

*To Marina and Vaia,
for the horizons
we explore together.*

*To my father,
for the worlds he has created
through the stories he told me
these past forty-five years.*

*It takes a minute to have a crush on someone, an hour
to like someone, and a day to love someone. But it
takes a lifetime to forget someone.*

Oscar Wilde

*Many thanks to Simone Arnaboldi,
Errikos Tzavaras, Iris Gioti,
Andreas Manolikakis, Lilia Dimaraki
and Chrisovalanti Leftaki*

FEELING THE SOFT sea breeze brush against my skin, I half opened my eyes and glimpsed that faint red light that tints the horizon to announce the coming daylight through the slits in the wooden shutters.

I lay still for a few moments watching the early colors of dawn play across the brightening sky. I got up as softly as I could and stood at the balcony doors to admire the beauty unfolding before me, the soft breeze drying off the moisture on my naked body.

A sliver of a moon was still discernible, as if making a last stand against the arriving sun before slowly and bowing out.

Further out, a small boat was indolently entering the port, carving a white trail on the still surface of the water. To my right, the imposing masses that loomed unmoving, as if suspended from the sky with invisible thread, cast imposing dark shadows on the blue waters. One of the shadows looked almost human, a body that had lain down on the rocks a long time ago and become one with the boulder with the passage of time, its frozen space forever staring into the vastness of the universe.

I always felt awed by these bizarre land sculptures, awed and irrationally afraid that they would suddenly come lose and crush everything beneath them.

Fears do not fade with age after all. You always stumble upon them, inexplicably, as if someone has carved them inside you, deeply and irrevocably, to follow you and rise up even at the most wonderful moments of your life.

Absorbed by my thoughts and the images of the waking day, I did not sense Anita rise and come towards me until she wrapped her arms around me and rested her head on my shoulder. I felt the heat of her naked body seep into mine and stepped back ever so softly to bridge any gap between our bodies. She hugged me tightly in response.

We stood there silently, afraid that sound, any sound, would mar the perfection of that moment. Our heavy breaths were all that could be heard, her body perfectly fitted against mine.

Turning to face her, I saw in her eyes that she had wanted to share with me the rising dawn. Spontaneously, our lips met and our hands reached out to explore every inch of flesh.

Through half-opened eyes, I saw our figures against the early morning colors reflected in the mirror across the room. It was like a shifting painting, the shapes altering as our bodies moved, until the outline blurred into an indeterminate shape.

I was holding her so tightly her feet no longer touched the ground, and locked in my arms as she was, she wrapped her legs around my waist as if executing a dexterous dance move, seeking our absolute union.

Untamed passion set the rhythm of our movements, while the first rays of sunlight peeked through the thin curtains fluttering in the gentle breeze.

We stayed there kissing, breathless, waiting for the intensity of our feelings to subside, letting our selves wallow in them.

“Good morning”, I said, brushing away the long brown locks that fell softly in her eyes.

Her smile lit up the room. “Good morning”, she replied softly.

We gazed deeply into each other’s eyes and then burst out laughing, not knowing why and not caring to find out. We just let ourselves sink into the unforced intimacy of the moment, kissing and teasing each other until a knock on the door sharply brought us back to reality.

The crumpled sheets on the bed and our clothes flung across the whole room betrayed the magical night we had spent together. I caught a glimpse of the hotel telephone on the floor, the receiver off the hook.

“What time is it?” she wondered and moved to pick up her phone from the bedside table. “Ten missed calls...Oh no, it’s already nine thirty”, she gasped and hurriedly wrapped herself in one of the loose sheets. “Who is it?” she asked looking at the door, although she already knew it could only be one person.

“It’s me Miss Hertz. Electra”.

Anita cracked the door open ever so slightly to prevent the girl at the door from seeing me standing naked across the room and sheepishly greeted Electra.

Electra was a production assistant, looking after the actors and in charge of their schedules. Short, sweet and

slightly overweight, she pulled back the hair hanging down the unshaved half of her head. “Good morning, sorry bother you, but I’ve been calling your room and your cell phone, and I realized you must have overslept, we are due on location at ten, and the monastery of Aghios Mámas is a bit far away”, she said in one breath.

“I know Electra, I’m very sorry. I must have forgotten to set my alarm and the phone...I guess I did not hand up properly. I’ll be down in five minutes, ok?”

“Yes, Miss Hertz. The others will have set off, but I’ll wait for you”.

“Thanks, I’ll be as fast as I can. Again, I’m so sorry and please call me Anita, ok?”

“Yes, of course, Miss Hertz...errr, Anita. Sorry”, Electra said and, before Anita had a chance to close the door, added in a louder voice, “Good morning, Mr. Voudouris. Have a nice day; I’ll let you know soon what time you’re due on set on Monday”.

She walked off, leaving both of with the same stunned expression on our faces. We were both aware everyone knew about us, but not to the extent of knowing when and where we met. We were in the middle of shooting and had to be more careful. It did not matter that our lives seemed to be following the script we were filming, we had to be professional about it.

Electra had just shattered the illusion of secrecy we were under up until that moment, although we both knew that whatever was happening between us would not affect our work. We were fully conscious that we were mixing work with pleasure and we were handling that in the best possible manner, as we had done from the first moment we’d met, at the screen test.

On my side, I had been feeling lucky to have been cast in such a sought-after part. Now, simple as it sounds, happiness had been added to that heady mix despite the small amount of time that had lapsed, despite the fact that we were only just getting to know each other.

She was already famous, mostly in Europe. Not even thirty yet, she had a career that anyone would envy, with parts in international films, awards and acclaimed theater performances. I never would have imagined she would be so unaffected and approachable in person. Not a spectacular beauty, she had a unique, strange allure that won others over. Her eyes, the way she moved, her expression were captivating.

I watched her dash around the room getting ready and realized how much I wanted this relationship to last. Did she feel the same way about this?

Putting an end to my musings, Anita came near me, a small smile on her face. "Just think what they must be saying about me. I'm late on set, I sleep with my co-star..." she said and kissed me goodbye.

I took her hand, trying to keep her near me for another moment. "I don't know how much sleep *you're* getting...I've hardly gotten any", I said teasingly, and then, in a more serious tone, "People may be talking but they stop when the camera starts rolling Anita. That says a lot about you. You are an amazing professional and perfect for this part. I'm so happy to be in this film with you, to be acting alongside you".

We gazed at each other, letting our eyes do all the talking and jumped at the sound of the ferry boat's horn as it entered the port.

"Isn't that your ferry?" she asked.

“Yes, I guess”, I hesitated, still caught up in the moment.

“Then you’d better hurry or you’ll miss it”. She looked at me sweetly as she moved towards the door.

“You’re right; I’d better get back to my room and pack. You know I would have loved to stay and spend these three days with you, right?” I asked as I walked her to the door.

“I know, but I understand how important getting to that island is to you. First ever visit”.

“Not exactly *first* visit...”

“That time doesn’t count, nobody saw us”, she said, giving me another kiss and not seeming in any hurry to leave the room. “Anyway, it’s only three days, they’ll fly by and we’ll be together again before you know it”.

“I wish you could come with me. Maybe I should put this trip off and we could go together, when filming is over”, I suggested, stroking her hair.

“Don’t tempt me to say yes, when I know how much it means to you to get there now. I’ll be here, waiting for you. Go, find your answers and then we’ll go together and stay awhile. Promise, Dimitri? And we’ll go to Krifó and visit the Cave of Silence again”.

“I promise”, I said, and kissed her, trying hold on to the flavor of her lips for the coming separation.

She took another look at the mess in the room and hesitated.

“Don’t worry. I’ll tidy up before I go... Maybe I’ll leave something for the cleaning lady to do, too”, I said and winked.

She looked at me, eyes twinkling with laughter, picked up her bag and made her way to the stairs. I watched her walk away and felt our being apart, even for these few days, start to weigh upon me.

As she arrived at the top of the landing, she turned towards me and, a shadow of worry fleeting across her face, said solemnly, "Dimitri, be careful!"

That was the first time I had ever seen her worry. That same look had crossed my mother's face when I had announced my intention to visit the island. She was adamant I should not go. When she failed to dissuade me, she made me swear not to tell anyone my grandfather's name or the reason for my visit.

I had taken it upon me to carry out her brother's last wish before he passed away. To have his body cremated in Bulgaria, as cremations in Greece were not possible, and scatter his ashes at his birthplace. He'd left the island as a young child and never been back; at least, that's what he claimed. He wanted, even in this manner, to stay there forever. So, someone had to carry his ashes there. But neither my mother nor my two distant aunts had any wish to be involved in this. That had to mean something, but what? The reasons behind that reluctance remained unclear.

Uncle Nikos lived in northern Greece, in Thessaloniki, and never had a family or any other close relations. He was a lonely and reclusive man, with a wonderful voice, a gifted singer. When I used to ask him as a child how I could learn to sing like him, he used to laugh and say with a forlorn sigh, "When you drink from the spring at Mantani, at the top of the mountain on our island, you'll sing beautifully too, Dimitri". But when I would declare that as soon as I was old enough I would go to the island and drink the water, he would become solemn once again. He'd look me in the eyes and say, "No one from your mother's family will ever return there". Then his face

would cloud over, belying that Uncle Nikos regretted the words he had just spoken.

No one ever explained what those words really meant, neither my father, who passed away fifteen years ago, nor my mother, who avoided the subject like the plague. All I knew was that she had left the island as a very young child with my uncle Nikos, just before the end of the Second World War. The Germans had just executed both my grandparents and others from their village. I was, as they never tired of telling me, the only male left on my mother's side.

So, when I got cast in this film, I took it as an omen, the shooting taking place on a location so close to the island. My three-day break, when I wouldn't be needed on location, was a window of opportunity to carry out my mission. No one knew that the small metal box in my suitcase contained my uncle's ashes. Not even Anita.

My mind preoccupied with all these thoughts, I was staring blankly towards the landing where Anita had been standing minutes ago when I suddenly realized the cleaning lady had stepped into the corridor and now stood staring at me standing naked by the door, stunned.

"I'm sorry", I stuttered with a deep blush and closed the door.

Berlin, three months earlier

ANITA HURRIEDLY ZIPPED up the suitcase that was lying on the bed in her sparsely and tastefully decorated bedroom.

One wall was mostly glass, a stunning view of the centre of Berlin, which looked clean and orderly, as if it had just been built.

On the wall facing the window stood a closet covered in mirrors that reflected the view, and the staircase that led to the floor below, a loft-like space that contained the living and kitchen area.

Facing the bed, a collection of paintings and photos hung on the wall. A large black and white photo stood out among the other frames. It showed two women, smiling and holding a one-year-old baby, in what looked like an antique shop. The baby was Anita, and the two women her mother and grandmother.

Script pages were scattered all across the room and she was hurriedly trying to gather the loose sheets in one pile when the phone rang. “Anita Hertz speaking”, and then, as if the line was bad, “Who is this? *Mamá!* I was just about to call you. Yes, almost ready...I have a taxi waiting downstairs.

I'll be over in twenty minutes... I have to hurry up. I hope Yiayia is up and I get to see her....Great!"

Hanging up, her glance lingered over the photo for a moment and she smiled fondly. She hurriedly finished gathering the papers in a neat pile and, once order was restored, pressed the remote control button. The blinds in the bedroom and downstairs started to noiselessly come down, plunging the apartment in a dark twilight.

She picked up her suitcase and made her way to the living room, with its two comfortable, red, designer sofas and marble fireplace, the hearth now filled with candles as the weather was warmer at the end of spring.

On the coffee table lay a dark metal tray filled with a collection of pebbles, which at first glance seemed to have been randomly put together but, upon closer inspection, the colors blended together to form an impressive abstract mosaic.

A smaller suitcase and a laptop bag stood by the front door.

Anita cast one last look over the room to make sure everything was ok and struggled to shuffle both suitcases out to the corridor. She set the burglar alarm, turned off the lights and locked the front door.

Downstairs, in the building's lobby, the waiting driver quickly picked up her suitcases and carried them to the waiting car.

"Vielen Dank", she thanked the driver and then got in the back seat, registering the surprised and admiring glances the middle-aged driver was casting through the rear-view mirror before starting the engine.

As soon as the taxi joined the evening traffic towards her mother's house, Anita sank in the leather seats and looked

out at the urban scenery flashing past her window. She had always been an observer, enjoyed taking in the landscape and people around her, no matter where she was. In all these years as an actress, the words of her teacher, the great Kurt Rainus, never left her. *You become a better actor and a better person if you never stop observing in life and searching for the truth.*

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe came into view, its 2,711 concrete slabs, unmarked tombs arranged on a sloping field, casting a shadow of isolation, oppression and menace on the visitors wandering through its maze of corridors.

Anita, too, had felt awed and distressed whenever she had been there, especially at nighttime, chilled by the darkness cast by the slabs. She thought of them as human bodies lying still, frozen in times, silently screaming for justice beyond death.

The driver's honk, a rare sound in Berlin, brought her back to the bright present. As if suddenly remembering something urgent, she took her phone out and dialed a number. "Good evening, this is Anita Hertz...How are you?" she said in Greek.

The driver, somewhat startled, stared at her through the rear-view mirror, but this time Anita did not notice, absorbed in her call as she was. "I'm flying to Athens in three hours... No, I haven't received it yet...That's fine, I'll see you at my hotel tomorrow morning then. Thank you. See you soon".

She hung up and looked out the window to get her bearings. The driver's voice brought her attention back to the car's interior once more. "You're Greek?" he asked in the same language, eyes firmly on the road.

Overcoming her initial surprise, Anita smiled and answered politely. "My grandmother is Greek, but has lived here most of her life. How about you, are you Greek?"

"My father is. He immigrated to Germany forty-five years ago. He married my mother, who is German, and they had me and my sister. It's a nice place, Germany, but not like Greece. Many Greeks came to work here".

"Yes, that's true, many..." she agreed.

"It's a funny world. During the war the Germans executed my grandfather, but my father came here and loved the country and a German girl... funny, isn't it?"

"Love is stronger than war. Nothing can stop it", she answered with a knowing smile.

"Your Greek is very good though..."

"Yes, I spoke Greek at home, both with my grandmother and my mother. My mother used to teach at a Greek school in Berlin. I went there too, and then studied Greek literature".

"And acting!" the driver added meaningfully, to show her he had recognized her.

"Yes, acting too", Anita replied with an awkward smile.

The ringtone of her cell phone interrupted this rather uncomfortable conversation.

"Hi, Mamá, I'll be there in five minutes...Yes, in the taxi now. See you shortly".

She hung up, staring absentmindedly at the screen for a moment before turning back to the driver, who had been patiently waiting for her to finish the call.

"Things are not easy in Greece at the moment, are they?" he asked with a sad nod.

“Greece has been through a lot worse and everything will be fine”, she replied curtly, as if reluctant to discuss the matter any further.

“Let’s hope so...” he replied, picking up on her mood and falling silent.

A few minutes later the car pulled up in front of her mother’s house.

“I’ll be back in ten minutes and then we’ll head to the airport”, she said, slinging her laptop bag over her shoulder.

“I’ll wait, *kein problem*”, he reassured her, still smiling.

Despite her seventy years, Michaela had a face as fresh and warm as the sun on a spring day. The resemblance between the two women was striking and anyone could easily guess they were mother and daughter.

Thirty-five years had passed since she had met and married Anita’s father, a US soldier stationed in Berlin. By the time her husband announced he had been recalled back to his country the marriage was on the rocks, so she chose to remain in Germany and filed for divorce. Anita met her father rarely, whenever he would visit Germany to see this distant daughter, and relations between the two of them were rather formal. Every time they met he would try to persuade her to leave Europe and try her luck in Hollywood, but Anita had no wish to do so. She was happy with her life as it was, and wanted to stay close to her mother and grandmother.

Walking up the garden to the house, Anita saw the beaming face of her mother waiting impatiently at the door and felt a warm glow.

Michaela greeted her daughter with a kiss and ushered her into the ground floor flat. In sharp contrast to Anita's apartment, the room was heavily decorated and bursting with artifacts, the remnants of her grandmother Eleni's antique shop. The business had passed on to Eleni when her husband's family perished in the Battle of Berlin, just before the end of the World War II.

Anita knew very little about that time in her grandmother's life. All she knew was that the antique shop was one of the few buildings left standing after the Soviet bombardment and that her grandmother had had a lucky escape. "God owed me that", Eleni used to say, never giving away the full meaning of those words.

Whenever Anita and Michaela pressed her with questions, hungry for more information, Eleni would change the subject, insisting that one should let sleeping dogs lie lest they wake up and bite. She would then purse her lips together as if determined to honor a vow of silence.

"Did you take everything you need? Are you sure you haven't forgotten anything?" Michaela asked with a frown of concern as the two women entered the apartment.

"Don't fret, Mamá, it doesn't matter. It's not like I'm heading into the wilderness", Anita said soothingly. "*Yiayia?*" she asked looking around the living room.

"Your grandmother's expecting you, Anita. She is better today, although overall she is getting worse every day. When

she found out about you going to Greece, she wasn't very happy. She's not spoken a single word since."

Michaela put her arms around Anita's shoulders and gently guided her towards Eleni's room.

They found the ninety-year-old woman propped up against a cluster of comfortable pillows on the large bed. Her neatly coiffed hair and pretty nightgown showed how eagerly she had anticipated her granddaughter's visit.

Rina, Eleni's Georgian carer, sat in an armchair beside the bed knitting and keeping up a happy, aimless chatter. As soon as she saw them enter the room she got up, greeted Anita and, wishing her a safe flight, discreetly exited the room to give the three women some privacy.

Anita paused before the bed for a moment and glanced around the familiar room, which always transported her back to her childhood; back to those moments when she would lie by her grandmother on the big bed and listen to that tender voice tell Greek fairytales, soothed by the melodic sound of words whose meaning she was still learning.

Long organza white curtains hang from the ceiling, diffusing the daylight into a soft warm glow that filled the room. An old dressing table with a three panel mirror stood by wall to the left of the room, clustered with knick-knacks. On the wall across the bed a large frame was prominent: a sepia faded photograph of a crowd gathered at a harbor, cloth bundles and trunks littering the quay, waiting for the coming steamship that loomed large on the horizon, clouds of black smoke escaping its funnel, announcing its arrival.

It was the only photo from Eleni's youth. It was fuzzy and the faces were somewhat blurred, as this was a blow up of the original, small photograph and its sharpness had been

sacrificed in the process. The original photo had been lost on the day Eleni had picked up the enlarged framed copy from the photographer's. She had been terribly upset, crying for days. Clearly that photo had meant much to her.

She had told them the picture had been taken during her student days in Italy. The man holding her in his arms was a fellow student, who had been very much in love with her. Eleni claimed she had not felt the same way, but the photo told otherwise—she was leaning against his chest, eyes shut, enjoying the moment with all her senses.

Anita bent down to kiss her grandmother's wrinkled cheeks, the familiar, beloved scent of lemon and lavender a warm, welcoming cocoon. She was going to miss that scent when... She shook her head to chase the gloomy thought away. No morbid thoughts now that she was saying goodbye.

Eleni opened her arms invitingly, with a tender smile and the lively sparkle of a much younger woman in her eyes. Anita sank into her grandmother's affectionate embrace for a moment, and then sat beside her on the bed. "My beautiful grandmother, how are you?"

"How do you find me, Anita?" Eleni asked in a playful tone.

"You look wonderful, Yiayia. It's nice to see you smile, it makes you even lovelier..."

"You, my love, are beautiful. I think you take that from me", the elderly woman joked.

Michaela, who had been watching this tender exchange glowing with happiness, came and sat on the other side of the bed; three generations laughing together, the eldest squeezing their hands tightly as if wishing to infuse them with all her warmth.

Before their laughter had subsided, Eleni turned to Anita and sighed. "You are going to be away for quite a while, my love. Be careful".

"I'll be careful, Yiayia, don't worry! It's only work, but I'll be careful".

"Your mother said you're going to Greece. Is that so?"

"Yes, Yiayia, I'm flying to Athens today". Anita took a deep breath: "I'll stay there tomorrow and the day after I'm going to an island near Turkey. We'll shoot most of the film there. I'll be back in three months, and finish filming here..."

The moment the words "island near Turkey" left Anita's mouth, Eleni fixed her gaze on the framed photo on the wall and stared at it mesmerized, as if trying to see through the painting into the distant past, oblivious to anything else her granddaughter said.

Unaware of the change that had come over her grandmother, Anita chattered on. "I'll call and we'll Skype, so we'll be able to see each other..."

Michaela, more used to the elderly woman's lapses, stroked her hand and turned towards her daughter. "I think we'd better let grandmother get some rest. You don't want to miss your flight..."

Anita nodded and hugged her grandmother. "Yiayia, I'm going now. I love you, don't you ever forget that".

Eleni's eyes were moist, but it was hard to tell if she was saddened by the thoughts crossing her mind or because she had been staring at that photo unblinkingly for so long, still frozen after the mention of Anita's journey.

Feeling the weight of the young woman shift as Anita started to get up she suddenly grabbed her arms and pulled her closer, until their faces were only inches apart.

“When they come, you hide in the mountains so they don’t find you, you hear?” she whispered fiercely in a shaky voice.

Anita, taken aback, was dumbfounded for a moment. Then, realizing her grandmother was in a state of confusion, she promised in a sad voice, “Yes. I’ll be careful. Don’t worry, I’ll be very careful”.

Digging her fingers into Anita’s arms, Eleni spoke once more, in German this time. “I should have gone with him...”

Her grasp weakened as if all her strength had been exhausted by that last sentence and she could not hang on to Anita any longer.

It was the first time her grandmother had ever spoken to her in German and Anita was taken aback. She stood staring at her grandmother for a moment, trying to make sense of what had just happened. She kissed her forehead and stood up. “I love you Yiayia”.

“I love you too, Anita”, Eleni replied, returning to the present for a moment.

As she turned to leave, Anita’s coat belt caught on one of the drawer handles. Bending down to untangle it, she noticed a case on the dresser, an old hunter case pocket watch inside it. She had never seen the watch before and was puzzled to find it there. Already running late, she gave it no more thought and started moving towards the living room, followed by her mother.

One more time, she turned towards her grandmother and waved goodbye, but the old woman unresponsive.

Rina, who had been patiently waiting outside, rushed back to her place by Eleni the moment the two of them came out of the room.

Noticing Anita's sad expression, Michaela gently cupped her daughter's face and said, "Don't be sad Anita my love, your grandmother is very, very old now. If only we are as lucky and live as long as she has".

"I know, but it's hard seeing her like this", Anita replied swallowing hard. Michaela stroked her daughter's cheek.

"Even so, my sweetheart, she is still with us and we should be thankful for it".

Anita nodded and pulled her hair back as if trying to shake off the sadness. "I have to go now, I'm late and the taxi is waiting... The driver's Greek you know".

"Really?" Michaela smiled, trying to lighten up the mood.

Still unable to brush off what had just happened, Anita turned the conversation back to what had just happened in the bedroom. "Why do you think she spoke to me in German? Who was she talking about when she said she should have gone off with him?"

Michaela shook her head. "Your grandmother has been saying a lot of things I don't understand lately. It's as she's remembering something, but it's all very confusing. I can't make sense of any of it".

Anita raised her eyebrows quizzically. "What about the watch on the dresser, Mamá? I've never seen it before".

"I only saw it for the first time the day before yesterday. When I asked her about it she said "memories" and nothing else. Yesterday, I asked again and she didn't answer. You know how Yiayia is with all this old stuff. Her trunks are filled with it. Some remind her of something, others she just likes to have. Maybe it's your grandfather's. It doesn't matter, go now or you'll be very late".

Anita hugged her mother and gave her a kiss goodbye.
“I’ll call you when I get there. I love you...”

“I love you too, Anita. Take care”.

Michaela reluctantly let go of her daughter and stood outside the front door, watching Anita get back into the taxi and drive off.