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Mira

That Aris wasn't in Athens when I'd first arrived did not seem ominous at the time, though when I think of him telling me he'd be back in a few days I feel a quick flash of dread, a weight inside me.

A few mornings after I'd arrived, Aris returned from Brussels. I repacked a suitcase, leaving much behind, and headed to his place. I had planned to spend the summer living with him and working on a collection of essays, a departure from my usual scholarly work. From the sidewalk, I looked up at Aris's building, the old neoclassical house where I had lived last summer and stayed many times before. I could see Aris on the balcony, but he wasn't looking down, waiting for me; instead he faced the inside of the apartment, looking in at something not visible from the street. I called to him, and though he knew I was on my way a look of surprise passed over his

face, as if he didn't remember what I looked like, or what he was doing on that balcony in the first place.

But then he smiled, waved, and went inside to buzz me up. He met me at the landing and the moment I saw his face, of course, I knew something was wrong. In the corner of the apartment was the smaller shiny red suitcase I'd left last time. I did not yet know he'd filled it with all the things that had accumulated there over the years: books and clothing and a curling iron, several notebooks. When I see the pair of suitcases now in my own apartment, it's an obnoxious reminder of the humiliation I felt that day.

"It looks so nice in here," I said, moving through the flat, wheeling my suitcase behind me toward the bedroom. The place smelled lemony, freshly cleaned. The bathroom with fluffy white towels and the bed with light-blue sheets. Engagement gifts, though I didn't realize that until later.

It's when I stood in the doorway of the bedroom that he appeared behind me and put his hands on my shoulders. "Mira," he said. "We can't live here together." His voice was pained and tender but also that of a man who was expecting a fight.

It took me a minute to realize he wasn't saying he didn't want to live together but that he didn't want to be together at all. I don't remember how much he told me then and how much I learned after the fact. Another woman, it had happened so fast, he hadn't meant for it to become serious and now, he said, they were planning to marry. Her name was Eva.

Planning to marry. Also, she was having a baby.

I sat down on the bed.

"Mira. I couldn't tell you over the phone. It would have been cruel."

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“When is she due?” I asked, looking down at the floor.

“Late summer,” he said.

So she had already been pregnant when my parents died. “You could have told me, in Chicago. Or in Athens, after the funeral.”

“It felt inhumane. I’m sorry. There was never the right time.”

In a foggy state of shock I hauled both my suitcases back down to the landing—no elevators—refusing his help. Aris stood on the sidewalk with me and my bags, assuring me not *all* would change between us, that he still wanted me in his life. I got into a taxi, and I could feel him standing in the street, watching me drive away.



Later in the evening, a little drunk, I scrolled through my messages, not replying to anything. More texts from Aris—*Are you okay? Call me. Mira?*—as well as from Nefeli and my friends Dimitra and Fady. My father’s cousins had called, but I didn’t want to call them back. They had been anticipating an engagement, a wedding, and I didn’t want to give them the smug satisfaction of knowing it wouldn’t happen. They adored Aris, a handsome, hypereducated man with a new seat in parliament, but his involvement with me baffled them. They knew—because my mother had told them—that we both had imagined what our lives would be if I moved to Greece for good. Get tenure first, Aris had said. You’ll be glad you did. And I was glad he felt this way, but when I did finally get tenure I felt no differently. It was not that I was that attached to teaching. Besides, so little of my

job was teaching and so much was taken up with administration and meetings and navigating a department whose internecine struggles and alliances predated me. To be honest, I wavered between loving it and dreading it.

But perhaps Aris and I were both putting something off, or knew summers together, and Christmas, was enough, and maybe there wasn't anything wrong with that. But to my father's cousins it was not this complicated. To them I was not elegant enough, nor pedigreed enough, nor Greek enough; as if I had stolen him away from someone with better claims. I was their family, but I was not one of them.

Well. There would be *a* wedding. There was that.

Aris called again, several times, and finally I picked up.

"And she knows about me," I said.

"In the sense that you exist."

In the sense that I exist. I let him continue. *Do I exist.* I put him on speaker, set the phone on the table, needing the distance of his disembodied voice.

"That we had a history. I said your father was an old friend."

This was true. I'd met Aris three times before we really became involved: once, age eighteen, on the island, where I prowled around with friends from my freshman year; second, twenty-one, when I had a summer job bartending at an American bar on the island and he'd show up during my shifts, usually alone, and talk with me when I was not busy; and third, on the ferry, as a graduate student. This was the time that stuck. But he had loomed in my mind, my heart, since I was a teenager. He was part of me as I was forming, part of this place.

"That we were together, Aris. Can't you even say it?"

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“Well, were we? *Really* together? Not since we both lived in Chicago. Not physically—not day in, day out.”

“You’re revising our history.”

“That’s what history is. Revision. Point of view. Of all people, you should know that.”

It was the meanest thing he ever said to me.

“Mira?” he asked finally.

“I’m fine,” I said. Aris wanted it to already be *after*, not understanding that the only way out is through. There was also the fact that he and my father had been particularly close. I understand that it would have been harder for Aris to leave me had my parents still been alive; once they were gone he had an escape.

“Would you even have wanted this?” he asked. “Marriage, a baby.”

“Of course,” I said, though neither of us completely believed me.

He was quiet, and he knew as well as I did that I had always resisted what was expected of me. Though I imagined marriage could be a beautiful thing, for me somehow it represented a sort of erasure. Couples often depressed me, and neat little families even more so. I don’t know. Maybe I would have wanted it now, here, the different me in this different country.



The next morning, I called Nefeli and told her what had happened with Aris. I was dreading saying it out loud, as if saying it would make it true. But it was already true.

Half an hour later, she was at my door, telling me I looked terrible. She wore a black-and-white-striped T-shirt, jeans, boots, a red scarf wrapped stylishly around her neck. She didn’t seem surprised.

I could not block her out, nor could I hide anything from her. I returned to Athens each year and was seamlessly integrated back into her life, the rhythm of her days. What happened all those other months? I didn't know. We video-chatted from time to time, but since my parents had died everything blurred together.

I asked her if she wanted a coffee, and she followed me into the kitchen, her eyes resting on the new countertops, the modern light fixtures, the empty bottle of wine on the dining room table, the paper bag of my finished beers and my mother's empties still on the floor. "What the hell," she said.

My head hurt.

I pretended not to notice the disarray—how often in the next few months I would willfully ignore something right in front of me—and poured us each a cup. "Don't drink so much, Myrto," she said. "Especially alone like this. It will only make things worse."

She held the warmth of the pale-blue mug close to her cheek for a few moments before she took a sip. She looked around at the sunny colors. "Haroula redid this?"

"My mother," I said, and her face showed some relief that it had not been Haroula who'd re-created the apartment, as if to rid it of Nefeli's presence. As a young girl I did not question the finer points of their relationship; they were simply Haroula and Nefeli. It was only after my freshman year in college, when I returned for the summer, that I finally knew them as lovers, partners, together. My parents had never explicitly mentioned their involvement but never denied it either. I suppose they might have been more socially progressive than I'd credited them for.

When I was a graduate student, in ethnographic studies, I read an anthropologist's study on women in same-sex

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relationships in an unnamed Greek town. Many of them were married to men, had children, and did not refer to themselves as lesbian or queer. It might sound like they were victims of a conservative society, certainly true, but there was a wonderful progressive fluidity to it as a result: you can defy the system if you refuse to let it define you. It struck a chord with me, the freedom found between the lines and the way the women had navigated conflicting identities, broke barriers. I found myself deeply fascinated by these women, their nonchalance, their structured freedom. I am not making the hetero mistake of thinking that lesbian relationships are any easier than those between anyone else. It was this particular group, unwilling to declare one identity, that fascinated me. Was it oppression, or freedom? What intrigued me most was the way relationships were ended, the ritualistic collective grieving. How do you say goodbye to a relationship? I had never been good at clean breaks, old loves trailing behind me like shadows.

When we'd finished our coffees, Nefeli suggested we go to the sea, which to her was the balm for everything. Though in my opinion it was still too cold to swim, the sun was warm, and we'd eat lunch by the water. She had been working hard preparing an upcoming show, her biggest ever, and declared it would be good to get out of Athens.

She followed me into the bedroom as I gathered a few things for the beach. "Suffering is a chronic state," she said as I threw things into a small bag. "I'm in this room with you, you see, and I've got this gun. And I'm holding it above you, waving it around your head, I'm chasing you around the room, and you're wondering if and when I'll shoot."

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I didn't know then if she was talking about Aris or Greece, though later that summer, after she disappeared, I understood she'd been talking about herself. But Nefeli often spoke like a sibyl, and it had always seemed that she could sense things most others could not. I was also used to moments of deep joy with her: nights we'd laugh until we gasped for air, our stomachs aching. Just that morning, an old picture of us had popped up on social media: years earlier, the two of us drunk and laughing at a party on the island, me sitting on her lap at a crowded table.

She wandered out of the bedroom, and I heard the door to the apartment open as she headed into the foyer.



When we arrived, we dropped our things on the beach and took off our shoes. The sun felt marvelous. Usually Nefeli donned her goofy bathing cap and swam many laps back and forth, even when the weather seemed too cold. Today we both rolled up our jeans and shrieked as the water washed over our toes.

The day was bright, the sky a wild, changing blue. At the other end of the beach, a thin woman stood in a bathing suit and flippers, staring at the large rock in the distance, as if wondering what she was thinking in contemplating a swim. A bit farther down, at the end of the cove, was a beach chair nestled in the sand, a book atop it. Otherwise, we were alone. We walked through the scraggly beach grass up to the taverna that overlooked the sea. Light shimmered through the olive trees like an invitation to another world. We chose a table in the sun and ordered coffees.

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Behind us sat a man alone, reading the paper. Across the terrace a blonde woman drank a frappé, while her two matching curly-headed children talked animatedly. She seemed genuinely happy. The man was cute, with faded jeans and a blue T-shirt. Brown hair messy from the beach, another cold-morning swimmer.

My phone lit up with two messages from Aris.

Nefeli glanced at it sitting between us. “This relationship will destroy you. Trust me.”

“No longer a relationship,” I said.

She looked at my phone. “I know Aris,” she said. “He’ll want it both ways.”

Maybe that was true. But did *?* Nefeli turned around to face the man behind us, and for a moment I thought she was going to ask his opinion. Instead, she asked for a cigarette, and when he leaned over to light it his eyes were on me. I smiled with closed lips. He offered me one but I declined. All this took place silently, in the span of a few seconds, but Nefeli caught it and rolled her eyes. He went back to his reading.

I looked out to the beach. The woman with flippers was now swimming toward the rock. Nefeli’s words stung; less warning than accusation. She might have been right. But perhaps *I* had been the one who’d wanted it both ways, who’d grown comfortable inhabiting, straddling, two worlds.

“Just be careful,” she said.

I wanted to change the subject so I asked Nefeli about her upcoming show. She said it was bad luck to talk about it. I asked instead about her love life. A woman she’d been seeing was married to a man, which didn’t work out too well; there was a woman

she liked in her tango class. “You’d think it would eventually go away, as the body changes. But no: desire is desire.”

We walked back across the cool sand and arranged our blankets facing the water. I pulled my shirt off over my head and lay down on my stomach. Nefeli was telling me about spending more and more time on the island, even teaching a community art class in the big municipal building at the top of the hill, at the port. “Mostly British divorcées,” she said. “Widows.” Her soft chatter was comforting. And as she spoke, I was surprised by my eyes welling up. Nefeli paused. She placed her hand on the small of my back. “I’m sorry,” she said. I closed my eyes and felt hot tears stream down my face. We stayed like this for a while, her hand offering me both comfort and permission. We didn’t speak. I listened to the waves pile up against the beach, then recede, steady and reliable.

I dreamt of swimming, of my mother swaying on a boat, telling me to breathe: *One two three four five breathe*. When I woke an hour later, disoriented, Nefeli was still staring at the water. I glanced at her through half-closed lids, and for a moment I saw my mother, young, smooth skinned, embroidered dress, bottle of beer at her hip. *It’s written on the body*, she said, or maybe it was Nefeli.

I rolled onto my side and Nefeli turned to me, noticing I was awake.

“Myrto, do you think I’ll ever have sex again?”

I hoped the simultaneous surprise and relief in my face came off to her as amusement. “Definitely. Why wouldn’t you?”

“I don’t know. Eventually there is a last time, no?” She was quiet again. “He was looking at you, that man.”

I laughed. “He was looking at my breasts.” I couldn’t tell if she was telling me to distract me, or to make me feel bad.

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Nefeli's face changed then, her eyes focused on my chest. "Yeah," she said. "That's what I said." She paused, looked back out at the sea. A sailboat had appeared in the distance. "You should just chop them off. Get it over with."

Her tone was matter-of-fact, but there was something else there, something that gave me the same hot wash of shame my mother could give in an instant.

I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. Our relationship was tinged with something I'd never been able to name, something she occasionally threw in my face.

"Haroula wouldn't tell your family about me," she finally said. "We hid twenty years of our life together. Do you know what that does to you, to be hidden?" She raised her water bottle to her mouth, drank. She wiped her lips with the back of her hand.

"I can imagine," I said.

"I couldn't handle her shame. In my fifties there were others. And then I just got tired of people. All the shit they bring with them. I meet someone new and too quickly see the beast beneath.

"Among our friends it was fine. Artists. But when Haroula and I walked hand in hand in London, or in New York? So nonchalantly? I still cannot believe that was me. Never in Athens. Maybe it was just the freedom of travel. But I don't think so."

They'd been together, on and off, for eighteen years. Then Haroula moved to London, though she'd spent her last years back in Athens, in my apartment. But that was only the beginning of the end. Their relationship was a slow, painful fade.

"Most of my friends who are lesbian, queer, have always known," she continued. "Yet only half of them are out to their families. Maybe it's different now, for young people. I can see it.

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But Greece is still a terrible place to be queer.” She told me she’d had a quiet but vibrant community here, though after she and Haroula broke up she broke away from them. It was too painful.

I nodded, keeping my gaze on the flat expanse of the sea. Somehow we’d never spoken of this before. “And your parents?”

“We fought over politics, not sex,” she said.

How could we distinguish the two? How could we extricate identity from anything, from politics, from the art we make, the stories we tell, the things we feel? But I knew to drop it.

She pulled her beach bag onto her lap and began rooting around for something. “People become uncomfortable when you can’t be pinpointed. Ambiguity makes people nervous. I’ve had two loves of my life, very different. One was when I was very young. It was also something we kept hidden. He was married.” She looked up at me to see my reaction.

“Not judging.”

“We were in a camp together during the junta.” Nefeli pulled out a little metal cigarette case painted with a watercolor of the Eiffel Tower. Inside were several tightly rolled joints and a pale-green lighter. She lit one of the joints, took a long drag, and then continued. “I loved this man, also an artist. It was mostly emotional anyway. Chaste. I was confused then; I didn’t understand my own sexuality. But it didn’t matter: he walked off the boat into the arms of his wife, the first I’d known of her. I remember her trench coat, her open, happy face, and I knew I never again wanted to be a ridiculous girl.”

Even though I had not known her then, Nefeli was easy to imagine as a teenager: the wide, amber-colored eyes, her hair still long and shiny and black. She continued: “He loved me like a

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little pet you take care of. You know what can happen to women in those camps. And when we returned, when the junta was over, he asked Nikos”—she paused, in case I hadn’t yet made the connection, though I just had—“the Captain’s father, to look after me. For years, I think he bought my paintings, instructed by this man. Eventually I think he gave them to Haroula.”

Nefeli stubbed out the rest of the joint, put what was left back in the small metal tin. “The body and mind are the same thing,” she said. I suggested lunch. We walked back to the taverna and sat at a table half in the sun, for me, and the shade, for Nefeli. Both the blonde woman with the kids and the handsome man were gone. Now, a table of sunburned tourists drank beers from frozen mugs.

We sat there a long time, ordering first a salad and then some fried zucchini that only I ate, and some fava. Nefeli didn’t eat meat and refused to sit with others if they did. We shared a beer and then another. Eventually she got up to use the bathroom, and when she returned she declared she had paid the bill, that she was tired and wanted to leave.

Nefeli immediately fell asleep as I drove, but after twenty minutes she awoke. We were nearing the center. The traffic was terrible. A strike, a protest, a 5K run—Nefeli wasn’t sure. “You know which two countries report the highest levels of stress?” she asked, staring out the window. I glanced at her so she’d go on, and she turned to me. “Greece and Iran.” She let out a deep breath.

The road felt like an enormous parking lot. Young men wandered between the stopped vehicles, dangled gadgets and toys in front of windshields, a captive audience in the gridlock, and I was surprised when Nefeli handed a man a couple of euros for a little wind-up toy.

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After an hour we reached Nefeli's, and I parked her car in the lot below her building. We each got out and hugged goodbye, but she hesitated before taking the elevator up. "I need to show this to you," she said, scrolling through her phone. "I'm sorry I waited this long."

I was hoping it had to do with her new work, something from her show. But it was an online magazine, and not even one of the more horrible ones, basically hypothesizing Aris and Eva as a couple. Eva was a fairly well-known actress, Greek French. In the past she'd done mostly smaller, artful movies, often French, but a new international hit with a Greek director had catapulted her into the spotlight. And Aris, after all, was a rising politician. They were both attractive and intelligent, and the Greek newspapers ate this up. I couldn't bear to read it and handed Nefeli back her phone. "I'm sure these sorts of things are everywhere."

"Scroll down."

I did and was startled by my younger self, smiling like an idiot, walking up a marbled, narrow island street. It was more than a decade ago; I don't think I was even thirty. I wore cutoff jeans and a blue bikini and held an ice cream cone—who knows where they'd unearthed this photo. The picture was juxtaposed with a horribly unflattering shot of Eva smoking a cigarette, looking angry. I had seen her in movies years before and knew she was beautiful, but the photo unfairly depicted a tired, too-thin actress who was not aging well.

Until, of course, the love of a man changed that: the next photo told a different story, the two of them together, each looking impossibly youthful. Eva had a deep intelligence in her eyes.

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Aris was smiling big, looking at something out of the picture, and Eva was looking up at him. When was this taken?

“I’m glad you showed me.” Of course I felt sick.

“You’re lying,” she said. “But in case someone else brought it up.”

“Who else reads this nonsense?” I asked. I was furious at the stupid magazine. It might as well have read, *Upcoming politician rejects well-fed American and transforms aging, starving Greek actress.*

Aris had stayed with me those two weeks after my parents’ deaths, in Chicago, helping me clean out their things. From there we made arrangements about where in Athens they would be buried. He tossed cardboard boxes of old magazines into recycling bins as if he were shooting baskets, and we made a race of how much we could discard in the shortest amount of time. I ran in and out of the house in a frenzy, but when I found the boxes of my father’s old records, I crumpled into Aris’s chest, and we didn’t do any more with the dumpster that night. I’m trying to reconcile those tender moments with the fact that already, at that time, he was with Eva. The worst part of a betrayal is trying to reconstruct the events around it: what you knew then and what you know now. But I have to believe his tenderness then was sincere and not simply a manifestation of his guilt, of the fact that his second narrative was occurring simultaneously. I know human relationships are complex and multilayered and fluid, that it is possible to feel things for more than one person, to want two opposing things. Eventually, you have to choose.

Still, it didn’t make it any easier to handle.

But besides the shame of Aris’s other romantic narrative, I felt spied upon retrospectively, as if something had been taken from

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me without my knowing it. Even in our tell-all, display-all world, I use social media sporadically. The few photos circulating of me have been posted not by me but by friends. Perhaps it's the dissonance that's too much, the fragments that never make a whole: here I am in a bikini on the beach, here I am with a glass of wine and a big grin, here I am giving a lecture, here I am by the sea.

I told Nefeli I'd see her that weekend, at Fady and Dimitra's. Then I turned and headed down the sidewalk toward my apartment.

I admit that I don't always see the things people say about Athens—it's dirty, it's chaotic. Sometimes I'm not even sure what people are talking about. It's a city. There's traffic. If anything, people are always sweeping the sidewalks and washing the staircases. But after the sea that day, the freshness of the breakup and the sting of those photos, Athens felt like an assault, like all its violations were announcing themselves to me, questioning my decision to be there—the traffic stopped everywhere and people honking their horns, frustrated in their cars. Every car, it seemed, confined couples and lovers bickering over the route not taken; or sitting silently, the passenger staring at their phone and the driver at something ahead they could not see. I noticed all the boarded-up buildings, the closed businesses. I ducked down a side street and passed a young man in a blue-and-black flannel shirt rolling up his sleeve, his other friend watching, waiting. Sure, you might have run into a person strung out near Omonia, wandering around the Archaeological Museum, far before this new crisis. I distinctly remember Haroula telling me, when I was eighteen, in English, as if this could not be uttered in Greek: *Watch out for junkies*. Yet unless I was in a particular neighborhood at night, I

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never really noticed, but Nefeli, who seemed to absorb the shame of the entire nation, claimed people shot heroin on the streets the way Americans walked around with their giant cups of coffee. If my American friends had said something like this I would have bitten off their heads.

And wouldn't this be the same in any city? But I admit, it was jarring against the backdrop of those grand neoclassical buildings, that architectural trilogy. And I admit I had my blind spots with this city, a city people either Orientalized or romanticized, two versions of the same sin. Even though it was the city of my birth, perhaps because of it, I was surely guilty of both. There's no such thing as perfect vision, true, but how to rid oneself of blindness?

As I walked through the last of the traffic I was relieved to be walking alone, moving freely between the cars, up the sidewalks, through the park, and up along the side of Lykavittos, spared most of the mess.



Back at home, I went to my balcony. I think I was hoping to find the Captain, but his apartment was quiet. Around ten, I heard his key in the door and soon after I smelled cigarette smoke. I stepped out onto the balcony and waited until he registered my presence. A shift in his seat, a change in the air. *Kalispera*, Captain.

He returned the greeting. I heard the ice clink in his glass.

When I was a child my mother would pour her first drink immediately after her classes. She'd make me dinner and pick at something herself. My friends' family dinners were an endless

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source of fascination. Mothers who ate at the table! Or my best friend's mother, who always washed dishes while her husband and four girls ate; another lived only with her mother and brother, and after school her brother made us chocolate chip pancakes for dinner as he drank beer from a can. He was seventeen, usually shirtless. I loved him deeply.

"Were you close with your mother?" I asked.

"Very," the Captain said, as if the forwardness of my question were routine, as if we'd always spoken this way.

"I'm fascinated by people's mothers. But I was most comfortable in the houses where they felt invisible," I said. "Or crazy." As a young girl I had had the sense that it was my duty to take care of my mother, not the other way around.

I heard the Captain exhale. Shift in his chair.

I continued:

"The nights my father was gone, playing bouzouki in Greek-town, my mother watched television in the den and drank. Sometimes I confused her cries with those that came from *ER* on television. I would wander from my room, where I talked on my princess telephone to friends, and stand at the door like a sentry. Sometimes she realized I was there and the cries stopped, the bad dreams. Maybe drunken hallucinations. I don't know. When my mother began sleeping in that room for good I told my child-self that she liked the television, which my father did not."

Even then I had known the power and comfort of a good, solid lie.

"Those nights, when she stopped the bizarre mix of conversation and terror-stricken cries she'd have with herself, I was released from my duty. But I never went back to my bedroom.

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I'd fall asleep in the high-ceilinged living room, watching television—*Saturday Night Live* or a movie or those ridiculous nighttime soaps that I stupidly loved. In that large room I felt safe on the couch but terrified to move, to pass the den door, afraid my mother would stir from her drunkenness and say something unintelligible or mean. So I'd remain on the couch until my father returned from his nightclub and carried me up to my room."

The smell of tobacco in his shirt pocket had signaled that I was off duty and could collapse into childhood again.

"My mother never got over leaving Greece," I said. "She left for my father." I know now my mother's excitement for a new life, those last days in Athens, had been a manic state of denial. "Each visit back was painful to her, yet being away was even worse."

"The scourge of the exile," the Captain said. "Not being able to forget."

"My mother existed in two places but lived nowhere, whereas my father existed in two places and lived everywhere." I am sure my mother had moments of happiness in Chicago, but I don't remember them. The closest I could remember was when she pattered around in her small rock garden in our yard, or sat in the early autumn sun, reading. On the island, things felt a little better, but I think she was always thinking of the moment she'd have to leave.

The Captain didn't say anything, but I could feel him listening, as if he'd been listening to me for years. He did not ask many questions, and I liked him for this. It was not aloofness or disinterest. Something else. A sense of space, not distance. It occurred to me right at that moment that everything with my mother had been performance. But pain all the same.

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My parents, and me by proxy, were not always aware of two worlds but were always aware of themselves from the perspective of the other one. It seemed that the traits of my personality were always viewed as a product of my Americanness, not my Miraness. For instance, I was nearly always on time. My parents' sense of time, which I do not attribute to their Greekness but to something else, infuriated me as a child. I was late to school plays, to school, to birthday parties; I was often the last to be picked up. My father would begin lathering his face to shave at the time they were supposed to be at a dinner.

"What time is it there?" my parents would ask a relative when they spoke, as if the rules for time elsewhere moved forward of their own accord, that those eight hours were as arbitrary and changeable as my mother's moods. The only time they kept sacred was the evening weather report, before which my father would angrily hush any conversation or noise, as if our quiet obedience would ensure the early arrival of spring, and the nightly Lucky Lotto drawings broadcast on WGN.

But their dual identities were clear. When in Greece, they saw things through American eyes, and when in America, through Greek eyes. My father flourished like this. He loved it, he fed off it, he became a larger version of himself. But my mother, I think it slowly killed her. She was displaced in Chicago, and when she was back in Greece she felt a more acute, sad kind of displacement. She didn't exist fully formed in either place, and she slowly melted away.

Had I said all this out loud, or to myself? I was suddenly sleepy, but when I said goodnight to the Captain and fell into bed, sleep would not come. The bed felt hard, and I tossed and

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turned, my eyes wide open. But I must have slept eventually because I woke to the sound of a woman's screams. First I lay there, unsure if I was dreaming. I suppose I'm still not certain—there is a small chance it was a dream, and for many consecutive nights in that apartment I'd awake completely confused. But even as I say as much, I feel my guilty conscience: I could no longer blame the disorientation of jet lag, or even a new space. And because of this I cannot shake the feeling of shame that accompanies this confession: lying in bed, unable to even move my arm to reach for the phone, sheer terror surrounded me as a woman screamed for help. I could have immediately dialed the police, I could have gone out to the balcony and called to her. Maybe even if I had made my presence known, the assailant would have run. Maybe she was with a lover, an episode of violence unfolding right in front of their home.

Her screams for help were clear and deliberate. *Voítheia*. Help. And they became more frantic, more terrified, more muffled. They were from a living body, they were not my imagination, but I could not move.

Finally, the silence released my limbs and I was able to tear myself out of the bed and onto the balcony. I called the police and explained to them where I was. I called out to her.

But I was too late. The night had swallowed her up.

The next night, I asked the Captain about the screams. Though he slept with his balcony doors open, he said he had not heard a thing. The ship made him a light sleeper, he added. Always ready for an emergency.

“You really heard nothing?” I asked.

“Not even the cats,” he said.

NATALIE BAKOPOULOS

I wasn't sure where the screams were coming from. Lykavittos? Near the stadium? Sometimes what sounded like music from a party in the next building was coming from the park that was a fifteen-minute walk away. But I know these are excuses that I make because of the helpless shame of lying in my bed, my shoulders pinned down by fear.

"Are you okay?" he asked, finally. "Mira?"

I realized sleep had taken hold in the chair and I'd been dreaming of driving around with large green-and-turquoise sea charts I could not read, trying to place one into my eye like a giant contact lens. I told him this.

He laughed, a deep, gentle laugh. "You remind me that I haven't paid attention to my dreams. I'm probably having them but my sleep has felt blank."

"That sounds wonderful. I'm often teaching in my dreams, about to lecture on a subject I know nothing about."

He was quiet. I wasn't used to talking to someone who didn't interrupt each sentence. I continued. "Except suddenly I'm bartending, my boss complaining about the wrong drink, words spilling out of her glass, across the television screens while I fumble with a tiny lock on luggage, or try to dial a phone number."

"Me, driving a car into the water and sinking; or worse, watching my kids drown and not being able to help them. Of water, of blindness, of rock."

I was quiet, trying to imagine his kids. Twins.

"I've never told that to anyone," he said.

"Terrifying." The woman and her scream came back to me. But it had not been a dream. "So hard to explain." I paused. "A dream cannot exist in words."

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“Is that—”

“From *Maria Nephele*,” I said.

“Elytis.” He seemed disappointed. Elytis bored him, he said. The sun, the sea, we get it. He spoke a bit more but I felt drowsy, suddenly sleepy.

Later, I woke draped with a white blanket that was not mine and a vague image of him handing the blanket to me, a quick glimpse of his face. I rose from my chair, went inside, and flopped down onto my bed, feeling an odd rush of euphoria.