. They were entwined against the twisting trunk of an olive tree. Phryxis half-sat on a crooked limb low to the ground. Joanna stood between his legs, and Phryxis' knuckles bunched in the joints behind her knees: it was a joining of parts Christopolous had never considered the joining of with his own wife, and it struck him senseless more than their wild copulation would have.

The olive trees were fully fleshed into leaves, and it was darker under their canopy than it had been even in the lower hollow. But Phryxis had gathered the fabric of her skirt so that it exposed the backs of her legs, which gleamed dimly like twin pier-mirrors. Her hands on his shoulders might have been made of chalk. Christopolous only couldn't make out the exact arrangement of their heads. He thought that she might be stooped, so that she might touch her face to his.

Phryxis was the first to see him. Christopolous saw that he saw him. Their eyes met through a slash in Joanna's hair and around her bent head. Phryxis' pale pupils bored

right at him, and then, defying Christopolous' belief, Phryxis smiled, his teeth a white gleam in the darkness.

He called her name. When she twisted out of her lover's arms, Christopolous glimpsed a pale swathe of leg before she reclaimed the hem of her dress from his knee.

“Father Christopolous,” she gasped, “what are you doing here?”

In the gloom of the grove, her face was a floating oval, her mouth a dark, swollen smudge. A few silvery leaves clung to the neckline of her dress.

“Is the service finished?” Phryxis asked. He remained sitting in the crook of the tree, his legs spread, the glinting toes of his boots angled outward. His hands lay loosely in the same position as before, his fingers caressing the backs of remembered knees. While it was too dark to know for sure, Christopolous sensed that Phryxis' lap flaunted an erection.

The service wasn't finished, Christopolous said. There was something expected of him, he felt, and he was determined to defy it. He was expected to ask them, even though he knew the answer, what they were doing out here while night descended, while Yianni was inside the church, speaking of Judas and the kiss of betrayal.

“And why'd you leave, if it wasn't done?” Phryxis asked. “You weren't feeling well?”

Christopolous tried and failed to remember seeing where each had been before he'd staggered out of the church. He'd been blind to everything but his own internal turmoil. For all he knew, they'd watched him blunder out and had woven out in his wake. For all he knew, Metrios had seen the three of them leave together and assumed the other two had followed to help him. But who was Phryxis, to shame anybody when, a stone's

throw from the church and all of its congregation, he was thrusting himself upon the priest's wife? Again, the conviction came upon Christopolous that Phryxis wanted to be discovered. He wanted Joanna to be discovered.

Christopolous said, softly, "You should not be here, Joanna."

You're not safe with this man, he wanted to say. He will not keep you from harm.

She said, "We were only talking, Father."

"We're still talking," Phryxis said.

She said, "This isn't what you're thinking."

Christopolous said, "I'm not sure you know what I'm thinking."

Come away from this man who will hurt you, he was thinking. You deserve more than him. More than your husband. More than me.

"You told me what you think," she snapped. She was recovering from the first fright of being stumbled upon in the dark, "in the vineyard, you said, 'You're fucking him, aren't you?'"

Christopolous trembled. Had he said that? He did not remember using that word. In the grip of intoxication, what else had he done?

"I'm sorry I used that language with you," he said.

"Things are different now," Phryxis said, "from when you were young, Father. Men and women can be friends now. They can keep each other company without -"

Joanna finished his sentence: "without people thinking they're fucking each other."

Joanna stood halfway between the two men, but Phryxis hadn't stirred. From the lap of the tree, he smiled, his teeth brighter than anything else in the grove.

Christopolous said, "Please come back with me, Joanna."

"I told you, Father, we're still talking," Phryxis said, but Christopolous felt her longing toward the moonlight that illumined the earth just beyond the copse, toward the brightly-lit church in the distance. She was angry at him, but she would take the excuse he offered her to return before she was counted missing. And to get away from Phryxis. Did she sense danger in him? Was she repulsed by his coolness toward her? He'd turned all of his heat toward Christopolous. Even his sex, which Christopolous could feel, if not see, below that cheshire grin, was a thing he wielded against Christopolous.

"Come back before the service is over," he said.

"You shouldn't have said that earlier," she said, "You were wrong then, and you're still wrong."

But she took a step toward him.

"I can't even count how many times I've been wrong before," Christopolous said.

For the first time, Phryxis' equanimity wavered. "He's still drunk, Joanna," he said.

Christopolous didn't think he was still drunk. And yet, he was whispering, his blood pounding in his ears over his own voice.

"You can smell it on him," Phryxis said, disgusted.

"I should make sure he gets back okay."

Phryxis uncoiled out of the crook of the tree, and Christopolous' heart jumped. He took a step toward her, and she took one toward Christopolous. She was close enough now that he could scoop her into his arms and make a run for it, that if he stumbled on the path, he'd twist his body so that he'd take the fall on his back.

“Here you are, a priest, all the way from America, and you get wasted the first chance you get. Yianni told me about the Turkish Delight, too. You fly halfway across the world to gorge on someone else's food and drink – what? So your own people won't see you do it?”

To his surprise, Joanna said, “His wife just died.” Although reluctance was in her voice, she was defending him.

“Not just,” he murmured, but Phryxis was saying, louder, “A drunk priest, what's he going to do?”

“He's our guest,” she said.

“You don't owe him anything, Joanna,” Phryxis said. But his voice had become whining. Christopolous had won.

“I'll take you back,” she said. And then, kindness beyond kindness, she tucked her hand into Christopolous' elbow. Since she'd given him her hand in the car, it was the first time she'd touched him. Even through his sleeve, he felt the coolness of her fingers. He imagined them applied to his forehead, to the flaming patches behind his ears. Phryxis stepped toward him, but Christopolous was so happy. She'd forgiven him, it seemed. She would take him back. Phryxis could hit him, he could rain blows down on him. But she would walk with him back to the church.

Phryxis gripped his other elbow. Their three faces floated close together in the dark, Christopolous seeing them from a distance, as if he were a grackle in the branches of the olive trees.

Joanna knew before he did that his stomach knew he had no right to be so happy.

“Father?” she asked, right before he doubled over, and his stomach, scorching, hurtled up his throat. If Phryxis had punched him in the gut, he could not have experienced a greater upheaval.

“Mother-fucker,” Phryxis cried, as he leapt aside.

The sensation was the same as when he'd thrust his finger down his throat. Again, he wondered why anyone would induce this kind of pain to themselves.

“He's fine,” Joanna said.

“My boots,” Phryxis said, and, again, “Mother-fucker.”

“It's not so bad.”

“It's disgusting.”

This conversation he heard remotely. His ears were ringing in the aftermath of that violent extrusion. His mouth was a bed of coals. He was aware of them whispering, conferring, and then Phryxis was moving away, out of the grove, and Joanna had resettled her hand in his elbow.

“Don't step in it,” she said, guiding him away.

When they emerged from under the heavy branches, he couldn't see for the brightness. He had to blink his sight back. The moon, he then saw, had grown radiant. The clouds that had been evaporated by the flaming sunset had regathered. Diminished in size, they fleeted across the face of the moon, giving it an illusion of velocity and drawing from it an illusion of similar brightness. When they streamed away, they remained alit. Stars prickled between the bright bars of clouds.

In the brightness, everything had a shadow. The surface of the hillside was cross-hatched with them. The escarpment cast a shadow in which grew the darker shadows of

the olive trees. Phryxis had a shadow, which stomped alongside him down the hill toward the church. Once, he paused to scuff his boots against a hummock, and his boots had shadows. When Christopolous and Joanna started down the hill, their shadows entwined. He walked slowly, trying to put distance between them and Phryxis. Also, to delay the moment of return to the church, which loomed in front of them far faster than he'd hurried away from it earlier.

When they reached the point of the path's bifurcation, though, Joanna did not lead him back along the one he'd come up from the restroom, and which Phryxis, who'd already disappeared beyond the northwestern corner of the church, had already descended. He realized that she was taking him past the church, and down the hill where a couple dozen cars nested in the long grass, the little, apple-green Renault among them.

Joanna opened the passenger-side door for him, and when she got in on the driver's side, she rolled down her window.

“You want to roll down yours?”

He smelled like sick. It spackled the front of his robes and embroidered the cuffs. If he'd realized before, he would have shed the cassock and left it on the hill rather than crowd his own smell into this small space with Joanna.

As she reversed out of the lot, she half-turned in her seat to see out the back window. She did not trust the rearview mirror, apparently. This was the first time he'd ridden alone in the car with her. Her right hand gripped the shifter, mere inches away from his thigh. Her left hand on the steering wheel while the rest of her body angled toward the vee between their seats: it made the gap open again between the strap of her

shirt and the sweater that festooned her shoulder. The far side of her face was close to his. How could she be unaware of the effect of the tension on her face? She'd been shifted about under cameras and lights, her face molded like putty: how could she not know that the stretch would bring tendons into relief? Her facial structure to the surface of the skin? A hank of hair that begged to be fingered back over her cheekbone?

He made himself look out his own window. From where he sat, he couldn't see the moon. It was uncanny now that a planet-sized object should fit behind the roof of a car. Uncanny, as they began to move, that the church, which was on its own hill, should be folded into the cleft between two closer hills. That these hills in turn be engulfed by a larger range, which in its turns should be entirely blotted out by an embankment which the road now passed under. Uncanny, this clarity that allowed him to make out distant cypresses as easily as if they were stands of milk-thistle just beyond his open window.

In motion, the worst of his own smell dispersed in the cool, aromatic dark that flowed around the car. In the vineyard, he'd said to Joanna, "You're fucking him." What else had he said? What else had he done to make her angry? Had he really gripped her around the throat and felt her larynx pulse underneath his fingers? He could not remember, and it seemed impossible that he could forget doing something like that. He felt that he could remember physical details, the knob of her throat, the pits at the termini of her jawline, the buzz of her vocal chords – the specificity of these details impossibly retrieved from previous memories, for he'd never in his life choked a woman, or any person – yet it was also not impossible that his longing had planted false memories under his skin. But if he had put his hand on her throat, what could account for her kindness to him now?

If he had really done it, then he thought that she had really purred. Then why had she been so angry, in the olive grove, when she'd said that his drunkenness in the vineyard had made him say that she was fucking Phryxis? Was it possible that the words had made her angry, but not the physical gesture that must have followed, and had likely been caused by, the words? It occurred to him that if she hadn't made the accusation she had in her mind, that it could have been to protect him from Phryxis. If Christopolous had circled her throat, and if her lover knew about it, what would he have done? What would her husband do?

The need to know blossomed under his skin, an unbearable itch.

He said, "I just realized I'm leaving in three days."

"On Monday," she said. It wasn't a question.

"It's gone by in a flash."

When she didn't answer, he continued, "I don't know what I was thinking, booking my return ticket for the day after Pascha. How wonderful it would be, to be here during Bright Week. To be in Greece, on this island, among these people."

But he could not mention Bright Week without feeling guilty. While the rest of Greece would be rejoicing in the feast following the fast, he'd observed no fast and could therefore experience no feast. "Last time I was in Greece -" he began to say, but Joanna asked, "What will you do back home?"

"Unpack," he said. "Do laundry."

"Won't you become bishop? You'll take the position from Yianni's uncle?"

"It's not official yet."

"But you will."

He didn't want to think about going back. Suddenly, he could not bear the thought of not waking up with the sun in his eastward-window, of not turning the two sheets down to the foot of the simple bed and clothing himself in the breeze that came through the window, of not breaking fast on the patio. Of not breaking silence, of not talking against the clatter of Joanna's silver coffee-service and the chiming of distant goat bells, for who would he talk to when he went back? He tried to make himself think what it was that he would in fact do, but he could not call forth a single image of substance. There were only negative images of what he would not do: he would not be washed over every afternoon by this beautiful light. No more minor rebirths. No more gifts he had not earned.

“What will you do?” he asked.

“When you leave, you mean?” He'd meant exactly that, though he wouldn't have said it, it being so obviously presumptuous. What could it possibly mean to her, a woman half his age? A married woman, and one with a lover, he was sure now beyond any doubt.

“Do laundry,” she said, “clean the tub.”

She was trying to diminish him. You're only our guest, she was trying to say, another person only who's soiled our sheets. Yet her sarcasm filled him with a flickering hope. He must find out what he'd done. It was impossible, he thought, that they keep interacting without him knowing what he'd attempted, what she'd allowed. He would go crazy if he bore back so many possibilities to Mt. Pleasant, where the days were still short, the darkness still quick to descend, the fields that hemmed the town still fallow.

“But what else? How else will you fill these long, Greek days?”

She said, coldly, “The same exact things I always do. Milk the goats. Make cheese. Tend the garden. Go to church.”

“And meet Phryxis in the afternoons and meet him again in the evenings.”

“We're friends, Father.”

“Please,” he said, “please don't tell me exactly what Phryxis told me.”

“He's Yianni's friend, and he's my friend.”

He understood why she was invoking her husband's name, but it made him angry.

“I'm not blind, Joanna. I saw you and him.”

With a tone of infinite weariness, she said, “What did you see, Father?”

“I know what I saw,” he said.

“And what was that?”

“You walk together over the fields while your husband is away. You seek each other out in the darkness. You steal away while he is trapped in front of the altar, so that you can embrace under the olive trees. You were in his arms. His fingers, they were -”

But he hated to think of Phryxis' fingers. He hated the images he was creating, of two people finding solace in each other. Of a precious refuge. He knew lust when he saw it. And he knew what she was doing by making him articulate what he'd seen. He had nothing, she wanted him to see, nothing that would convince her husband, nothing except his own feverish imagination.

“He's not a good person, Joanna. Don't you see, he wants you to be discovered? He wants people to know what you're doing together.”

“He's my friend. That's it.”

The same thing Eleithyia had said about Michael.

“He has a fiancée,” he said. “Maybe he says he doesn't love her, that he loves you best. I wouldn't be surprised. But he will marry her, or some other woman, do you know why?”

He could see some real emotion trying to get through the mask of patience she'd donned.

“Ask me why -”

She finally asked him, just like he knew she would. She was determined to humor him. If she could, she'd stymie him with patience. She'd be patient unto death.

“If this one in America doesn't marry him, he'll find someone else who will. He's the kind of man who has to have a woman to deceive. If he can't cause pain by it, then there'll be no pleasure in it for him.”

“I knew a man,” Joanna said, “who carried on an affair for nineteen years. This was in London. At first, he told his mistress that he couldn't leave his wife because they had children. But by the time I knew them, both of the kids were in uni already. And he was telling his mistress that he couldn't leave his wife because she'd be devastated. But on some level, he knew that she knew. She would tell people, the wife did, that they had an open relationship, so she didn't look like a victim. He knew she told people that. But when it was just the two of them, she pretended along with him that she had no idea. And he pretended, too. They both preserved the illusion of his subterfuge. If they didn't, it would have been him who would have been devastated.”

Christopolous could make no sense of this story. The man who wanted to believe in his wife's ignorance: was he Phryxis? Or Yianni? Did Joanna see herself as the

woman who preserved the man's illusion? He could not make out whether it were a story about the will to control or one about kindness.

“Did she love him?”

“Which one?” Joanna asked.

“The wife. Did she preserve her husband's illusion because he loved her?”

“I don't know,” Joanna said. “I didn't know her. Just him.”

“How did you know him?”

For a moment, Christopolous feared that she'd say that she was the mistress. But she'd only been in London for two years.

“He was a designer. Everyone knew him.”

“What a baffling parable,” he finally said.

She shrugged. “It happened.”

Christopolous had been diverted, and he'd lost his sense of purpose. As he tugged at the thread, she said, “You should probably roll up your window.”

Joanna was taking the curves more slowly than her husband had earlier, but they were still traveling at forty-five miles an hour, faster by a dozen miles than the human body was capable of. He'd been floating his hand outside the car, marveling at the warmth and the strength of the wind as it planed over its back. But as Joanna spoke, something like hot oil splattered into his palm. Instinct made him close his hand and draw it back into the car, and when his finger uncurled on his lap, he saw that he'd trapped a little rock. He turned the tarry pebble back and forth in the bar of moonlight that slanted through Joanna's window.

Loose gravel ker-chunked under the chassis, and the turpentine odor of asphalt filled the car. He and Joanna had traded relative positions to the sea. Now it glimmered beyond her profile, while the dry hills reached into the interior at his right. They'd turned onto the southern-loop road. Only ten minutes now, and they'd turn onto the peninsular road. Another ten, and they'd have tacked down the marshy pitch, and they'd be home.

The geography of the well-stocked pantry unfolded like a map in his head. The raisins, the olives, jars of jam, and the other, forbidden foods - the rings of cheese, the yogurt, and eggs, each egg nested in its own cardboard dimple: he saw exactly where they were, and what surrounded them, with an impossible clarity. He knew there were books next to his bed. He remembered that, for most of his adult life, he'd tried to read a chapter or two of something before sleeping, but he could not summon a single title to mind. He recalled the stores where they'd purchased the furniture – the sleigh bed, the cedar chest at its foot, the bureau, the vanity – but he could not fill them or cover them with the items of daily life. They might still stand in the furniture showrooms for all that his images of them suggested what he used them for, why they'd ever wanted them.

He said, “I know what infidelity looks like.”

“Please stop it.”

“Phryxis won't make you happy, Joanna.”

“Stop.”

There was that tone again of taxed but determined patience, that voice of reason, of forbearance. How Eleithyia must have hated him for it.

“He has no love for you. I've seen it. He has more love for your husband than he has for you.”

“You're going to say things you'll regret tomorrow.”

“In addition to what I've already said, you mean?”

For a moment, she sealed her lips, and he feared that she'd determined to say no more. But she changed her mind. She said, “You're drunk.”

She said it with scorn. An amateur mistake. She was not so good at it as he'd been, he thought, with a bitter sort of gratitude.

“So Phryxis said.”

She let her lover's name linger in the air between them for longer than he'd have thought she could. The silence stretched around it.

“He does love my husband. Perhaps he even loves me, as a friend.”

“You're not friends,” Christopolous said. To his surprise, he struck the dashboard. The little rock leaped out of his hand.

“You won't look at him when he talks. But when he walks away, you follow him with your eyes. You wouldn't have come with us today, except that Yianni forced you to. You would've stayed away if you could have. You don't say his name. That's not how friends treat each other.”

“What do you know of friends?” she cried.

“You didn't drink today,” he said, forcing his voice lower than hers, “because you worried that you might lose control and betray yourself.”

“Look what happened when you lost control.”

“What? What happened?”

The question nearly caught in his throat. The erotic tension was almost unbearable between what she did not want to tell him and what he did not want to tell

her. She was sleeping with Phryxis. He'd seen his hands up her skirt, and she knew that he'd seen it. But it had become a game, almost, an almost unbearably erotic charade, of him trying to get her to name it, without himself using the name. And likewise, circling her throat, if he had, in fact, done it: by the tacit rules of the game, she could be victorious by implying that he'd done something to shame himself, but, by the rules of the game, explicit accusation would be a loss.

So charged was the atmosphere in the car that Christopolous thought she was going to strike him. The hand that had been gripping the shifter shot toward him, and he actually shuddered in the thrilling anticipation of impact. But she only snapped down the passenger-side mirror.

“That's what happened.”

In the little square of glass, he saw the gray flaccidity of his face. He'd convinced himself that the moonlight had given him the brilliant definition of the milk-thistles and the guard rails. But his eyes, which were yellowish, were swelled, the distinction smeared between lids and lashes. He saw blemishes on his skin, and in his beard, he saw the residue of his being sick. This whole time, he'd been stealing glances at the olive leaf that clung to the back collar of Joanna's sweater, experiencing an erotic thrill, each time he saw it there, unperceived by her. And he'd carried his own vomit in his beard.

When he could no longer bear the sight, he looked away, but he lacked the courage to close the mirror.

“I was married for thirty-four years.”

“This isn't your wife's wake.”

“Oh god,” he said, “I'm not trying to excuse my behavior. I'm trying to tell you that I've – me and my wife – we grappled with infidelity.”

He tried to avoid the wrecked eyes of the old man in the mirror.

“Oh *my* god,” she said. Her emphasis 'my' reminded him of young Californians on American television. “That's what all this is about.”

“The point is -”

“I get it now. You want to convince yourself that everyone else is a cheater, so you don't have to feel so bad, so you can tell yourself that it's normal. It's something everyone does. The best of people, they're all unfaithful, just like you.”

“Not that it matters who was unfaithful, the point is that I do know. I know what it looks like, I know what it means, what its consequences are.”

“You cheated on her, and now you feel guilty. She's dead and you're miserable, thinking about what you did to her, and you want company in your misery.”

“I'm telling you, what matters is that I can help you.”

“What a load of crap!”

He knew it. In his own marriage, it had mattered a great deal who had done what, who was what, and it mattered just as much now in Joanna's marriage.

“It was her, if you must know.”

“Yeah, right,” he thought he heard her mutter under her breath.

“What was that?”

“Nothing.”

For a moment, he was excited by the possibility that she thought he was capable of – and not just capable but inclined to – commit adultery. The potential significances

of it were exciting. Was it because she wanted an all? Like she'd said of him, did she want company in her misery? The air shimmered for a moment with possibility. What mightn't he do if he were still on the right side of the cusp of drunkenness? But before the bubble could reform, he glimpsed himself in the mirror, and it was gone. He could not regather the feeling that had been dissipated when the mirror was slapped down.

They were approaching the turnoff. In the glancing light of the headlights, the beehives clustered along the ridge looked one-dimensional, like slabs in a graveyard.

"I'll tell you why it doesn't matter," he said, with an urgency that surprised him. "When it comes to a marriage, there are never parties who are all innocent or all guilty. It's all tangled up when you're married. You learn that, after you've been there a while. There's nothing that happens in a vacuum. All the mistakes you make, the sins you commit, you implicate your partner in them."

"Don't even."

"Don't what?"

She shook her head, as if it were obvious.

"Do not. It's a directive, isn't it? What is it I should do not?"

"What you should do," she said, sarcastically, "is roll your window down."

They'd left the high road behind and were already slinging around the first switchback. Sure enough, as the odor of tar receded, his own rose into its own place. When he did as she asked, oleander spears bristled into the frame. Rat-a-tat-a-tat, the overgrowth drummed on the car as they ratcheted down the peninsula.

"I truly don't believe that people are unfaithful because they recognize in the lover their rightful match, their soul mate or whatever people say. As if they'd recognize that

person as their perfect counterpart, if they were single, I mean. If they weren't stuck in a miserable marriage already, I think most people would hardly give their lovers a second look. I don't even think people are unfaithful because they're overcome by lust. Most people, I mean.” He was thinking about Phryxis.

Joanna was shaking her head. “Unbelievable,” she was muttering.

“They're responding. They're trying to get revenge, maybe. You don't love me, well then, they're saying. It's an absence they're trying to fill, something crushing them they're trying to push back against.”

“I can't believe you're putting this on her. And you think I haven't heard this shit before? This is classic Greek-man bullshit. A man cheats on his wife, it's because *she's* frigid. It's because *she's* let herself go. *She* doesn't make him feel like he's a man anymore. It doesn't occur to him that maybe she's exhausted from wrangling *his* kids and propping up his ego up all the time. That maybe she's tried and tried to get his attention, until there's clearly no point anymore. That she knows he's a cheater, so why in the world should she cater to him in bed when he's already getting it from someone else?”

“We're saying the same thing, aren't we?”

“Hardly.”

But he thought they were. He was trying to say that he was to be blamed, too, for his wife's infidelity, just like Metrios was to be blamed, in part, for Joanna's.

“I'm saying that I'm not here to chastise you, Joanna.”

She barked a single-syllable, mirthless laugh.

“How could you? I haven't done anything wrong, whereas *you* clearly have.”

He did not know why he should be so surprised at Joanna's persistent denial of what they both know was true. For ten years, Eleithyia had kept her confession to herself. He'd never stumbled onto his wife entangled with her lover, though.

“You're right. I never loved her like I should have. I didn't value her in the ways she wanted to be valued. I didn't see her how she wanted me to see her.”

“Oh please,” Joanna said. “For god's sake, stop trying to put it on her.”

“Can't you see I'm trying not to? I mean, you're right, I did. When she told me, I was a little glad just to have a tangible reason why we weren't happy together. Oh this is why, I thought, and I was relieved that it didn't have anything to do with me. But that was ridiculous. It had everything to do with me.”

“Yeah, it did. You cheated on her, and you're trying to blame her. You're trying to blame your dead wife for your fucking around.”

“I'm telling you,” he said, a little desperately, “that she's the one who had the affair. But it wasn't like I was blameless. Husbands' and wives' failures are entangled. You can't point to one person and say, 'You're to blame.’”

“So you didn't cheat on her?”

“I didn't have sex with anyone else, no.”

She was quiet for a moment.

“Who did she have sex with?”

“It was with my advisor.”

“Yianni's uncle?”

“Lord, no. No. My advisor in seminary.”

“Dr. Eoannis?”

It was surprising, he told her, that she'd remembered the name from yesterday.

“I guess this explains why you sounded so unhappy with him.”

He himself scarcely remembered talking about the old man, and he hadn't thought she'd been listening all that closely. He wondered how much else of what he'd said and done she'd silently remarked.

“Well, he's dead now.”

“Serves him then.”

He glanced over at her. Not so much moonlight penetrated the thicket of brush through which they traveled. The interior of the car was dark, and he could put no expression to her deadpan utterance.

“My wife's dead, too. Will you say 'serves her,' too?”

“I don't have to. You just did.”

Around and around the interior of the car rattled the pebble that had leaped from the road into his hand. Outside, the wind soughed through the overgrowth, bringing into the car the sickly-sweet smell of damp ground and oleander blooms.

“That's not very nice of you,” he said.

She uttered that sarcastic, one-syllable laugh again. But then, after a minute of silence, she asked if he could blame her. The entire day, he'd been obsessed with this idea that she was having sex with their neighbor.

“And I get it. I really do now. Your wife cheated on you, so of course you'd be distrustful of women. And I've seen that you care for my husband, which is lovely. He's never really had a protector-figure like that before. He respects you, Father. You want to make sure he doesn't get burned like you did. But for goodness' sake, try to imagine what

it would have been like if you were,” she corrected herself, “*when* you were twenty-eight, only married for a few years, and someone you've only known a few days accuse you of cheating on your wife. Try to think what you would do.”

“But I saw you, Joanna.” Even to his own ears, this protest was small, feeble.

“Are you?” she asked. “Are you imagining that you invite someone into your home, to sleep under your roof and eat your food, and then he insists to you that you're committing one of the worst sins possible? Especially if he's insisting it with all the conviction possibly granted by alcohol. What do you do then?”

They bumped to a stop in front of the gate. He'd missed the moment when they'd burst from the claustrophobic thicket and onto the plateau. Now, here they were, the headlights rinsing a milky yellow the sheets of dust rising around the car. And beyond the wire-wrapped boards of the gate, the symmetry of the Metrios' neat little house disrupted by a single window, his window, illuminated from within. The radiator ticked and hissed, and Joanna released her seatbelt with a clang.

“I'll get it,” he said, but before he'd fumbled his latch open, she was outside the car, stooping to get her shoulder under the top board of the gate.

He knew he should get out and help her, but he was transfixed by the sight of her in the twin spotlights of the car's beams. When she returned to the car, he saw, with a twinge of disappointment, that the olive leaf had disappeared from her collar. On the other side of the gate, he insisted that she let him close it, but when he'd tumbled from the car, he was doubled over by the bodily certainty that he'd be sick again. He mastered it when he became aware, amidst the rumble of the engine and the sifting of dust around him, that Joanna might be watching him, like he'd watched her, from the rearview mirror.

Only then did it reoccur to him that she was, despite what he'd said, being very nice to him. She might right now be driving the car up to the house, as was her husband's habit, and leaving him to catch up the distance on foot. But she waited as he struggled with the gate. And when he returned to the car, befuddled by that minor exertion, she didn't reiterate the point she'd been last making, the one about Christopolous' ungracious return of hospitality, but remarked, instead, that the goats would want milking. He could pretend her kindness was without ulterior motive. He wanted to pretend.

When she'd parked the car and choked off the lights, leaving twin afterimages on the exterior wall of the mudroom, he asked if he could help her with the goats.

“Nope. You're going in the shower.”

She made him go first through the mudroom, and she shut the exterior door behind them as he pried off his shoes. When he groped for the lightswitch, she leaned around him and flipped it, a few inches more to the left and higher than his memory had placed it. He longed to skate his fingers over the enamel plate just brushed by her fingers, but she was shepherding him through the kitchen and into the hall, past the landing of the staircase that led up to her bedroom, and into the bathroom. Again, as his fingers sought the light, hers maneuvered under them and deftly flipped the switch.

“I'll get you a towel.”

“Please, can I say one more thing?”

Joanna stood, bare-footed, in a honey-colored square of light that angled through the bathroom door and onto the maple floorboards in the hallway. He was desperate that she shouldn't go.

“Say it,” she said, “and then forever hold your peace.”

A joke. A warning sort of one, but not the kind of thing, nonetheless, that one on the defensive would say.

“It's none of my business what goes on between you and Phryxis” - her face twitched - “or you and Yianni for that matter. Like you said, I've only been here three days.”

And he would only remain for another three, he didn't say. In that pause of self-censure, she said, “there's nothing going on.”

“You were right, Joanna, about me still being affected by my wife's infidelity. But you think that I'm still angry at her, that I would still punish her if I could, and that's why I'm persecuting you, like you're a stand-in for her. But it's myself I can't forgive. It was my lack of love that drove her to Eoannis. It wasn't accident or desire that made her choose him, out of all the people in the world. You perceived that I didn't like him, and you thought it was because he'd slept with my wife. But I didn't like him because he was cruel. That's what I wrack myself over, not that they had sex, but that he was so cruel to her.”

“Oh please,” Joanna said, “You think about them having sex.”

She was wearing an arch smile he wished he didn't find so compelling.

“Back then, maybe. But these days, what I find myself thinking about is love. I wish I'd loved her more. She wouldn't have chosen Eoannis if I'd loved her more.”

“The vanity of Greek men. It never ceases to confound me.”

To his surprise, she stepped over the threshold into the bathroom. She moved around him and bent into the tub and turned the tap knob. Christopolous saw that white

dust was thumbed into the hollows of her ankles and powdered up the backs of her calves.

Over the squealing, which he'd anticipated this time, of the pipes, she said, "I like how in your narrative, you didn't love her as much as she loved you. Conveniently so. Because then when she chose another man, you could say, 'well, I could've stopped her, but I just didn't love her enough to try.'"

Water throbbed out of the pipes. It hissed against the backside of the plastic curtain with the sound of bacon seizing against a hot skillet. She angled the head away from the curtain and tucked its skirt into the tub.

"My narrative?" he croaked. Thirst had coated his vocal chords in fiberglass.

When she straightened, he saw that the spray had beaded her arms. He saw them like an aphid sees a dewdrop twenty times its own size.

"Yeah, in your version of the story, she didn't like your Dr. Eoannis, because he was mean to her. According to you, he treated her like trash. Poor her, right?"

She crossed her arms over her chest, and in the resultant depression of her shirt, he glimpsed the silvery leaf that had vanished from her collar. Lifting the gate must have worked it below her sweater and now its serrated edges pinned it, like a brooch, to the meeting place of strap and neckline.

Marshaling his concentration, he said, "He did treat her – like that. He was awful to us when we first knew him, when I was his student and she was his secretary. That's the real measure of meanness, how you treat people who are indentured to you. But he was awful to Eleithyia, too, when she returned to him on her own."

Joanna rolled her eyes, that provocative smile still playing about her lips.

“He humiliated her, Joanna. Sexually, I mean.”

“By having sex with her? Oh please.”

“Not just that.”

Joanna wanted to know what Eoannis had done. She would not be put off by Christopolous' insistence that it didn't matter.

She said, “You want to believe she didn't like it.”

“I know she didn't.”

“You have to believe it,” she said.

Steam had begun to plume around the edges of the curtain. The enamel surfaces in the bathroom were sweating, and the individual droplets on Joanna's arms had collapsed into a general slick. Her eyes glittered under damp temples.

“She told me she was.”

“Of course she would,” Joanna said, impatiently.

“She cried when she told me.”

“It's essential to you that you maintain this idea that she was humiliated by it. You'd be crushed if you had to admit the possibility that it wasn't humiliating for her.”

This strange animation that had possessed her, he recognized it. She was intoxicated by the possibility that this talk, his secrets, would lead to something. In the car, and before, in the vineyard, he'd wanted her to talk, and now she wanted him to. But what she wanted from it, he didn't know.

“She was angry at him for what he did.”

“Then tell me what he did.”

In the heat of the moment, she'd planted her hands on her hips. The leaf winked at him, like a military badge, from the flushed field of décolletage. The bathroom had become crowded with moisture, with his width and her height. What would she do, he wondered, if he reached out and took her in his arms.

“What is it about this word that's so riled you up?”

“You have no idea, do you, that it's a legitimate thing. Humiliation? Your poor wife, she slept with someone who wasn't her husband, how humiliating. It's a fetish, okay? Some people like getting humiliated.”

“I do know,” he said. Eleithya had told him. In the period not immediately following her confession, not the one in which she'd been exceedingly chastised and gentle with him, but the one following, in which she'd pushed back against his coldness, with her own intent to punish. During that time, she'd instructed him on aspects of human sexuality that he'd never cared to know about.

“The only thing that strikes me as humiliating about it is her having sex with a man who was thirty years older than her.”

She was taunting him. Pushing him. His whole body contracted with the desire to push back. To fold her spine over the lip of the sink. To grab her arms right below the elbow and push his thumbs into the gaps between the bones of her forearms. To overcome her with his weight.

“I'll tell you what he did.”

“Tell me,” she said.

Forgive me, Eleithya, he thought. Forgive me, dear Lord. “He tied her up and then he made her stand in the closet.”

“She was naked?”

He nodded. Joanna's stance was not so aggressive now. One hand now reached across her waist for the other hand, making a strange bouquet over one hip. She was leaning slightly toward him, the effort drawing her solar plexus into relief. Her mouth was a little open, waiting for more.

“He'd taken her – her underwear and put them in her mouth and then he made her stand there – like that.”

“And?”

She'd be disappointed if this was all there was, just the wife of a priest standing naked and bound in the dark closet of another priest. It made Christopolous furious that she demanded more. And yet, there was more he could tell and, the Lord forgive him, he found that he wanted to tell her what he'd told nobody else.

“He had his students over, the new crop of them, and he entertained them. He fed them dinner with her just feet away with her – her underwear in her mouth.”

“Did he let his students fuck her?”

Christopolous was floored by her rapacity, this leap of imagination.

“So he did?” she prompted.

“Of course he didn't.”

“Did he exhibit her to them?”

“No. She wouldn't – she wasn't - ”

“Did he talk shit about her to them?”

How would I know?” These possibilities had never occurred to him. He'd never been able to get past the image of Eleithyia's underwear, substantial cotton things with

the brand-name embossed on the upper strip of elastic and the double-tabs of laundry instructions flagged out the back. At the mere thought of them, his own mouth dried up like a fig skin.

“That's it? She was tied up in a closet?”

Anger felt like a swarm of live things squirming under his skin. Thousands of tiny legs, tiny pincers, tiny probosces searching for an exit. He felt crazy with it.

“What else do you want? What can I tell you about my dead wife that will satisfy you, Joanna?”

“That just doesn't seem -” Joanna swallowed. “Maybe she liked it.”

When she'd told him, Eleithyia's crying had nearly swollen her eyes shut. She'd been sobbing in rage. She'd been angry, at Eoannis, at herself, and most of all, at him.

“You said that I needed her to have hated it, but why in the world do you need her to have liked it?” What in God's name, Christopolous wondered, had made her so greedy for suffering.

“I don't need anything,” Joanna said.

“Then why? Why tell me she liked it?”

“People do like it.”

“Do you?”

“In London, I knew plenty of people -”

“I don't care about people in London. Joanna.”

She shot him a glare and whirled around to leave the bathroom. Before he understood what he was doing, he'd thrust himself in her way and gripped her elbows.

He let them go in a second, the moment that she opened her mouth to hiss “Let go.” He would have let go without that, he was so shocked by the coolness retained by her skin,

“I'm sorry, I shouldn't have -”

“Let me leave,” she said.

He became aware that he was still barring the door to the bathroom. The coolness of the hallway beyond licked at the back of his neck. In front of him, the steamy air churned in the wake of their sudden movements. He could distinctly see the space he'd occupied, could see the steam pouring into the cavity. The sight of it made his head swim. The threshold swelled under his feet, nearly tipping him back into Joanna's arms. He gripped the doorframe to steady himself.

“Please, I'm sorry,” he heard himself, a fool, as if any number of civilities could atone for laying his hands, however briefly, on her. “I just want to know why it's so important to you that she liked it.”

“Let me leave,” she said, again.

Her voice was cold. Her eyes dead, the snaps of fire in them smothered. He felt a stabbing sense of despair, of irredeemable failure: only moments ago, she'd been open to him, and he'd done something, flipped a one-way switch, to shut her down. Even her body had gone limp, her hands open at her sides. She offered nothing, not even the possibility of resistance.

“What's made you so eager to hear about this kind of suffering?”

“Yianni will be home soon, and I need to take care of the goats.”

“Yianni, he'll take care of you as long as you'll let him, you know that?”

“I’m done with this conversation,” she said, softly.

“He will. He’ll take care of you.”

“Let me leave,” she said.

It was devastating, her robotic repetition of this phrase. Stepping backwards into the hallway, he yielded the threshold. When she brushed past him, a ball of heat moved with her, in which the smells of perfume, sweat, and dust were highly concentrated. How must he smell to her, he wondered.

As if he were in a dream, he watched her recede down the hallway toward the illuminated archway of the kitchen. Like plunging into the cold bath after the sauna, escaping the bathroom had jolted him into incoherent. Ears ringing, vision crossed, he felt drunk all over again. The floor rippled up toward him, and he perceived on the wooden boards the glittering impression of Joanna's soles.

“I never loved my wife,” he said.

The words echoed in the dim hallway. Joanna did not turn around.

“To her dying breath,” he said, as she stepped over the threshold into the kitchen, as if she were passing into a place he knew he'd never reach no matter how long he dreamed, “I took care of her. But I never loved her.”

Finally, Joanna stopped and turned. The kitchen's light draped over her hair and her shoulders, a glowing mantle in which it was difficult to make out her face. Within that archway, with that light spilling behind her, she might have been an icon.

And as if she recognized that she'd passed beyond any ability of his to harm her, she said, “You're an asshole.”

“I’m worse than that. I’m a priest who’s never loved in his whole life. It’s all been work, every good thing I’ve ever done, they’ve all been deliberate acts, based on decisions to do what I knew I should do. No good thing has ever arisen naturally out of love. My whole life, I’ve just been words and ideas rattling around and around in a – a coffin. And here I am, almost dead, my wife whom I wasn’t good enough to love already dead -”

Just then, a bubble of air rose out of Christopolous’ belly. It passed through his throat, rendering him unable to continue, and erupted as a loud, wet hiccough. After all he’d said and done, he wouldn’t have thought he could still be ashamed. But he was.

“Oh my *god*,” she said, “are you *crying*?”

He tried to say that he was sorry, but these words, too, were wrenched out of his mouth as a hiccough. She struck at the lightplate, and the hallway was lit up with a wattage several times brighter than either bathroom’s or kitchen’s. He shrunk against the wall. He felt exposed in the light.

“You feel *sorry* for yourself,” she said. An accusation.

“I’m not” - hiccough - “crying.”

But, Joanna, at the other end of the hallway, appeared to be spangled in prisms. A fine, golden mist appeared to be curling from the kitchen.

“It’s your wife you should feel sorry for. Even if she did fuck some pervy old fuck.”

“I do,” he said. “I would, if it could do her any good now.”

“You should shower before Yianni gets home.”

A fresh occlusion of his vision absorbed Joanna into the swaying light, and as he knuckled his eyes, he heard the slam of the mudroom door. She was gone.

