

# First pages

Charis Gantzoudis



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CHARIS GANTZOUDIS

# First pages

Short stories collection



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**“I am trying to learn to begin to begin to begin”**

Erica Jong



# Dark Feelings

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March 2012

### *Despina's testimony*

"I won't let you marry him, I'd rather kill you than lose you". Yes, I saw the note. Anna had thrown it on the couch. When I entered the house she looked distraught. Shaking like a leaf. She told me that Stelios had come to see her the night before. He was waiting for her outside the house and begged her to take him back.

I can't believe he killed her. I never thought he could get to that point. I was telling her on a daily basis to end their relationship and move on with Dimitris. Not that he was perfect, but at least their relationship was normal. Anna was a good person. She didn't want to harm Stelios. She pitied him because of the rough years he'd been through.

Yes. He was a troubled child. His father died when he was two years old. One year later, his mother married our father, who never loved him like his own child. He treated him violently. I remember one time when he broke our neighbour's window with a ball. He hit him so hard that his nose started bleeding. Our mother couldn't do much. She was of weak nature. But as troubled as he might have been, the sexual attraction he felt for Anna could not be justified.

One day, when I came home from cram school, I saw Stelios peeking on Anna bathing. I caught him by surprise. He lost his temper and left without saying a word. He was a quiet child. Didn't express himself. Didn't have any friends. He had left school at age of 14 and got daily wages from any job he could find. But even I didn't think it was that big of a deal. We were children, how should I know?

A few months later, Anna confessed to me in tears, that Stelios had raped her. I couldn't believe it. He was telling her that he loved her. At first I thought she'd gone mad. If our father ever found out anything about this, I'm sure he would have killed him. He had a weak spot for Anna. She was at a loss. She loved Stelios and didn't want to harm him.

This "relationship" went on for the next two years. Anna turned 18. That's when she met Dimitris. He was crazy in love with her, but also excessively jealous. Once, he hit her in the middle of the road, because he thought she was looking at someone else. In one of our conversations, Anna, told me that he had become violent many times. If our brother Stelios hadn't been found dead next to her, I'd think he killed her.

Stelios didn't like that relationship. I remember, one time, I told him to let her live her life. He responded that he wouldn't let anybody take her from him. Neither me, nor my sister ever talked to anyone about Stelios' passion. Those things remain unsaid in closed societies.

I am a year younger than Anna. I always looked up to her. She was the prettiest girl in school and the best student. We were very different, but loved each other very much. Anna, as I said before, was our dad's weak spot. He loved me too, of course, but Anna always stood out for him. I was mum's favourite. If she was still alive, she'd tell you. She died last year, at Christmas, from cancer. I'm sure dad will pass away soon, too. He won't be able to handle Anna's death.

I cannot believe it. Just imagine, a few days ago we went shopping to find a wedding dress for her. I don't know how to keep on living without her. I'm sad for Stelios too, but it is all his fault. I can't talk anymore. If you don't need me for anything else, I'd like to go home.

### *Dimitris' testimony*

Anna called me on Friday at the office. It was about 12 o'clock noon. She sounded troubled. She told me about the note. She had found it when entering the house. I never took it seriously. 'A joke probably' I thought to myself. To calm her down I suggested that she should call Despina, to have someone around until I got home. It wouldn't be long. Banks close early on Fridays.

She's never told me anything about her brother. She must 've been embarrassed. I found out everything later, from Despina. That bastard. How could he do something like that? He seemed to be a nice guy. A little distant though. When I visited them to ask for Anna's hand in marriage, he didn't sit with us. He drank a quick drink and left without a word.

I met Anna one year ago. It was love at first sight. Her big brown eyes sent out a catching warmth. First I had met Despina. We had a mutual friend. We were sitting at a table in our village's local coffee shop. After a while, she showed up. Almost two weeks passed until she agreed to go on a date with me.

Yes, I was jealous. Who wouldn't be with such a beautiful creature? But I knew she loved me. And she knew I loved her, too. I lost my temper once and slapped her. I know Despina has already told you. She was jealous of my relationship with Anna. She never said anything, but I could tell from her looks. Once, when we were alone, she confessed her love to me, but said that she didn't say anything for her sister's sake. They were loving sisters. I never, not even once, saw them fight. After all, who could fight with Anna? Once I told her what I

thought about her sister and that I thought she was jealous. She didn't talk to me for three days. I went nuts. I thought I'd lost her.

All of this time, Stelios never came to visit us. Anna always had excuses ready for him. I don't know what else to tell you. It doesn't matter now anyway. That was it. I will never see her again. Oh my God. I'm sorry.

### *Confession*

I thought we were done. I don't understand why you called me in again. Show a little respect for my mourning. It's not even been ten days since my siblings' funeral. What new evidence could you possibly have? On the day of the murder, I waited for my father to come home, made him dinner and then went to my mother's grave. The candle has to be always lit.

No, I wasn't jealous of my sister, I loved her. I don't know what Dimitris told you. I didn't want to say it, but he kissed me once. I kept it from my sister. She would've been devastated. Fortunately, he didn't bother me since.

A few days ago I had an accident. I fell down the stairs. While trying to get up I injured my hand. This is where the bloody clothes in my closet are from. I would never kill my siblings. Why won't you believe me?

Stop it, can't stand listening to you anymore. Yes, I killed her. I couldn't stand living in her shadow anymore. Since we were children, Anna was the best at everything, from school to friends. Boys always noticed her. When I met Dimitris I fell for him, but he chose her.

Stelios was part of the plan. I knew he had a gun in his bedside table. I took it. He wasn't at home. He was at the coffee house. I found him there and told him we had to go to Anna, because something bad had happened to her. I had the note ready in my pocket. I killed them and left. Everything about Stelios' attraction to her was a lie. Why are you looking at me? You cannot understand how it is to always be second. I have no regrets. I am ready to pay for what I have done, but I have no regrets.





I am Alice

April 2012

My name is Alice. I'd rather not say my last name. Home for me has been for a few years now, this blanket that covers me, those few square meters of pavement my body takes up. I decided to fill up these blank pages with my story, so they know who I am, when the end is near and the smell of my rotting body draws the attention of somebody near me.

I was born fifty years ago in a small village in the mountains. The name doesn't matter. The cause of my abandonment, was my relationship with a "gentleman" a few years older than me. I was fourteen when my father threw me out of the warmth of my family. My secret relationship was uncovered by my aunt Aspasia, my father's sister, who happened to see me with the "gentleman" in the small coppice at the outskirts of the village.

"I don't want whores in my house" were the last words I heard from my father. Since then I haven't seen them. Friends, familiars and relatives left me on the street.

I met the "gentleman" a few hours later, at the train station. He put some money in my pocket and said goodbye with the promise to find me in Athens. It was the last time I saw him. Later I incidentally found out that he got married and was expecting his first child. Let him be well...

When I arrived in Athens, I didn't know anyone. From time to time I felt I was drowning in this city. The first few days I stayed in a small city centre hotel. But I soon run out of money. My body started weakening from hunger. I started

walking around the streets, begging for a job. Nobody seemed willing to help. Only him...

It was a February evening. I had run out of money. I was sitting on a bench at Victoria Square. The cold was piercing my body. A young man approached me. Well dressed with fine features. He asked for my name. I was afraid and didn't answer.

"Are you playing it hard to get?" he asked with irony in his voice. I got up to leave, but he caught my hand and started sweet talking to me. He apologized and offered me a cigarette. I told him I didn't smoke.

"So, will you tell me what is going on with you?". As time went by, I felt nice with him. I told him my story without hesitating. He was the first person who showed some interest in me. He told me not to be afraid. That now I had him.

He led me into a small room with little furniture. He told me that this would be my home from now on. I felt awkward, but thanked God in silence for my luck. Afterwards, he left. I was alone in my little room. I was so tired and weary that I immediately fell asleep.

Early the next morning he came back. He entered the room holding two bags. In the first, the smaller one, there was food. "I thought you might be hungry" he said. When I asked him about the content of the other bag he answered that I was in a hassle. He asked me to talk to him all the time. At one point, he approached me and kissed me. I stepped back.

"Listen to me, if you want to survive, you have to do what I'm telling you. You only have me now" he said in a strict tone. He approached me again. Started ripping my clothes. I begged

him to stop but he wouldn't listen. He stormed over me in madness. My resistance got on his nerves and he started hitting and screaming at me. I got so scared that I gave in. After he was done and ready to leave, he said:

“At noon a girl will come over. She will tell you what you have to do. Listen to her, if you want us to get along. And don't even think about leaving because if you do, you are screwed.

He slammed the door and left. I was still in bed, naked and crying. I couldn't understand what was going on.

At noon, there was a sound at the door. I opened. It was the girl I had been waiting for. Her face had a lot of make-up and I could tell from her clothes what she was. She looked like one of the girls working at Victoria Square at nights. I kept looking at them those days I spent on the street. Everything cleared up in my head.

The girl sat at the end of the bed. She said we didn't have much time. I started crying.

“Don't do that now. In time you'll get used to it. Stratos told me he brought you a bag with things for work. Where is it?”

She was talking about the big bag. I had forgotten about it. Without wasting time, she started doing my make-up. My face was covered with many layers of a white powder and my lips with red lipstick. My body was dressed in provocative clothing.

“At around eleven we will go out for work. If you see a car you will go to the passenger's window. He will roll down the window and ask you the price. You will stand provocatively and talk with confidence to turn him on. Then you will get into the car and leave the rest to him.”

This is what “my teacher” said. When I attempted to ask some things, she stopped me.

“Those things don’t matter. You have to learn the job if you want to save your skin.” Was her answer and she continued “Stratos isn’t joking. He is capable of doing anything.”

That night I had my first customer. I approached his car and from the window he told me to jump in. He saw that I was hesitant and, to attract me, he doubled my payment. A while later, I found myself naked in a hotel room. When the act was over, I felt dirty not only on the outside, but on the inside too. I was clearly a prostitute now. In one night, my whole life had changed.

In this filth I was living and in the dark streets, I found love. His name: Paul, a street musician. Thirty years old, tall with dark hair and honest eyes. He treated me kindly. He was meeting with me in the first hours because he couldn’t stand the smell of someone else on my body. Yes, I fell in love with him, but I never told him. What would have happened? Who would want for a partner, wife, mother of his children, a woman from the streets? I often thought, that if I’d met him sooner, my life would be different. I wouldn’t have to sell my body to survive, I wouldn’t drag myself around the streets searching for a quiet place to wait for another day to pass.

For the next five years, I was one of Stratos’ hookers. One day, after he came to get the money I made the night before, I gathered some clothes in a suitcase and disappeared. I left the neighbourhood and never saw him again.

I kept on working on the streets for twenty more years. But time went by and I got old. The make-up didn’t work anymore. Even though they say the older the better.

In those twenty years, I was working alone. I never had a pimp again. For a while, I was living a good life. I rented a two room apartment and decorated it. Money didn’t matter. I spent it on

expensive furniture, carpets and curtains. I managed to create the illusion of a normal life. But, as I said before, the last few years, work didn't go well. Men preferred younger foreign girls over me, to satisfy the lust in their loins, and, as if that wasn't enough, my health problems started.

It's already been five years since the doctor diagnosed lung cancer. I stopped smoking and did some chemotherapies. My body got rounder and my long black hair started falling out onto the pillow. I started having financial problems. I couldn't keep the apartment any longer. I sold everything to cover my expenses. I survived cancer, but I was on the streets once again.

During the day I go from church to church and cadge. I ask for a little money that will help me survive one more day.

All my years I was on the streets. Streets with no lights. On these streets I sold my body to survive, on these streets I saw young people dead on the pavements with syringes on their arms. I still walk these streets today, but now they are filled with the light of the day and this makes me see my misery with every step.

I am Alice, and this is my story in short. Now that I feel the end drawing near, I felt the need to write everything down. I could write many pages but it doesn't matter. It is enough that the one who will find me, when the smell of my rotting corpse will draw him here, will find out my name and I won't be a stranger in somebody's memory.

I am Alice, Alice of the streets. And this is how I want you to remember me, you who will bend with sadness over me one day or one night.





Did I wake you?

May 2012

“How would my life be if I hadn’t met him? Where would I be right now? And if I tell him to break up, how will he react? But no, I won’t do him any favours”.

This is what she was thinking about and her eyes wouldn’t close. Every time he came home late from the office, she woke up with dark circles under her eyes. She peeked at him, wondering how he was able to sleep next to her, when, a few hours earlier, he was touching someone else...

“Work at the office you say? Poor guy, you didn’t have time to inform your secretary and she told me everything... I have to do something or I will go crazy. What if I kill him?”

Her eyes sparkled in the dark and a smile of satisfaction flashed across her lips. She wanted revenge for his betrayal. Hate started taking over her mind. With languid moves she grabbed the pillow, blocking every life entrance. A cry, that almost escaped his lips, made her use more force, chocking him in the four walls of the room. As his body was shaking on the mattress, like a fish on land, she felt a feeling of vindication filling every cell of her body.

When his body dried out of life, she took the pillow from his face. The colour seemed washed out and his still open eyes, were painted by surprise. Alexandra remained on the end of the bed looking at him. His expression caused a loud laugh. For the first time she saw him in fear.

She lit a cigarette. Ostentatiously, she threw the ashes on his lifeless body. “I’ll tell his family he left me for his girlfriend. Everyone knew his flings. I was the last one to find out.” She whispered, while walking across the room, trying to find an excuse for Takis disappearance.

The joyful bell sound from the church two blocks away, as Saint Nicholas Day dawned, interrupted her thoughts “I need

to hurry” she thought. After covering the body in a blanket, she dragged it to the elevator and from there to her car.

She drove for some time and ended up, without realising it, at a deserted location. She dragged the body to the edge of a sharp cliff and threw it down without any hesitation, without a single goodbye. She wanted to get it over with...

It was almost noon. The sound coming from her living room drove her to stand up. She was surprised, but her quandary was nothing in front of the one drawn on her face when she went to the living room and faced Takis asking her “Did I wake you?”



# The journey

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May 2012

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Philip's birthday was here. Eleni decided to leave the accounting office to, her former fellow student and current colleague, Sofia's capable hands, so she could dedicate the day to her partner. They met eight months ago and this was the first birthday they spent together. She went shopping early to find the perfect gift and buy that light blue dress she had seen some days ago at a boutique at Kolonaki and which Sofia was bugging her to buy since, because she thought that it highlighted her well-shaped body and blue eyes. Afterwards, the plan was groceries shopping so she could buy all the necessities for a dinner-surprise for her beloved, when he would come home unsuspectingly late in the evening from work - the advertising company he was working at, was setting up a big campaign and the manager had inflicted exhausting working hours to his employees.

Eleni went up to the fifth floor and unlocked the door to the apartment with her keys. The laughs coming from the bedroom confirmed that she wasn't alone. She approached the door and opened it quickly. Her eyes opened wide when she saw Natasa, her childhood friend since elementary school and the only person Eleni would confess everything to, in Philip's arms. For a few seconds she couldn't move. She felt the blood freeze in her veins, making it impossible to react. With the little strength she could gather, she said with a voice barely audible: "I don't want to see you ever again" and turned her back to leave before she collapses. The cheating couple, that had also remained frozen the whole time, awaiting her reaction, didn't say anything. Only Philip ran after her when she stormed out of the bedroom, shouting her name. But her look, full of anger, stopped every excuse that was about to get

over his lips. The closing sound of the door broke the silence and Eleni didn't know how fast she got out in the street.

She walked for hours without stopping, chasing away every thought from her mind. She refused to realize what had happened, she didn't want to admit to herself, that at age thirty two, she was alone again, that someone betrayed her and from two sides this time.

Spring was almost over and the sun made Athens look like a boiling cradle. Her long brown hair wiped of the sweat from her neck, while the big, dark glasses she was wearing, were hiding the despair in her look. People were walking by, touching her, but she wasn't feeling a thing, she wasn't even hearing the sounds of the horns from the cars stuck in traffic. She was just walking without knowing where she was going.

Her steps drove her to Piraeus. She placed her body on a bench by the pier and started observing the sea and the anchored ships. Anytime she felt like drowning, she sat there. The feeling of being able to embark on a ship, get lost in the endless blue and find herself away from her problems, gave her a relaxed feeling. She always dreamt of traveling. She had that habit probably because of her father, who, when younger, before meeting her mother, had worked as a sailor for a while. He used to take her to the sea and tell her stories of his few travels. She doted on him and the heart attack that took his life when she was eleven, left her in endless loneliness because her mother didn't have time for walks, or any time for her at all.

The memories started coming back and she couldn't evade them. Her eyes filled up with tears and as much as she tried to prevent them, she couldn't. She burst into tears. She looked like a little girl in fault.

Alex came to her mind. Her first love. It was the senior year in high school. With his height, blond hair and toned body, he was the secret desire of every school girl. She was tucked away in her books, and taken by surprise when he asked her to prom. She remembered Natasa telling her that she was jealous of her luck. She had fun with him, until, two years later she found out that he was cheating on her and no matter how much she vowed crying in the arms of Natasa, to never trust a man again in her life, she couldn't resist Niko's charm.

She met him in her second year at university. They had fun together and made plans about the future. Alex was nothing but a memory. Eleni was crazy in love with him and so did he seem to be, so it was a big surprise, when, a while later, he asked her for some time to think. "To think about what? I love him and he loves me. What is there to think about? I don't understand.", she remembered telling Natasa. "It makes sense after the three years you are together, that he'd want some time to himself. He might even be thinking about proposing" Natasa answered to comfort her. "Do you think this could be it? Hopefully..." Eleni said, started imagining the moment when Nikos would fall on one knee and ask her to marry him and sighed. It was Eleni's dream to get married and start a family since she was a little girl, but the time off Nikos asked her for, was not to propose, but to get together with Maria, a freshman who drove him crazy, as he confessed to her later. And now she had to cope with Philip's and Natasa's betrayal.

She'd met Philip eight months ago. She had been alone for quite some time and determined to keep the promise she had made to herself this time. But his persistence made her give in. Happiness was around the corner. His positive attitude towards life and his humour had driven away any sadness,

and, even though they were together for a short time, she felt ready to share the rest of her life with him. At their six month anniversary dinner, she even proposed to him. He smiled and told her that there was no need to hurry. Eleni smiled, but deep inside, his answer hurt her.

“Doesn’t he understand that I’m not a girl anymore? I am thirty two. I want family and children. I don’t want to get old first and then be a mother.” Eleni screamed into the phone the next day, when she called Natasa to tell her the news. She advised her not to pressure him and to enjoy every moment. Those words sounded so fake now.

She sobbed and asked herself what she was doing wrong and ending up alone every time. Why hadn’t she yet found the love and companionship she was dreaming about since she was a little girl?

Time went by. The sun had stopped burning her skin and a fresh breeze brought the salty sea smell to her nose. She wasn’t ready to go back home and cope with her mother, who for sure would blame her for what had happened. She stood up ready to leave but the number and message written on the bench caught her attention and she stopped. The message said: “If you want to travel far away from loneliness, call me. Dimitris”

She stood there for some minutes, trying to understand what was hiding behind those words. What could have driven someone to write his phone number on a bench? Random thoughts started popping up in her head. “It is probably somebody crazy or a gigolo”.

She turned around to leave, but Natasa’s image in Philips arms appeared in her mind and then her mother’s image in the living room with a judgmental look in her eyes. Without any

further thought, she took out her phone and started typing the number. “What am I doing” she thought and closed the phone before it could ring. She was walking up and down without knowing what to do. There was a chaos in her mind. On one hand she wanted to take revenge for Natasa and Philip’s betrayal, on the other hand she was afraid of what might be hiding behind that number on the bench. “I will call. What do I have to lose?” she said quietly to herself and dialled again.

“Hello?” a male voice answered at the other end of the line. Eleni was stunned and didn’t know what to say.

“Hello?” Dimitris asked again in a perky tone.

“Hello” Eleni managed to mumble with her voice shaking “I saw your number and...”

“What’s your name?” Dimitris interrupted her. The tone of his voice showed a person who surely had done that before. He was calm and humorous and helped Eleni forget her embarrassment for a while. After they exchanged some formal words, they arranged to meet at a nearby café in an hour.

An hour later, Eleni found herself outside the café. The anxiety of what was awaiting her took the best of her. She thought of calling him and cancelling, but her curiosity won. She pushed the door and got in. The cold air from the a/c cooled her down. The interior was tasteful and filled with nice smells and whispers from the people. Eleni stood in the middle and looked around. Her eyes looking for a man, thirty years old, long blond hair. Their eyes met. He was sitting in the far corner. Her predictions turned out to be wrong. Dimitris was charming and didn’t seem crazy at all. Her awkwardness washed away and she approached his table in confidence.

“Nice to meet you” he answered when she shook his hand and introduced herself. In the first minutes of their conversation,

they talked about general stuff. Eleni had left everything behind her. No sign of anxiety or embarrassment. She felt like a little girl on her first date. Her look only darkened when Dimitris asked her “Why did you decide to call me?”

Silence took away all the generalities. The awkwardness returned but she quickly found confidence again and answered:

“What made you write your number here and there?”

“You are avoiding my question” he replied

“So do you.” She said.

The conversation started feeling like a game of ping pong. They threw the ball at each other and Eleni seemed to be enjoying the game. She liked Dimitris a lot and he seemed to like her company. Two hours later they arrived at his house.

They entered all over each other, exchanging passionate kisses. Soon they found themselves naked in bed. His toned body covered hers. The whispers of pleasure filled the small studio. They spent all night in each other’s arms.

The next morning their bodies became one again. Eleni glanced at the clock and jumped up like a spring. She hadn’t talked to anyone since last night and thought that they would be worried. She got dressed quickly and turned to Dimitris, who hadn’t taken his eyes off her.

“Will we talk in the evening?” she asked. Dimitris sat up on the bed, glanced down and said:

“At five I’m leaving for Rhodes. A friend of mine offered me a job there.”

Eleni mood dropped again. Everything from the previous day struck her mind like thunder. She thought that she’d be left alone once again. Dimitris stood up and approached her.

“I know it is too soon, but, do you want to come with me?” he said. Eleni looked at him in shock.

“With you? But how?” she answered “we don’t even know each other.”

“We have a whole summer ahead of us to get to know each other. Besides I don’t think you have much to lose, or you wouldn’t had called me.” He answered.

Eleni left his tiny apartment with the promise to think about it.

On the way home she tried to put her thoughts in order. Dimitris’ proposal troubled her. When she opened the door and found her mother on the couch in the living room waiting for her, while reading a book, with no worries about her disappearance, she got puzzled. Her query disappeared when she heard her mother say:

“Natasa came by yesterday evening. She wanted to give some explanations, but...”

“Explanations? What audacity” Eleni interrupted her.

Her mother tried to convince her to rethink what had happened calmly, trying to persuade her. That behaviour however gave Eleni the answer she was searching for.

At a quarter to five she was in Dimitris’ arms again but not at home or at some café, but on board of a ship. The engines started up. The calm sea swirled up at the ship’s passing. The journey had just began. The port looked as far away as everything Eleni had been through the day before.





**Wrong priorities**

June 2012

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Petros got out of bed before the alarm went off. He had a quick shower, went through his folder to make sure he didn't forget any important documents and went down to the kitchen. Maria was waiting there for him. She said good morning with a kiss and prepared his coffee.

"Are you anxious?" she asked

"Very much. The meeting today will determine my future at the bank." he answered.

"You'll do just fine. You have struck many bargains like this in the past."

"It's not the same. The current market situation makes investors suspicious. I don't want to think about what will happen if they decide not to invest the money in our bank." he answered while taking a quick sip of his coffee.

At age thirty eight, Petros, was a successful stockbroker. His first priority was his job. Everything else came second. He never went out of plan and expected everything around him to be neat. He even put his clothes himself in the closet. He wanted to be able to find his black or red tie, the white or blue shirt instantly. Maria never dared touch his things and she never entered the home office. They were married for 10 years. She often felt neglected but didn't say anything most of the time. The only time they had a huge fight was 8 years ago, when Maria's water broke and she had to go to the hospital by herself because he was at a business appointment. Petros came two hours later and saw his son in her arms. He cried but she didn't give in. For the next forty days she didn't say a word to him, but in the end she forgave him. Of course he loved her and cared about her, but every success in work would give him satisfaction. It caused him to fly in the clouds and feel important and despite the complains from his friends, his wife

and even little Nikolas, who only saw him for a few minutes before being handed to Morfeas, he didn't seem willing to change his state of mind.

He drank another sip from his coffee, looked at the time and jumped up.

"I'm late" he said and after checking his folder one more time, he turned to leave. Maria followed him into the living room and after he kissed her, he wished him good luck. He opened the door to leave but her voice stopped him:

"Don't forget the pottery exhibition at Nikolas' school at four. We'll be waiting at the entrance."

"Is this really necessary? After all you'll be there." he said while holding the door open.

"Our child wants you there. He asked me yesterday evening. All this time you haven't been to one school event, so please be on time".

"I need to be at the office today. Couldn't it be on another day?"

"Your son needs you more" she answered and the tone of their voices started rising. Their bawling could be heard up to the entrance of the apartment building. Right before the apartment door shut, Petros promised Maria that he would do everything possible to be there, but he didn't convince her.

The cloudy Athenian sky burst out in lightning and thunder, while the big drops of rain would soon transform the streets into raging torrents. Petros hands hit hard on the steering wheel. He was stuck in traffic for quite some time now, while the flooded from the rain streets made the traffic even worse. His appointment with the investors drew near and he still hadn't made it to the bank. Anxiety had taken the best of him. The ring of his phone interrupted his thoughts for a while.

“Hello?” he asked intensely

“Hi my friend, where are you?”

“Dimitri, not now. I am on the way to work and I’m already late.”

“I won’t hold you up. I just wanted to ask you about...”

“I told you, I don’t have time right now. I’ll call you later.” He interrupted him, closed the phone and said: “with everything on my mind today I can’t listen to Dimitri crying on about Olympia cheating on him.” and started cursing his luck.

Dimitris was his childhood friend and was going through a tough time lately in his personal life. They were talking on the phone for hours after work. Petros tried to comfort him and convince him that there would be more girls like Olympia. But now work came first and he wouldn’t let anybody, not even Dimitris, occupy him. This behaviour had become the cause of misunderstandings between the two friends.

Every chance he got he would accelerate as much as he could and anytime someone came in his way, his horn buzzed like crazy. Because of his anxiety, he took a wrong turn. So he wouldn’t be late, he turned around instantly to avoid having to take the long way but he oversaw a motorcycle coming his way. It fell on the driver’s door. The young motorcyclist fell on the asphalt. Petros stepped out of his car. Thankfully nobody was injured. Only some minor scratches on the motorcyclist’s arms and legs, who started shouting at Petros. He tried calming him down, which turned out to be not that easy. When he suggested he gave him his card and they sort everything later through the phone, because he had to go to work, the young motorcyclist got even angrier.

“You’re not going anywhere. First police will come and clear things up and then you can go wherever you want.”

Petros tried to change his mind without any success. He got into his car and waited for the police to arrive. He didn't stop for a second cursing his luck. His suit got wet and his pants were full of mud. For a second he thought about stopping to buy another suit, but he would lose more time this way. He just hoped that the big investors would concentrate on what he had to say, not on his looks.

Half an hour later, after he arranged that his insurance company would pay the motorcyclist, he got into his car, relieved that he could continue his drive to work. But there was one more unpleasant surprise waiting for him. His car would not start up. He got out and started kicking the door that was already squeezed from the hit earlier. Though his luck seemed to be back, when he saw a taxi passing by. He got in and told the driver to go as fast as he could. In fifteen minutes he had to be at the bank. His anxiety rose while he was thinking about the investors waiting for him in his office. While thinking about all this his blood froze and his eyes opened wide. "The folder. I forgot the folder with the documents in the car" he screamed. He started hitting the taxi's dashboard and cursing. He asked the driver to turn around. When they drove up to the car, he saw the documents and some of his belongings scattered in the muddy water of the street. He had forgotten to lock his car and somebody had stolen everything. Petros tried gathering some of the muddy documents from the asphalt, but there was no point in it. He started crying in anger, unable to believe what he was going through. After he calmed down, he got into the taxi again.

When he finally go to the bank, it was too late. Christina, his assistant, informed him that the investors had just left a few minutes ago and that Georgiou had closed the deal, a co-

worker with whom Petros didn't have the best of relationships. Petros walked towards the manager's office. When he entered, he saw him congratulating Georgiou, who gave him an arrogant look while leaving. When the office door closed, Petros tried to explain to the manager what had happened but he didn't seem willing to listen and simply said: "Don't bother. Just go to your office and gather your stuff. I have already arranged your compensation."

Petros left, without trying to say anything more. There was no way he could have made him change his mind. He went into his office and gathered his few belongings. A few hours later, after he had said goodbye to his co-workers, he stepped out of the bank. He turned around and stared at it for a while. His whole life flashed before his eyes: endless meetings, consecutive appointments, studies, economic analyses, anxiety, alienation. "Eventually my whole life was only my job and what did I get out of it?" he wondered. Next to him was a recycle bin. He opened it and threw the things he had gathered from the office in. What had filled him with satisfaction a few hours ago, now suffocated him. He looked at his watch and stopped a taxi that was passing by. He urged the driver to hurry, but this time not to get to a work appointment, but to make it to the appointment he had with his son. The pottery exhibition had to be reaching an end soon and since he hadn't made it from the beginning, he at least wanted to be there at the end.

When he got to the school entrance, there was no one. The gates were locked. Without wasting any time, he hurried home. He opened the door and shouted for Maria and Nikolas. In his hands he had gifts for both of them. But there was no

one in the house. A white piece of paper on the living room table caught his attention. It was a note from Maria:

“I hope that you closed the deal and that the investors were pleased by your knowledge. I also hope that you have seen satisfaction in your boss’s eyes, and not the disappointment I saw in Nikola’s look when I told him that you couldn’t come to the exhibition. This look helped me make the decision to order my lawyer to start divorce proceedings. Neither me, nor Nikolas are still able to compete with your job. I got tired. We got tired. You see, the job turned out to be more important to you that we were. For a while I will stay at my mother’s in Thessaloniki. Whenever you want you can communicate with the child. As for my decision, it doesn’t change. I know that you love and care for me, but we have different priorities. Good luck.”

Petros left the note on the couch. For some minutes he stared at the wall in front of him. The memories were going wild in his mind. He started reckoning what he had lost all this time because of work. He grabbed his phone and called Dimitris. The pre-recorded message “your call is being diverted” made him see that he had lost him too. He was all alone.



The memories  
come back

July 2012  
Deity.gr

“I don’t have the words to describe what happened. It was scary but also unique on the same time. At the beginning I was scared, but after a while, curiosity took the best of me and I listened to what they had to tell me. I wish you could have been there to see for yourself. Then it wouldn’t be so hard for you to believe me”. This is how Marios started telling to his father and Alexandra what had happened a moment ago.

It was an ordinary afternoon, like all others. Marios was sitting next to the improvised grave he had made, to have his mother nearby. A month ago, he had moved with his father and his new partner to this almost forgotten town. Tears were running down his face and questions filled up his mind:

“Why did he take me away from you? Doesn’t he care at all how I feel? Has she changed him so much?”

His father’s words still echoed in his ears: “I met Alexandra eight months ago. She came to my office for work. We got along from the beginning and started hanging out. She made me feel nice. We decided to move on with our relationship. I want you to understand”.

Marios said nothing. He went to his room troubled.

“What does he want from me? To act like she’s my mother? What does he think? That we will be sitting all together at the dinner table on the weekends, chatting? How is it possible that he forgot about her so fast?”.

He was fourteen when the medical exams of Zoe, his mother, showed a tumour in her head. A few days after the diagnosis, she started chemotherapies, but her body couldn’t take it. Marios had lost what was most valuable to him. Since then, he visited her grave and talked to her every day. This was the reason he was in conflict with his father when he announced

that for the next time they would be living in this town, far away from her.

His parents had met twenty five years ago, in Paris, where both of them were taking classes to get their master's degree in mechanical engineering. When they finished their studies, they came back to Greece and got married a little while later. "His masculine and strong character fascinated me from the beginning" he remembered his mother telling him one evening, when his father stayed at the office till late.

The office was a second home for his father. Since the first years of his career, he had been working until late. In a short time he had created one of Athens most successful engineering offices.

While thinking about all that and with his mother's voice in his ears, he didn't notice how late it had gotten. The sun had set whilst the moon was covered by the shadow of the dark clouds that had spread on the sky. The strong wind was bending the naked branches of the trees, forming strange silhouettes on the street. While he was saying goodbye to his mother, a voice, asking desperately for help, stopped him. He was startled. He turned and looked around in a daze. There was no one, just rocks and dried trees. But the voice didn't stop: "Help, run for your life".

His heart started beating faster. His hand were shaking and his feet were stuck to the ground. While time went by, he could hear more and more voices calling for help.

"The children, save the children".

Marios blanched in terror and looked around to see where the voices were coming from. The sound drove him to the edge of the cliff. His terror was so great, that he tripped and almost fell into the deep gorge, which he remember being there, because

it was the reason he had chosen this spot for his mother's grave. He wanted her soul to see the magical view stretching in front of her. This view also drove his father to build the hotel on this site of the town.

The moon suddenly appeared on the sky and flooded the dark gorge in light. The he faced something that he had seen only in movies. People were running to save themselves from huge rocks crashing on them, houses were collapsing and huge fires surrounded everything. And while all this was happening, he felt a cold breeze piercing his body. He turned around and saw a girl looking at him in the eyes. The white dress she was wearing, was covering up her skinny body. Her long dark hair, full of twigs and covered in dirt, made a contrast to her pale skin. Her sad blue eyes weren't moving at all. The knot in Marios' throat didn't let him say a word.

"Who are you?" he managed to ask a while later.

"I'm Zoe" the girl answered. When Marios heard her name, his mother came to his mind.

"And what do you want from me?" he asked with more courage this time.

"I once lived in this place. A big earthquake buried my town beneath the rocks of the mountain and with it all its citizens. This place became the grave of old people, young ones and children. But no one cares about us. As if we never existed. No one remembers us. Our souls wake at night and sleep during the day. We never found peace in all these years."

"So, you're dead?" Marios interrupted her.

"Dead and forgotten. Everyone has forgotten us." The girl answered and turned around to leave. While she was walking away, the echo of her voice followed her steps. "We will never find peace."

The girl disappeared in the darkness. The moon was covered in clouds again. The voices quietened and the shadows quenched. Marios run home. Throughout the whole way, he heard the voices crying: “We will never find peace. We will never find peace”.

When he was near his house, at the side of the road, he thought he saw his mother sitting saddened.

At home, he told his father and Alexandra what had happened. “You must not build the hotel in this place. Here a memorial needs to be build, in the name of these dead people” he said to his father.

“Stop lying only to keep your mother’s grave there” he answered in a strict voice and continued:

“You need to leave the past behind. We were all hurt by your mother’s loss, but life goes on”.

“So you don’t believe me?”.

“Believe what? That you saw a ghost that incidentally had your mother’s name? And you think I will lose a job like this that would provide a better life for us for your nonsense?”.

“You only care about money. We must remember the dead, that’s why we build graves. But why am I wasting my time? You forgot about your wife. Why would you care about strangers?” Marios answered and went to his room.

A short time later there was a knock on his door. Alexandra came in without awaiting an answer. Marios felt the need to apologize to her for the first time for his behaviour, but he didn’t.

“I believe you” she said.

“Really?”

“Yes. You have no reason to lie about something so serious. As for your father, I’m sure he will seriously think about

everything you said. I will help you convince him". She squeezed his shoulder and left the room with a good night wish. For the first time since his mother's death, he felt motherly love touching him.

The next night, when the darkness covered everything, Marios led Alexandra to the spot where he had had this strange experience the night before. He wanted to convince her that what he said was true. As the minutes passed, nothing happened. Alexandra grabbed Marios' shoulder and said to him:

"Come, it's late, let's go home".

"Let me go. I told you that it happened all here." Marios answered angrily when seeing that she didn't believe him.

"But, as you can see, there is nothing here..." but before Alexandra could finish her sentence, the voices appeared again, which made her grab his shoulder tighter. Zoe made her appearance:

"We will never find peace. Never".

In front of her eyes, she saw everything that Marios had described to her. He saw her whispering prayers as if asking for forgiveness.

When they arrived home, Marios was much calmer, while Alexandra was shaking. His father, who had been worried, hugged them and asked what had happened. Alexandra told him everything, but she didn't convince him for the second time.

"I don't know what is going on with you, but I told you, I won't lose a job opportunity like this just for your fantasies" he responded and went up to his room. That night, no one slept calmly. Marios tossed and turned, as did Alexandra.

The next morning, Marios heard his father talking on the phone:

**“In two hours, according to the schedule, the machinery should be there digging”.**

“So you won’t back down” Marios told him as soon as he hung up.

“We talked about that. I need to go” he answered and left the kitchen.

“Petros, think about it again” Alexandra told him while he was leaving the house, but he didn’t even answer. Marios chased after him and shouted:

“Dad, don’t betray mum a second time” but the car vanished around the corner.

Marios sensed that something bad would happen. Alexandra hugged him and they sat on the couch.

He started recounting stories of his mother. They were interrupted by the phone ringing. Alexandra hurried to pick up. Marios could see in her eyes that something bad had happened. When she hung up, they left the house in a hurry. Father had had an accident.

When they arrived at the hospital, they saw Petros with a cast on his leg. He hugged them and said:

“I should have listened to you”.

“What happened?” Marios asked.

“While I was driving, a little girl was standing in the middle of the road. I honked, but she wouldn’t move. I tried avoiding her and lost control over the car. My collaborator, who was driving in his car right behind me, said he didn’t see any girl on the road. Then everything you said and I didn’t believe you, came to my mind. Now I know what I have to do.”

The hotel opening was glorious event. The whole town was there and the community band played cheerful melodies. Next to the foundation of the hotel, there was a memorial for the forgotten souls that used to haunt the area all these years. The white plate said:

“To the memory of the deceased”. Near, a candle was burning in their memory, in the church of the Life Giving Spirit which was set up at the same time as the memorial.

Marios was standing between his father and Alexandra who were holding his hands tightly. At the end of the opening ceremony, when he turned to leave, he felt that cold breeze as that night everything began. He turned and next to the memorial, he saw his mother holding the little girls hand and smiling at him. He smiled back and turned and looked his father and Alexandra in the eyes. Finally, they were a happy family.





She smiled a lot  
lately

September 2012

Deity.gr

She was unpacking her suitcase cursing herself for her cowardice. For one more time she didn't manage to pass the house door and shut it behind her back for good. After emptying the suitcase, she kicked it hard and it disappeared under the bed. She slammed the closet door and made her way to the kitchen. Although a little late, Myrto started her daily routines, even though it tired her and made her whole body ache, she didn't have the strength to break free.

She started peeling potatoes. It was getting late and she didn't have time to prepare anything else. Any moment now, her daughter would come home from school.

"Thankfully my girl loves French fries" she said to herself.

She gazed out of the window. Her mind playing games with her. Her thought wouldn't let her relax. Her life had become unsavoury. Nothing seemed to please her. She wanted to leave, but she always changed her mind at the last second.

"Were would I go?" she thought.

The serious problems had begun two years ago, when her aged husband got a mistress. No, he didn't sleep around. That she might could have forgiven. His mistress was the card deck. And how could Myrto compete with that?

The financial problems didn't take long to start. The few savings they had in their bank account in case of emergency, soon disappeared. Her husband's salary stopped two blocks away at the casino he used to go and never made it home. Along with the financial troubles, came the anger, the fight for every little thing, the tears, the "I'll leave if you don't change", the violence. Because even this point he had reached. Hitting her because he couldn't land with his mistress and letting out his anger on his wife.

And he loved her. He even got to the point to threaten her father, that if he wouldn't let her be his wife – his father-in-law never liked him, he would commit suicide. They met at the wedding of a distant cousin of Myrto. He was a friend of the groom and, because he was already thirty five, as soon as he saw Myrto, he decided to leave the bachelor life behind him for good. Up to two years ago, things were going well. But once he got into card games, everything changed. At first Myrto blamed herself. She thought that because of her pregnancy, that wasn't the easiest one, and her devotion to her daughter, she neglected him. But a visit to the bank and a "We are sorry, your bank account is empty" from the employee, what if she made him check two and three times since she had no idea about her husband's whereabouts, made her finally understand the reasons.

Her eyes filled up with tears. She was in a dead end with no hope in the horizon. Emptiness. She felt numb, fading from the daily psychological misery. At almost thirty, she had left everything behind to raise her daughter and take care of her husband. Not this one, the one she had met two years ago at her cousin's wedding. The one who took her into his arms two years ago and promised her love forever and respect. The dreams and ambitions about a big career in court, as she had excelled law school, took the backseat. And as long as things were good, she didn't mind. Now on the other hand...

The oil started sizzling in the pan. Its sound made her stand up. She dried her eyes and threw the fries into the pan. She heard the sound of keys on the door. Her daughter run into her arms. She hugged her tight. She asked her how school was and told her to go wash her hands so they could eat in a few minutes. Her mother appeared in the door of the kitchen.

“Thank you for getting her from school.” Myrto said and turned around so she couldn’t see her red eyes.

“Were you crying?” she asked her and sat down.

“You don’t understand”.

“Myrto, don’t give up like that. Give Giannis a little time”.

“Time? You want me to give him some time? And what do you think I’m doing two years now?” Myrto answered, trying to hold back her anger so the child wouldn’t hear and continued: “what else do I have to do for you to understand that this can’t go on anymore? Wait for him to put me into the hospital?”.

“I didn’t say that, but we...”. Myrto didn’t let her finish her sentence. Her body was shaking in anger, like a fish out of the water.

“I don’t care what you do. I will leave one day, whether you like it or not”.

The conversation stopped when the girl entered the kitchen.

Myrtos’ mother was very image oriented and a divorce would crack the perfect family image she presented to her friends and acquaintances. She often mentioned a lot of examples from women her age who suffered such things and worse, to convince her not to break up the family. Once Myrto actually found the strength to leave, but when she asked her for help, she turned her back to her, discreetly of course, but that didn’t change the fact that she turned her her back. And so, having nowhere to go, Myrto went back.

After they ate, the girl went to bed, following her schedule that imposed at least two hours of sleep at noon. Her mother left, without any further words. Myrto laid down on the couch in the living room and heard the keys on the door a few minutes later. She took a deep breath and pretended to be asleep. She didn’t have the strength and spirit to face him. A

few minutes later, the sound of plates breaking in the kitchen, made her jump up. He entered the living room and started swearing calling her lazy, because he thought that French fries were a mere food for him. She asked him to stop so the child wouldn't hear them but he didn't seem to care. After he called her names she never could image him saying, he slammed the door and left. Myrto dropped on the couch crying, wishing she would die, since she couldn't stand this situation any longer.

The next morning, after dropping her daughter off at school, she decided to take a walk in the park nearby. She couldn't stand going back home. She sat on a bench and no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't hold back her tears. Suddenly she felt somebody next to her. She raised her head and saw a young man offering her a tissue. She looked at him and he smiled. But she had no time to thank him. He disappeared without saying a word.

At noon, her mood had brightened up. The presence of the young man, even those few minutes, was stuck in her head, driving away her husband's image and what she was going through because of him.

"Wanna go get an ice cream?" she asked her daughter when she picked her up from school.

"But it's Tuesday" her daughter answered puzzled. Friday was ice cream day.

"A little change doesn't matter" Myrto answered and her daughter stormed cheerful into her arms.

Mother and daughter enjoyed the ice cream so much they didn't notice their faces that were full of cacao cream. When they looked at each other they burst into laughter. Myrto opened her bag to get a tissue. She found the one the young

man had given to her at the park. Her surprise was big when she saw a phone number on it..

The deep blue of the Aegean Sea was stretched in front of her. Small waves were splashing on the ends of her feet, making the August heat bearable. Her salt-covered, well-shaped body was left in the arms of the Greek Sun God, who filled her body with streams of sweat, whilst the straw hat was protecting her face. The beach bar a few meters behind her, was playing soft music, since the tourists hadn't showed up yet. Her phone started ringing. She slowly stood up from her towel. Vaso informed her that she had an appointment in the afternoon. She was the one who urged her to close down the law office and go to the beach. She closed the phone and turned her head to look at Dimosthenis who was teaching her daughter to swim without arm floats. Antigone looked at her and smiled. Myrto returned the smile and laid down on her towel again. She was smiling a lot lately.





**The important ones**

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September 2012  
onestory.gr

He was sitting still on the armchair. His gaze was lost. He was breathing heavily. For the last six months, he was covered in silence. His body felt numb. He was half in size, as if the armchair was sucking him in day by day. The slightest move caused pain. The only moves he allowed himself to do, was raising his hand and grabbing the lighter from the small table. He lit one cigarette after another. Elpida, his wife, emptied his ashtray every now and then. Depression was what the doctor had said.

April 2011. His boss called him into his office to announce to him that he was fired. For a year, the factory's turnover had been more than halved. So Christophoros was sacrificed in the name of the financial crisis and the cutbacks. It was not even out of the blue. For a while now the workers were leaving one after another. He shouldn't even be complaining. His boss had kept him until the end. And not unfairly. He was working there for almost twenty years and was one of the hardest working employees, but as said: crisis, cutbacks...

But Christophoros hadn't given up without a fight. He begged, fell on his knees, he didn't even hesitate to cry in front of him, but the only thing he achieved, was to get his boss' sympathy, but not to keep his job. When he got home, he wouldn't talk to anyone. Elpida tried without any success to understand what was going on. From this day on he didn't talk to anybody. He locked himself up in his room and the only thing he asked from his wife were his cigarettes. Not even his son managed to get him out of the hole he had fallen into. Christophoros avoided looking at him. He felt embarrassed. There was nothing he could offer him anymore. All these years he was working fifteen hours a day so his family could have everything. But a little while before his forty eighth birthday,

everything changed. He couldn't cover the house expenses, nor pay for his twelve year old son's extracurricular activities. The bank notifications for the delay in the payment of the mortgage loan were coming in one after another and Elpida hid them in the kitchen cupboard so he wouldn't see them. Not that he hadn't noticed. One day when he heard the bell, he asked his wife who it had been and she said it was the mailman who gave her some flayers of cosmetic products, he looked her in the eyes and said that if the house would go into foreclosure, he would commit suicide.

Elpida tried unsuccessfully to fix his mood by inviting friends over, in pretext of events, like birthdays or anniversaries, that no one ever remembered before. Christophoros was living in his own world. His mind surrendered to thoughts of despair.

"What will I do now?". "I am lost". "There no way I will find a job at this age". "I ruined my wife and son's life".

This last thought tortured him most. The fact that he couldn't offer what he had to to the people most important to him, crushed him. Every now and then he had an ironic smiles on his lips, when he remembered the words he had said to his wife when her father was giving her away as a bride in the church: "from this day on you will be my princess". He couldn't forgive himself that his princess had turned into Cinderella, having to clean rich people's houses so they could at least have everything that was essential.

One day Elpida entered his room. She said she would take the child to the doctor because he felt a discomfort in the stomach. She asked him if he'd like to accompany them. She was hoping to get him out of the house for a while. Besides, it was a good opportunity for the three of them to go for a stroll. The weather was so good, that a stroll after the visit to the doctor

would be perfect. It would do good to all of them and mostly to their son who had totally lost the connection with his father. Many nights, he asked his mother why Christophoros was acting like this and she reassured him that it was a phase that would go away and that his father just needed a little more time to conform to the new ways. But Christophoros didn't seem willing to return to his son and wife anytime soon. Yes, to return, because even if he hadn't left physically, his soul was closed in a black box of despair which the psychologist confirmed: "Depression". Once more, her tries didn't have any result. He didn't even turn to look at her. His gaze didn't move from the window he was looking at for hours as if hypnotized. A few hours later Elpida entered his room once again. She was holding a tissue in her hands. Her eyes were swollen from crying. For a few minutes there was complete silence. Only their breaths were stretching out across the ceiling. The silence was interrupted by the woman, trying to clear her throat, stating that she would start talking.

"Our child has a kidney problem. He will need a transplant" she said with a voice as stable as she could keep it, instantly stood up from the bed and quickly left the room. She went into the kitchen and burst into tears. He followed her.

"What did you say?"

"What the doctor told me" she answered, while wiping her eyes.

"But how? What happened?" he wondered and went on: "and what can we do now?"

"I will do everything I can to save our child. You can go back to your armchair" she replied strictly and stood up to leave the kitchen. He stopped her. He looked her deep in the eyes and she understood that this was his request of forgiveness for his

behaviour. They hugged tightly and both of them burst into tears.

“I want to ask you for forgiveness” he told his son whilst sitting at the edge of his bed. “I missed so many moments with you all this time. But from now on, I promise, we will make up for the lost time”.

“I have something serious don’t I dad?” he took him by surprise “I saw it in mom’s eyes when she came out of the doctor’s office”.

“Whatever it is, you will surpass it. And now you will have us both by your side”. Father and son hugged and wouldn’t let go of each other. They had both missed this connection so much. Elpida, through all the pain because of the child’s condition, was standing in the doorstep, flaunting.

One year later, all three of them took a walk in the park, filled with happiness. Christophoros’s and Elpida’s son had a successful transplant and was absolutely healthy. Elpida, thanked God day and night that she had come out of this adventure stronger and finally had the two men of her life healthy and strong next to her. Christophoros’s son’s health problems and the fear of losing him woke him up from the slumber he had been in and made him see the important things in life and also the strength his son showed, taught him to never give up.



Eagerly looking for  
love

September 2012

Deity.gr

With an abrupt movement, Dimitris jumped up from his bed. He noticed that he was soaked in sweat. A few minutes passed until he realized what had happened. “What a dream” he wondered.

He had dreamed that he had gotten old. His hair and beard were white. Any sign of youth had disappeared from his body. And he was alone. He had dreamt about his future. After rubbing his eyes, he glanced at the clock on his bedside table. It was time to get ready for work.

Dragging himself to the bathroom, he washed his face and looked at his reflection in the mirror. It scared him to see how much he resembled the old man he had seen in his dream. He left quickly. Holding a cup of coffee, he sat at the kitchen table. He attempted to take a sip, but the heat burnt his lips. His mind was still stuck on the image of the man aging alone. “I have to not let this happen” he whispered while closing the house door behind him.

Dimitris, at almost forty, was starting to panic. Loneliness was wrapping around his neck like a snake, suffocating him day by day. He constantly desired a love that would fill his empty life. To get him out of the swamp he felt he was in and to put him into heavenly pleasures. But as he desired it more and more, it never came, causing him to sink into sadness and frustration, which he fought with the hope that someday, somewhere, sometime, life had a surprise ready for him...

He hadn't always been like that. There had been many women in his life. Even though he wasn't too handsome - he had inherited his father's hard features, he exerted charm on women. Maybe because his mother's sensibility was imprinted in his eyes, which he tried unsuccessfully to hide behind the elegant and strict suits of a successful lawyer. He hated that

look. He hated her. He had never forgiven her the fact that he had left him in his early teenage years for someone else.

Since then, he was afraid of women. Of their abandonment. The only thing he asked from them was to suck out their pubescence and, like a bee sucks the nectar from the flower and then went to another, so did he leave for the next one. He sucked out their youth or their experience and flew away. He wasn't interested in taking or giving anything else. He didn't want to share any other moments except moments of passion and pleasure. He only wanted physical things. Feelings didn't matter. But now he felt different...

He arrived at the office late. To move around in the overloaded with cars streets of Athens wasn't the most exciting thing. And mostly on a stormy February morning. His secretary informed him that his next appointment would be in two hours. When he was alone, his mind went back to the dream that made him jump up from his bed. Lost in his thoughts, he overheard the knock on his door. Suddenly he saw Elena in front of him, as she introduced herself a few minutes later. Dimitris offered her a seat, asking her if she would like something to drink. But Elena was in a hurry. In a hurry to talk, although she didn't have to say much for him to understand the reason behind her visit. The bruise on her right eye, that she uncovered when she took off her dark glasses, shading her beautiful blue eyes, explained everything. Filing for divorce...

When Elena left his office, for the first time, Dimitris caught himself thinking more about the client than about the case. Her scent had filled the room and her presence his mind with thoughts. Pleasant thoughts. The hard features in his face smoothed. A few minutes were enough to make him happy. Life had brought his desire to him. Her nicely shaped body that

was covered by the warmth of a purple coat and the glow in her eyes were stuck in his head for good. He started whistling a cheerful tune, wondering how he hadn't forgotten it and asked his secretary to cancel all appointments for the day, while the forty eight hours until the next appointment with her felt like centuries.

His joy when she was sitting in front of him again was unspeakable. They were talking for a long time. It was hard for him to concentrate on the case. He was lost in her eyes. The bruise had started healing and Elena had calmed down. The only moment he took his gaze of her was the moment he overenthusiastically asked her to stay at his place, when she revealed that she had left her house. But her answer embarrassed him. She didn't accept the offer to stay at his place but offered they go out for dinner. The date was set for Saturday. For the next three days, he neglected work like he had never done before. At night he couldn't sleep. Looking at the ceiling, he imagined her body next to his. He constantly wanted to clasp her, taste her lips, make love to her. Love not sex. For the first time he could see the difference.

The big day came. In one hour he would be near her. He was looking out from the living room window. As time went by, the rain fell heavier. The streets were flooded. "Thankfully the restaurant is near and I won't be late" he thought. The ringing sound of his cell phone came from the bedroom. He hurried to get it but a few seconds later he realized that it was a message. When he saw her name on the screen he smile. But the smile froze when he read the message:

"Sorry. I won't come. We talked it through with my husband. He explained... He convinced me... You understand, right? Thanks for everything".

He got out to the balcony. The rain falling on his body hurt, as if the drops were sharing his grief. He raised his head looking for answers. No one. The noise of his body falling on the asphalt was covered by a thunder.





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