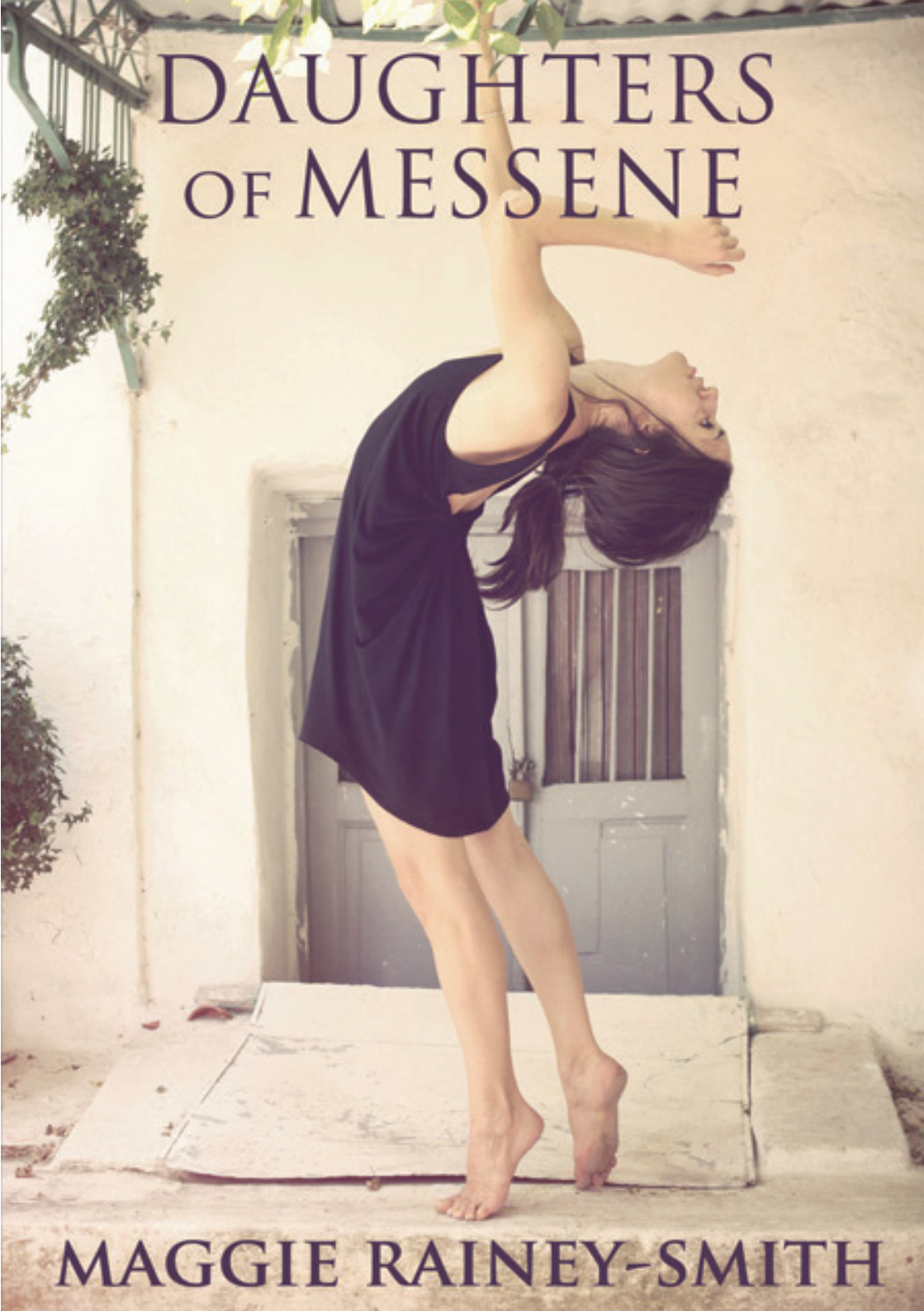
DAUGHTERS OF MESSENE



MAGGIE RAINEY-SMITH

Daughters of Messene

Maggie Rainey-Smith

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Cover image: *Dancer Myrto Grapsa in the Plaka, Athens*
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Our books speak for themselves

Dedicated to my dad, my sons and my friend Maria.

On the map, the southern part of the Peloponnese
looks like a misshapen tooth fresh torn from its gum.

Patrick Leigh Fermor

PROLOGUE

Shall I start with your grandmother? Imagine a taverna high on the hillside overlooking the sea where the Ionian and the Aegean beg to differ. It's the Mediterranean, but we call it the Messenian Gulf and it's where the two seas separate. Oh, people argue about just where one sea begins and the other ends, but that's the Greek in us, Artemis, always begging to differ. Listen to the music, the guitars and the bouzouki – how can you not dance? I see lanterns strung across the hillside, but that's just my imagination, perhaps there are only candles. There is a thunderstorm, the infamous Meltemi perhaps. Zeus speaks and the sky lights up, the lanterns rock and my mama dances.

She's out there, they say, on an uncovered balcony, one woman and many men, the fat rain falling at her feet, which is described years later as both a blessing and a scandal, depending on who is telling the story. Probably it was Yiayia, my grandmother, who was prone to superstition and longed for unexpected blessings, who saw the fat rain that way. They relied on the rain to feed the olives, plump black fruit, nothing like the strange fruit I found in jars when I came to New Zealand. But you can't blame her for remembering only the blessings; what harm a rain blessing at her daughter's feet, instead of a scandal? But I'm getting ahead of myself. That's for later.

Uncle George described the dancing to me, many years later, when Mama was dead and he wanted to gift me the best memories. He and Yiayia would argue about exactly what happened, but they both agreed, scandal or no scandal, that night there was nothing in the sky as electrifying as my mother dancing.

It's all about timing, Artemi mou, with Greek music, and knowing just when the foot should hover and when it should land, and you can't teach someone that. It's instinctive. You have to inhabit the music, know the exact moment that your foot will land and how to hover. It

matters, the same way using a certain word in a certain language will show whether you are a native speaker or not. You've heard me using the wrong word often enough, so you will know what I mean.

Nysa feels a sharp pain in her arm as she pushes stop on the cassette player. She'd chosen this tape at random, checking for the sound quality. She barely recognises her own thin voice. And now she wonders if she's done the right thing, making these recordings, and are they in the right order? But now there's no time left because Artemis is due home this morning.

Nysa has spent a restless night with shoulder pain, but puts it down to last-minute gardening, transplanting runner beans from trays and securing their stakes against the southerly. She is excited. No, that isn't right. For years she's been speaking English and thinking in Greek and now she no longer knows what she thinks or feels in any language.

She is going home …

Early winter she left; early spring she arrived. The air was the clearest she'd ever seen, windblown, grey, and yet filled with an eerie light that she now knows is about hemispheres, as if weight, texture, colour and even taste are altered by the tipping and turning of the planet. Wellington appeared as an under-exposed film leaking light. Wooden houses fell sideways from yellow-flowering hills. The green sea rose up to kiss the plane window. She fell out of the sky, a shy Greek girl, hoping to star in this film.

They had been front-page news back then: a plane-load of Greek girls arriving in Wellington. Photographers and the Greek Consul were waiting on the tarmac. A portable staircase wheeled to the plane so they could descend like royalty to flashbulbs and formality.

Rambo is still asleep at the end of the bed on the cream counterpane. This is the final packing. She's had several dummy runs over the last month since she made the decision to go. Artemis will be home to look after the house. Everything is in order, except her irregular heartbeat and

shortness of breath.

The cat stretches out, uncurling his head from the nest of his own sleek black fur, and his almost transparent whiskers shake. Nysa feels a momentary pang of guilt that she'll be leaving him for such a long time. But this is it; there is no turning back. Although the pain in her shoulder has returned and she is finding it hard to get air into her lungs.

Slowly, slowly.

Nysa sits on the bed to catch her breath. In her dressing-gown pocket is the letter from her sister, Daria, telling her to come home, that Uncle George is waiting for her. Hands shaking, struggling for breath, she opens the letter to read it again.

> *Uncle George is being disinterred in late October when things are a bit cooler. Please come home, he is waiting for you. Three years ago when we tried, it was awful, such a smell, such a terrible smell. Eleni said it was the hormones in the chickens preventing him from decomposing. Luckily, the priest called a halt to things before it all became unbearable. And then Petroula pointed out that Uncle George only ate home-grown chicken, which started the usual argument about who knew Uncle George best. They'll be doing battle on their deathbeds, that's what Uncle George used to say, and then he went and died first. He was really waiting for you to come back, Nysa. We all are, making black eyes for you.*

Plop, a wet circle forms around 'hormones', making it three-dimensional momentarily, and then the circle sinks and the words turn grey. Tears surprise her, she thought she'd run out of them. She has run out of excuses. It is time to go home. Her heart is no longer trustworthy; its rhythms confuse her.

There's just one more decision to make. Nysa is on her old knees now, in her cotton nightdress. There is the familiar pain in her joints and this new pain in her jaw. The nightdress catches under her knees, pulling the neckline down, and a pearl button flies across the room. Rambo leaps off

the bed and follows it. Nysa's hand is in the drawer, searching. The tooth is stowed in the bottom drawer under stockpiles of nylons and pantihose bought from the Kirks' sale each year. And now Artemis is in her head, disapproving, exasperated, disbelieving.

You bought five pairs!

She's made a decision – she *will* wear her mama's tooth. She opens the black jewellery box and there it is, cradled in faded velvet. The tooth she thought she would never wear again.

The reason she left Greece.

GIFT, SILVER POEM

The customs officer who took her passport peered at her over his glasses. He scanned her body the way a man in uniform can, fooling only himself that passenger profiling is a legitimate form of lechery. Artemis adjusted the front of her T-shirt. Her backpack was the reason it was skew-whiff. It was loaded with books that she did not trust to baggage handlers. She gave her very best neutral half-smile. The sort that could be interpreted as *Oh, I'm flattered you're looking*, or if you were discerning, and she was certain he wasn't, *You creep*.

'Have you any items you've forgotten to declare?'

'Nothing,' she said, irritated now. Perhaps he thought she'd secreted drugs in the spines of her textbooks, that the many pens in her bag were ingenious hypodermic needles.

'Step over here, please.'

'What?'

'You've signed this form, madam, declaring that you have no food items – I need to search your bag.'

Well, there'd be several drafts of a letter to Declan in her notebook, if he was interested.

But the official already knew what he was searching for.

'A peach, madam! You have an illegal peach.'

Declan had given it to her, his farewell gift at the airport. She cursed him under her breath.

'I forgot all about it. I wasn't smuggling it. My brother owns an orchard. I *know* about these things. I just forgot to eat it on the flight.'

'That is a two hundred-dollar fine, madam. I'm sorry, but we have to protect our border.' And then, unnecessarily, as if she were a child who needed reminding, 'You cannot eat this peach,' and he held the fruit aloft in his hygienic gloved hands.

'Do I dare …' she said, but stopped herself. To quote from Declan's favourite poem would have been perfect, with the illegal peach in the hands of the customs officer. But she could see from his face that poetry was the last thing this man cared about. Two hundred dollars. Damn, Declan.

The peach had seemed romantic, and now … but no, a peach was the perfect gift.

It was her fault. She should have eaten it.

She retrieved her bag, muttering, cross with Declan, because lately it was easier to make him the problem. And then she prepared her face …

… to meet the faces …

… well, she would need a taxi.

There was a brisk spring wind outside, and her jacket was stowed away in her luggage. She shivered, rubbing her bare upper arms with her hands – but was it really that cold? Didn't she always get the shivers when she was coming home? Artemis sometimes couldn't tell the difference between excitement and all those other emotions that came with thoughts of home and her mama.

A cab driver pulled up and opened the boot for her. She slipped into the back seat, grateful for his chivalry in stowing her bags, quickly grabbing her novel out of the rucksack to read on the way. She disliked having to make small talk in taxis.

The driver's ID said his name was Akila, and he had a photograph of a baby girl loosely tucked behind the rear-view mirror. Artemis approved of taxi drivers with photos of their offspring. She hoped it meant they valued their own lives and therefore hers too. He had a long and graceful neck, with skin tones that moved from black to almost black and back again, each tone melting into the other. As a historian, she liked to think she could place people, their heritage, their history, by reading their skin. She didn't mean to stare.

The driver was very quiet and possibly aware of her scrutiny. Their eyes briefly engaged as he looked in the rear-view mirror to negotiate the traffic – or had he been looking at her all along? Her speculation was

ended by a text message. The driver murmured something incomprehensible and sped up. Artemis found her phone and flipped it open: Missing you already x.

She suppressed the urge to text Declan back to tell him about the peach – it would sound so ungrateful. He was away with *C* for a while but he'd try to make contact when he could. They never said *C*'s name, even though she worked at the same university as they did. This way, Artemis kept *C* at bay. But on the way to the airport, Declan had spoken his wife's name several times. He was excited about the symposium they were going to, *C*'s part in it, her achievements.

What had he intended when he gave her the peach? Was it a parting gift, or something to eat? And now it had cost her two hundred dollars – a stupid, illegal peach. She needed a cigarette, but they were in the boot with the duty-free.

'The ferry,' said the taxi driver, pointing out the ship heading south, as if she might be a tourist.

'Yes, I know, I'm from Wellington originally. The ferry runs past our house every day.'

There, she'd said it, *our house*, as if she were still living at home. How easily she slipped back into this … this … what was it? No sooner had she landed in Wellington, she began to inhabit her old self.

The car was winding up their odd little street where the house was perched overlooking the sea (if you peeked through the branches of trees) and with access to the beach (if you took a shortcut through the neighbours' place). She was home.

Akila opened the car door. He was smiling at her as he handed her the duty-free cigarettes. Just a small shift in the shape of his eyebrows; either he was a smoker too or he didn't approve. Then he graciously extended the handle on her backpack for her. She smiled back.

The driver drew his feet together and bent just a little from his waist in either a mock bow or an extra-courteous farewell. Their eyes met, he

lowered his first, and climbed back into his cab.

Her mother's pseudo-Greek gate lodged within a rococo fence was out of place with this weatherboard house but intrinsic to it. And the ornate gate-latch was still faulty. You needed to jiggle it sideways and then upwards. Odd, how something so trivial could bring such a stab of pleasure. There, she'd done it, the gate was open. Shoes in hand, Artemis walked barefoot to the front door. She felt the southerly snatch at something. Her feet caressed the worn path, studded with seashells, scored with a wave pattern. Her father had promised her mother Rosetta cobble, but had never got around to it.

A pair of gardening shoes lay on the front porch as if slipped off in a hurry. Soil still clung in brittle clusters to the sole of one of them. Gardening gloves lay abandoned, half-inverted. She saw that the thumb on one was torn through. The key was tucked inside the right-side-up shoe – her father's shoe. This was her mother's elaborate 'how to fool a burglar' scheme. Artemis knew it off by heart, except that now the shoe was potent with disuse. She hadn't expected it would still hurt so much.

Artemis fumbled. The door finally opened. Inside, a faint smell of gas, and there was the cat at the top of the stairs unmoved by her return, as if he'd been expecting it all along.

Artemis walked through to the kitchen. Her mother's oregano was wilting on the windowsill. Rambo's bowl was on the floor by the fridge, reeking of fish. The smell of coffee lingered. She was undone: all the flavours of family were concentrated here, like bottled emotions, each aroma a preserved memory.

Where *was* her mama? A hair appointment had prevented her from being at the airport. Artemis had insisted she shouldn't change it, but even so it felt odd, her mother not here as if she had already left the country. Surely she'd be back by now?

Already she could feel time slowing around her, moving backwards even. She bent down to stroke the cat who'd come down at last. He snarled. Startled, she went to lift him, whispering, 'Horse, Horse, it's me, Artemis.' It was George who insisted the cat was Rambo really, and her

mama had given in, as she always did when it came to George. But there was no one here now to argue with.

'Horse,' she whispered, stroking the cat, willing him to purr, but he leapt back to the floor, sniffing at his bowl.

Horse, the name she'd given him in silent protest about her own stupid name. A protest lost on the cat and everyone else. According to her dad, when Artemis was baptised, the Cretan girls had cried out for a more suitable name, but Nysa had been undeterred. 'As soon as you were born, I knew you were my Artemis,' is what she would say. As well as something about needing a strong name for a Kiwi daughter. And that was that.

LIFE TO YOU

It was Mrs Cataldo who broke the news. She explained how she had dropped in to check on Nysa, found her on the floor, struggling for breath, and called the ambulance. There was no time to contact anyone, and she knew Artemis was due in that day on a flight from Melbourne, so what to do …

She'd waited, rather than phone the boys. She'd waited for Artemis to arrive and then burst through the door breathless, the bearer of bad news.

'I'm so sorry, Artemis … I was wanting to be here for you when you …' And Mrs Cataldo ran out of words. 'Your mama, your mama, you see, your mama, she was packing her bag and …'

Mrs Cataldo embraced Artemis, and in a series of extravagant apologies (as if she alone was responsible) explained how Nysa had died that morning at the hospital and was waiting for Artemis to come and collect her. They cried, and Artemis clung to the buxom comfort of her mother's neighbour, who rocked her back and forth, *there, there, there*. Mrs Cataldo patted her on the back, more of a thump really, and the thump felt good, it felt real. Whereas this news …

'She held my hand all the way to the hospital, Artemis. She wouldn't let me phone you. She said I must wait until you arrive. But she wanted you to be the first … before your brothers. I think she knew that this was it, the end, and she didn't want a fuss. No, no fuss. She talked to me about working in the hospital when she first arrived in Wellington. We laughed even, we laughed about lost teeth and someone she knew called Beauty-boy, but I don't know, maybe I've got it wrong. Beauty-boy, it's a funny name … you think?'

Mrs Cataldo's running commentary was a relief. It meant Artemis didn't have to think. She knew her mother's neighbour was trying to distract her, and they were complicit, all the way to the hospital. Mrs

Cataldo had seen her arriving home in the taxi and asked the driver to wait, so they were now in the same taxi Artemis had caught from the airport, with Mrs Cataldo confiding in the driver about her wonderful neighbour, a Greek girl who came all the way from Kalamata, and who was now dead.

The driver caught Artemis's eye in his rear-view mirror, sympathy in his wide, dark eyes and, for a moment, there was just the driver and her. The strange urgency of death had heightened all her responses, and she felt a closeness to this man.

Mrs Cataldo continued updating the taxi driver about Nysa; and when he stopped at an amber light, she urged him forward explaining that Nysa was waiting, they must hurry.

'You can go, you can go, don't wait, you can go!' Mrs Cataldo was waving her hands at the taxi driver, gesturing for him to drive through. 'Oh, you missed it! Oh, you missed it … poor Nysa, she's waiting for her daughter.'

Even in her grief, Artemis could see the funny side, and noticed the taxi driver was smiling also. He sped from the red light obediently as it changed to green.

'She has come home from Melbourne to look after her mama's house,' Mrs Cataldo continued, leaning towards the driver to engage him and at the same time, her hand on Artemis, the consoling *thump thump*. 'She's a professor, you know, a professor at a Melbourne university, aren't you, Artemis?'

She could have corrected Mrs Cataldo, explained she was not yet a professor, but it didn't seem important and the taxi driver was intent now on finding a place to park at the hospital.

'You'll wait, won't you? Wait, please wait, won't you? We want a ride home, don't we, Artemis? You'll wait for us.'

The taxi driver promised he would wait. Artemis followed Mrs Cataldo into the hospital. The gap between herself and her mother's Italian neighbour grew larger as Mrs Cataldo rushed forward, while the enormity of what was ahead dawned on Artemis and she slowed her

steps.

But when they arrived on the ward where Mrs Cataldo had left Nysa, there was just an empty, freshly made bed. It was almost a relief, and Artemis entertained the thought that Mrs Cataldo had got things wrong and her mama was really still alive in another room. A nurse appeared and told them Nysa had been moved to the morgue. Mrs Cataldo berated the nurse for not keeping Nysa on the ward to wait for her daughter to arrive *all the way from Melbourne*. The nurse explained how busy they were and that the bed was needed for someone else. She handed Artemis the business card of a local funeral home that was on standby and happy to pick up her mama's body. Briefly, Artemis considered using the taxi waiting outside, but she knew Nysa would never have approved.

Not a taxi, Artemis.

'You're welcome to go down to the morgue,' the nurse told them, 'but if you don't wish to, we will release the body to the funeral home.'

A contraband peach at customs that morning had seemed momentous. Just a few hours later, she was deciding whether to visit her mama in the hospital morgue or leave it to chance, trust that a funeral home could match up the paperwork, pick up the right person … of course, there was no choice.

Mrs Cataldo went to keep the taxi driver company, and Artemis followed a nurse to the morgue. Mama was in a shroud, rigid, her neck arched and her mouth partly open, clear air bubbles filling the space between her lips. It was far too awful for grief. The nurse said she would phone the funeral home and left.

Thoughts crowded in, selfish thoughts, all her research plans thrown into disarray. She wallowed in the unfairness, almost ready to tackle her mama about the inconvenience, the timing, how typical that she'd waited for Artemis to come home rather than when the boys were visiting last month, and what about her mama's trip to Greece? They'd be expecting her. She'd let them all down, dying, just like that, with no warning, and Artemis willed herself to be angry, because if she wasn't angry she would fall apart, here in this cold room. And then she

touched her.

Nysa was not entirely cold, not the way her father had been, all laid out in his coffin, rigid, stone-cold. Nysa wasn't warm, but she wasn't cold. She was almost still there, and Artemis placed her lips on the cool cheek, stroking one of the grey curls, moving it back into place, mesmerised by the cartography of her mother's neck.

'Mama, this isn't how it was meant to be; you're supposed to be going home.'

A suited man, all hand-wringing piety, touched her elbow and spoke in a modulated voice, introducing himself as Harvey, from the funeral home. If Declan were here, he would have parodied the over-anguished voice and polite sympathy. But Declan wasn't with her, and this wasn't funny. She watched as her mother was slipped into a body bag that zipped shut.

The taxi driver, Akila from Casablanca, drove them home. He and Mrs Cataldo were now on a first-name basis, with Mrs Cataldo filling him in on all of the details, a potted history of Nysa and her family. Even in death, thought Artemis, her mother was holding court, the centre of attention, uniting strangers. As they talked, Artemis discreetly phoned her brothers, placing a hand over her free ear to block out the chatter. She sent a text to Declan, rather than calling him. Mrs Cataldo didn't need to know.

In the morning, before her brothers arrived, Artemis toured the house. She ran her hand over the protective plastic across the back of the new sofa. Her mother had been planning to put a fabric cover over it, something she always did for the chairs that Sandy sat in, in case he came in from the garden, or home from work, and didn't have time to change. Then she could wash the extra fabric instead of making a fuss. But Sandy had become sick soon after they bought the sofa and her mother hadn't had time to sew a new cover.

She almost tripped on one of the mats. Her mother had mats for all

seasons: winter and summer, all along the fence, because they were too heavy for the clothesline, mats right in the eye of any unexpected salt-laden southerly.

It was spring now, and the mats were unwashed, and the plastic was still on the new sofa. Outside the front-room window the cabbage tree was almost blocking her mother's favourite view. Her father's vegetable garden was untilled, overgrown and sprouting weeds. He'd battled the sandy soil and the southerly winds, erected a glasshouse, created windbreaks with native bush and coaxed even cyclamens to flower. He'd grown lemons, grapefruit and artichokes, to prove to his Greek wife that the south coast was the perfect place for her, and she'd believed him.

At the back of the house was the extension built by Sandy as his family expanded. It didn't entirely match the old part of the house and was more solidly constructed. Her father had been a perfectionist, believed in soffits, overhangs and insulation. Before he got sick, he'd given up working with tools and become an assessor, going out to inspect leaky homes, checking for damp spots, stachybotrys lurking between the walls, mould that made people sick. It had saddened him, a man who had built homes to breathe and to last.

Each room in the new extension had thick rimu architraves and wide-panelled rimu doors that made satisfying clunks when they closed, and there were no gaps in the floorboards. These were her brothers' bedrooms. They had fitted carpet, which her mama had reluctantly agreed to. It was Artemis who slept in a room where the floorboards exhaled. Her bedroom was where George, her eldest brother, the first-born (and in Greek terms, the most important) slept as a baby. Irritatingly, her mother had continued to call it *George's room*.

Her brothers' bedroom walls were less revealing and their bachelor beds said more about their mother than about them – chenille bedspreads laundered to within an inch of shredding, but immaculate and ironed to perfection, adorned with lavishly decorated gold eiderdowns. Lace doilies on their bedside tables, the venetian blinds at a perfect tilt to prevent sun damage, and curtains … blinds and curtains, order and clutter, opulence

and frugality, contradiction was her mother's cornerstone, it was in her bloodline. Meanwhile, her brothers had forged identities, found wives – or, in Antony's case, a life in London – far from their almost-shredded bedspreads. Their mother didn't hold with duvets, she thought you needed woollen blankets for real warmth, but there were duvets too, just in case, brand new, still in plastic wrappers.

And then her parents' bedroom, next to her own, in the old part of the house but with the best view of the bay. Their bed, a modest double; and her father had been such a tall man. How had they managed? The bed was covered in a cream eiderdown, immaculate. The pillows were tucked under the bedcovers in perfect symmetry, like separate and sacred burial mounds. It was here, in this bed, she was conceived, presumably. Now that her parents were dead she felt at liberty to speculate. *This bed in which so much had happened*. Her three brothers and her, all of them, were likely to have been conceived within this modest square footage. It was a shrine to modesty, the size, the colour, the sense of containment.

She needed a strong coffee, and then a cigarette.

Her mama's copper *briki* sat on the stovetop, gleaming defiantly. Last time she was home, Artemis had purchased a more convenient and practical coffee plunger as a gift for her mother. Where was it? This was the type of battle they often engaged in and, still, with her mother newly dead, Artemis felt the need to assert herself. She opened the cupboards above the bench where the plunger might be hiding, riffled through the pantry noticing that it was well-stocked with food but she was too annoyed to be grateful because she wanted the coffee plunger. Finally, seething, she found the plunger under the sink, behind the kitchen cleaning fluids, still in its packaging, possibly unused except for the time that Artemis had made coffee in it to demonstrate to her mother how it worked. And then she saw the funny side.

'Okay, Mama, you win.'

Artemis shoved the plunger in its package back under the sink. Laughing and farting as she stood up, she remembered her mother in the mornings, reaching into the cupboards, small farts escaping. How she

would then sing as if music could both deafen and deodorise. George, Dimitris and Antony in their bedrooms, suppressing their laughter.

Artemis began the age-old process of boiling finely ground coffee, adding three sugars to make it *vahry glykos* (that bit to annoy her absent mother who was cautious about sugar late in life). She stirred the coffee until it dissolved, waited for it to boil and watched the slow crawl of caramel climbing. Then just before it erupted and spilt over the top of the pot, she lifted the coffee off the stove, waited for it to settle, and then poured the thick liquid into her mother's waiting white demitasse cup; the one that was part of a set given to Nysa and Sandy for their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. She ran her tongue around the bright gold edging at the top of the cup and sipped. The strong, sweet liquid scalded her lips; she blew on it, watched caramel bubbles erupt, and sipped again.

Artemis felt disarmed and emotional imagining her mother and father here in the kitchen with her, promising to come and see her in Melbourne. They'd drunk the plunger coffee together, her mother generously remarking that it tasted good, her father winking at her over her mother's head – which was easy, he was so much taller. And she'd known even then, they wouldn't get to Melbourne, for already Baba was not well, but she hadn't imagined how quickly they would both be gone.

Coffee in hand, Artemis wandered through the house, ready now to read the note left for her. Mrs Cataldo had burst into the house yesterday evening, breathless, scaring Horse.

'I forgot, I forgot! Your mama, she left this with me, a note for you, Artemis.'

Sunlight peppered the bedcover, illuminating worn threads, and the note, unopened, was waiting for her. She sat at first with her feet on the floor, holding the envelope, running her fingers along the sealed edges. And then, heart racing (perhaps it was the coffee), she lifted her feet from the floor, tucked them under her and allowed the weak spring sunshine to *slowly slowly*, warm her.

Act quickly; think slowly … an old Greek proverb.

Agapitemou Artemis,

When you read this, I might be miles in the sky over Mongolia, on the metro to Athina from the airport, or on the bus crossing the Corinth. I feel apprehension when I write this, knowing I'm flying backwards and yet going forwards, and this is what I want for you.

But first, have you found Rambo's frozen meat in the second drawer of the freezer? Are you warm enough? There's a new duvet in George's room in the wardrobe. I know how you prefer a duvet to blankets. And please don't forget to pass on my copy of the Listener *to Mrs Cataldo. I knew you would be expecting instructions and I can see you shrug and hear you click your tongue.*

You will look like your grandmother when you shrug and you will sound like your great-grandmother when you click your tongue. These are things I have never told you. Have you ever wondered about them? Where your nose came from (it's not your father's) and your stubbornness? I'm not a historian like you, Artemi mou. But I've begun looking into our family history, finally, with encouragement from your baba before he died.

When I get back from Greece I'll know more, because there is so much that I don't know. I did think of asking you to join me on my journey, but I knew you had your thesis to finish and it felt selfish to distract you. I hope that one day, together we will visit Kalamata. I've left some cassette tapes in George's bedroom. I have been recording my memories onto tape but many of them are very disjointed and I don't have your research skills. So if you do decide to listen to them – have patience with your mother. It's just a beginning.

KALO KORITSI

After the funeral, people spilled onto the roadside outside the church to wish Artemis and her brothers abundant life, as if they could keep death at bay by wishing it away. The old women claimed each other, passing compliments, 'I spit on you' being one of the favourites, intended to repel envy, but sounding quite the other. Artemis was handled with affection by strangers and friends alike, people who knew her mother and who thought they knew Artemis. Her brothers were wrapped in glittering bosoms, their cheeks pinched, their backs slapped, their pedigree reviewed and revised, their eulogies retold.

'A brave girl, your mama was a brave girl.'

This from Evanthe, their mother's best friend; and there was a chorus of agreement from the Cretan girls, as Artemis still thought of them, but they too, like Evanthe, were old women.

'A brave girl.'

Artemis had heard it so many times from her own mother's lips that she'd never really believed it, until now.

A brave girl.

'Your baba and mama will be together, Artemis,' said one of the Cretan girls, 'dancing to Nana Mouskouri.'

Artemis briefly imagined her mother and father in the front room back home beside the record player, on the wide floorboards before the new carpet, dancing.

A shy older man in a tired suit approached, stopping to crush a cigarette underfoot before he spoke. His name was Kevin. He said he'd worked with Nysa at the hospital in the sixties when she first came to New Zealand.

'Your mum was a real beaut. A stand-out. I'd never met a Greek girl until I came to Wellington.' Kevin had silver hair that was emphasised by his dark, lined face. 'She was a stand-out, your mum – life and soul

– we had a lot of fun working together.'

Artemis called Antony over. Her youngest brother had travelled from London for the funeral. He was more than happy to escape the clutches of the Cretan girls and was wiping lipstick kisses from both cheeks with the back of his hand.

'This is Kevin. He worked with Mum at the hospital.'

'We had a saying,' said Kevin. '"You couldn't meet a nicer girl than Nysa-rhymes-with-meet-her." That was because no one knew how to say her name.'

Artemis and Antony laughed. It had been the bane of their mother's life, people not knowing how to say her name. It was a relief to laugh, and they briefly hugged one another in confirmation of this shared family knowledge.

'She had guts, that girl, more guts than most, your mum.' Kevin stopped to catch his breath, he was wheezing like an old smoker.

Dimitris and his wife Penelope had joined them now.

'This is my brother, Dimitris,' said Artemis, 'and this is Penelope. They live in Sydney.'

'Rose Bay,' said Penelope, as if it mattered.

Artemis was wearing her sister-in-law's black blazer. Penelope had disapproved of the blue dress that Artemis had chosen to wear, and insisted she at least wear something black. She reached over to smooth one of the upturned lapels on the blazer, possessively.

'This is Kevin, a friend of Mama's,' said Artemis stepping back to dodge any further wardrobe interference.

'I was a porter at the hospital. You know, taking bodies down to the morgue. Not many nurses would come with me, but your mum, she'd have a crack at anything. We lost one once – fell off the trolley. Nysa was a good stick and she didn't tell anyone. We laughed until we cried, lifting the poor old bugger back on the trolley. Your mum worried we'd cracked his hip and that cracked us up even more.'

Kevin laughed uncertainly, perhaps thinking he'd said too much. But they leaned in, eager to hear more.

'Well, like I said, your mum was a good stick. Life and soul of the party.'

By now George had joined them, and Antony introduced his elder brother. But Kevin didn't take the hand that George put out to shake, he was too busy coughing. When he recovered, he continued.

'I just came to say goodbye to Nysa. She was a real beaut.'

'You must come back to the house later,' said George, ever the diplomat. But Kevin was a shy man, he'd said his piece and he had to go. He was looking uncomfortable, keen to get off as Ginny approached.

'Who was that?' she asked, annoyed at his sudden departure, sensing she'd missed something.

'Some chap who knew Mama when she worked at the hospital,' said Antony.

'Mum and Kevin used to take bodies down to the morgue …' said Artemis, and then, '… evidently …' as if she wasn't sure she believed him.

'Life and soul of the party,' added Penelope, one up now on Ginny.

They watched somewhat bemused as Evanthe chased after Kevin and the two embraced. Evanthe who owned a travel agency in Miramar and whose entire clientele appeared to be Greeks returning home, famous for her flash outfits and even flashier gold jewellery.

'Was he an old flame of Nysa's?' Ginny said, not to be outdone.

Penelope warmed to the idea. She patted Artemis's hair, which was pulled back in an untidy chignon, her rampant curls tamed by pins that Penelope herself had placed in her hair once the black blazer was sorted.

'What do you think, Artemis?'

She looked to her brothers for support – surely not? Dimitris bent to rub his already highly polished black shoe and George tipped his head back, his eye catching Antony's in brotherly conspiracy. They daren't comment one way or the other.

Thankfully, Evanthe returned to put them straight. 'Your mama met Kevin when she first arrived in Wellington. He's gay, but of course we didn't know that back then! I'm not sure he did either.'

Evanthe lifted her string of multiple gold chains and, with thumb and

forefinger, swung the necklace back and forth before patting it back into place on her ample bosom. She touched each ear, and caressed each small gold crucifix that dangled. And then she beckoned them all over to listen; she had something important to say.

'Artemi mou, you'll have to go back to Kalamata for your mama, you know. She's bought the ticket, and everyone's expecting her. You'll have to go. You can't waste the ticket and I can't refund it. It was a special deal I got for Nysa, and you'll never get to Greece again at this price.'

'Of course you must go,' said Penelope, who seemed to think that now Nysa was gone she was free to have a say on everything.

'You have to,' said Ginny. Only Antony looked at Artemis for her approval of the plan.

The Cretan girls agreed. They circled. Artemis was the centre of their attention.

'Oh, you have to go, Artemis, it's what Nysa would have wanted.'

Even Mrs Cataldo agreed, going on to imply that indeed this is what Nysa had mentioned when she was dying, on her way to the hospital.

Antony placed a hand on the small of his sister's back.

'Artemis can't make a decision today, not right now. Everyone, you're welcome back at our home later this afternoon, after … after the cremation.'

There was silence. He might just as well have sworn. And privately, Artemis did. *Damn it* – in rushing to rescue Artemis, he'd said the word.

She'd been wondering how they would explain to these devout Greek friends of her mama's that Nysa was to be cremated, and they would not be gathering at her graveside. That Nysa, a good Greek girl, had chosen this herself. There was disbelief among the mourners. The shock turned to talk and whispers, and people watched with anxious faces as Artemis and her three brothers left to follow the hearse – presumably, and here the chatter grew louder – to the crematorium. The priest had left already; he'd disagreed with their decision to cremate, he wasn't going to stand by and watch that.

Being scandalised did not prevent the congregation returning later that afternoon to Nysa's home. It didn't prevent the Cretan girls from

continuing to insist on Artemis returning to Greece on Nysa's behalf.

'Such a special deal I did for Nysa, you can't let it go to waste, Artemis, all that money. No, you'll have to use the ticket,' said Evanthe.

And then, triumphantly, 'Artemi mou, now your mama's been cremated, there's nothing to stop you taking her with you.'

This suggestion was greeted with much enthusiasm. Even Artemis's brothers had to agree it was a masterstroke from Evanthe. Of course their sister had to do this.

'But what about Kaikoura? What about Mama's wishes to be with Baba?' she heard herself arguing, taking her mother's side for possibly the first time in her life.

Ginny stepped in to placate her. 'We'll take Nysa … some of Nysa … with us, and you can take the rest of her to Greece.'

Just like that, they were dividing her mother up, measuring her out with coffee spoons for distribution between two hemispheres.

'Perfect, Ginny, a grand idea.' said George, sounding relieved. 'We'll do it! On our way home, Artemis. It's nothing, just a stopover in Kaikoura.' He put his arm around his sister, and she sensed his concern, but she also knew he wasn't about to contradict his wife.

'A grand idea!' Penelope agreed.

'It's a bet both ways, Artemis, what Mama wanted and you know …' George looked sweaty and uncertain, keen to placate both his wife and sister.

'We'll do it, spread Nysa on the tide at Kaikoura,' said Ginny warming to the idea and her part in it, and Artemis felt powerless in the face of her newly assertive sisters-in-law. But even more, she was powerless to stop all the enthusiasm for Evanthe's idea that it was time for Nysa to go home.

'Artemi mou, you must return to Kalamata and take Nysa with you.' Evanthe pinched her cheeks and rubbed her back and offered to pack her bags.

Ginny proposed a toast and they all agreed it was just what Nysa would have wanted. Glasses clinked, but the toast was interrupted as a text came through from Declan: Hope it went well.

Hardly eloquent. Hardly enough. A man of literature who had the entire canon to quote from, and all he could say about her mama's funeral was this.

He'd failed her. He'd gone to a symposium on modernist literature in Daylesford, where his wife was one of the plenary speakers, instead of coming over for her mama's funeral. Oh, he'd placated her with an extravagant wreath of expensive roses that everyone had remarked on. But he hadn't come. He hadn't been there for her. He wasn't *here* for her.

Worn down with grief, Artemis succumbed. She cried, really cried, for the first time. They all imagined her tears were grief for Nysa, but really the tears were mostly for herself, resentment towards Declan, her sense of isolation. Her grief had become a kind of euphoria. She agreed, yes, she'd go to Kalamata (and to hell with Declan). Her brothers, relieved that they didn't have to go, urged her on.

FROM WHERE ONE'S CAP HOLDS

In Frankfurt, they confiscated her bottle of duty-free cognac and the cigarettes. She was forced to remove her shoes and walk in her bare feet through the metal detector not once, but twice. They searched her bags. Her mother's ashes, having travelled incognito all the way from New Zealand in a box inside her suitcase, were now arousing suspicion. Artemis was asked to unpack the ashes and to explain the gold tooth she was wearing around her neck.

'You must take it with you to Greece, Artemis, find out its provenance. It was important to your mother,' Penelope had said.

Ginny had tried not to look repulsed at the sight of the tooth as they handed it around. Mrs Cataldo had found their mama clutching the tooth necklace on the bedroom floor. She'd taken the necklace for safekeeping and returned it after the funeral. The boys said it was up to Artemis what she did with the tooth, they weren't sentimental. But they all agreed it was a strange sort of necklace and perhaps Penelope was right, perhaps Artemis could find out whose tooth it was … and at that point they changed the subject and Ginny took charge. She drew up a list of household effects, right down to the cutlery, and they put coloured stickers on photographs and furniture – red to go south with Ginny and George, green to go to Rose Bay, yellow for Antony. Artemis didn't request a sticker; she felt stuck already with the trip to Athens and her mama's gold tooth, which now lay in the palm of a stranger's hand. She had papers to prove ownership of the ashes for customs, but she hadn't thought about the tooth. One of the officials reached over, and with manicured fingers lifted the odd necklace up to the light, turned it over and then showed it to the man beside him who handed it back to Artemis, happy to be rid of it.

Artemis found the customs document about her mother's ashes in her shoulder bag and responded to their questions.

'Yes, I packed my own bag.'

And then, just as abruptly, they were no longer interested, and she was being waved on but instructed to carry her mother's ashes on board with her and not to put them back into the suitcase. She purchased a new bottle of cognac in the transit area and stashed her mother in the same bag.

At the boarding gate she handed her passport to a young German boy, Adonis-like in his Lufthansa uniform. He matched her photograph to her face and handed it back to her without a word. She was directed through an exit to a set of steep concrete steps leading down into a narrow corridor. She'd expected an air bridge to a plane, but instead she was herded with hundreds of other passengers out onto the tarmac to catch a bus. And for a moment she panicked, caught in a swell of unplanned forward movement, clutching her mother and the bottle of booze tightly.

On board the plane she breathed a sigh of relief, obviously louder than intended, because the young woman seated beside her reached over and pressed her arm.

'I hate take-offs.'

But Artemis loved flying. She talked to the young woman to calm her as the plane hurtled down the runway and the wheels lifted. Artemis told her about her mother's flight to New Zealand all those years ago. How a plane-load of Greek girls had left their homeland and travelled to the other side of the world. She told the young woman how her mama had died, and how she was now returning to Greece on her behalf. She didn't mention the ashes in the overhead locker. Instead, she went back to drawing a picture for her companion of an adventurous young woman flying from one hemisphere to another.

A beautiful, brave Greek girl.

And this, she now realised, was her mother.

Soothed by the story, her companion fell asleep. Artemis, without the distraction of someone to talk to, thought about Declan.

It would be early morning in Australia. He was staying on with *C* in Daylesford after the symposium. Artemis loved Daylesford, the

second-hand bookshops, the spa baths, and hated the idea that the special place she had shared with Declan he was now sharing with his wife. But she wouldn't let him ruin this moment. She pushed up the window cover and looked out into the night. Soon they'd be landing in Athens.

Athina. Yes, Mama.

During the early part of her journey from New Zealand to Frankfurt, Artemis had distracted herself by watching movies. She'd been avoiding the recordings that Nysa had left, addressed specifically to Artemis. Cassette tapes, for God's sake. Antony, before he left for London, had insisted on having the cassettes digitised so that she could load them onto her iPod. She was less than three hours from Athens, and the unheard tapes from her mama had been on her mind through every inflight movie. The young woman beside her had prompted her to speak of Nysa's courage. But it was Artemis who needed the courage, and this she knew as she sat resisting the stories. The cassette recordings, thoughtfully converted by a friend of Antony's, were her mother's voice, and God knows what she had to say, or if Artemis could bear it.

Where to begin, Artemis?

I woke at 4.27am. The shiny green numbers on the clock are engraved in my memory. I touched your father's foot carefully and briefly by way of confirmation. He was still warm at that point, but later the warmth left him. I wasn't afraid, because Yiayia always told me, 'Don't be frightened of the dead, they will never hurt you. It is the living you need to fear.'

As his warmth faded, I remembered our first encounter, our first row, the birth of you and the boys, our first kiss, our last kiss – oh, that too, especially. And then I allowed death into my thoughts, and mourned privately, just me and your baba, side by side, before I got out of bed to phone the doctor (first) and you (second) and the boys, one by one after that. George last of all, because he was up early spraying the

orchard at the time and didn't hear the phone.

And afterwards, guilt, because I phoned you first, and how did the boys feel about that – their father – and George let me know how disappointed he was to be the first born and the last to know. And then, you know, I began to worry about what to wear to his funeral. I'm embarrassed about that. I panicked about a suit I'd left at the drycleaners last winter. Your father newly dead and here I am worrying what to wear. The forgotten suit brought a knot of worry to my stomach.

When your father's kidneys began to fail, the specialist said that I might be the most suitable donor, and the reason he gave was that spouses over a long period if still actively loving – ah, I hear you groaning – will not only grow more and more compatible in the act of loving, but their life organs will also change and assume the other's characteristics. I would have given him a kidney, Artemi mou, but I never got the chance.

Have you got the heater working? I know I'm nagging but there's no sense in getting cold. There's a thermostat on the side – you don't need it on full, but somewhere in the middle works best. It's faulty, so keep an eye on it, and don't get cold.

There was no reproof, and that made it worse. Artemis felt ashamed of her childish impatience with her mother over words that hadn't really mattered, though they had of course at the time …

The picture I have for you is a muddle of my and other people's second-hand memories, but that is all I have. And the trouble is, no two versions of the same story are the same. Contradiction, Artemis, is a part of the Greek nature. It's like your father would have said, 'having a bet both ways', or what Yiayia called 'playing it two doors'.

But you see, during the occupation and later on when Greeks were fighting Greeks, it was safer to have two sides to every story.

They say that my mother – the grandmother you never knew – was a talented singer who sacrificed a promising career to be part of the resistance. Yiayia always said that Mama would have been bigger than Sotiria Bellou if … but there's always an 'if' in our lives, Artemis.

Uncle George got the blame a lot of the time, as if he was responsible for my mama on the terrace that night, dancing. If Uncle George hadn't taken his sister to that taverna, she would never have met my father, a man from the Mani – never have danced the scandalous dance, and …

There is a gap now, and the sound of her mother moving about, opening and shutting drawers, before she resumes. She starts again with a self-conscious clearing of her throat, which brings her right into the moment, practically a passenger on this flight to Athens, so familiar is this fragment of sound.

Ah, but I'm getting ahead of myself. I should start at the very beginning. I'm going to tell you now about your great-great-grandmother. Most of it will be hearsay, but there is an old Greek saying, *the suitcase goes a long way*, which has as many meanings as there are Greeks to translate it.

Your great-great-grandmother was born in Istanbul and arrived in Kalamata sometime in the 1800s. She made silk tablecloths and she met your great-great-grandfather when he came to town to buy cloth for his table. He lived in Mavromati where he was famous for his flowers, figs and oranges. People were suspicious of a woman from Turkey, none more than your great-great-grandfather. But it must run in the family somehow. He was fascinated by her difference.

Her name was Azime. She died giving birth to your great-grandmother – your *proyiayia* – the one you call Yiayia, as if she was your grandmother too. Everyone needs a yiayia. Anyway, Azime left a silkworm legacy. If you ever go back to Kalamata, the nuns are famous for their silk. Back then, Azime was competing with the church to make silk – another reason for her to earn scorn. So, although Yiayia hated the Germans, and the Italians, most of all she hated the Turks (so you wouldn't have known that her own mother was a Turk) – but that's the Greek in her, Artemi mou, a bundle of contradictions.

There is a faint sound that could have been 'like you', but it might just have been her mother clearing her throat.

There's something else I haven't told you. Your great-great-grandmother Azime was a bigamist. And she smoked the narghile, which wasn't so unusual back then, but it set her apart nonetheless, and she is remembered for that and her bigamy. She left a Turkish husband behind when she fled Istanbul and so, although she married your great-great-grandfather, it might not have been legal. Ah, but what is the law when it comes to the heart?

Was this a concession from her mother, who disapproved of Declan? She called him 'that man', never by his name, but mostly they avoided the topic.

Azime was renowned for *calling figs figs and a basin a basin*. A nice irony, don't you think, her with a big secret like an extra husband?

Artemis paused the recording, reminded of the conversation she'd had with Declan on the way to the airport. In that short distance from her apartment, the unspoken had been spoken. She might be Declan's secret, but she was never going to be an extra wife. She'd sensed his relief as he dropped her off – the peach, a reckless moment that made him look

romantic, but really an afterthought.

Her mother's voice, her English a mixture of flat New Zealand vowels and the impetuosity of a native Greek speaker. It was an odd combination. Artemis, who had completed a linguistics paper, was attuned to nuance and register, and their implications. She found herself listening acutely to others. Declan, with his Irish heritage, mocked her Kiwi vowels. He had a terrific ear for dialect and could move from a lilting Irish imitation to a pronounced Australian drawl. His voice had been a key attraction at first, but lately it was becoming an irritation, because she sensed it was inauthentic – just another sophistry, a persona to inhabit while he inhabited her.

The engine sound on the plane altered and they began the descent, encountering mild turbulence. Artemis's fellow passenger clutched the armrest and started talking randomly, interrupting her thoughts. Artemis tried to engage, recognising the chatter was fear, but then thankfully the young woman needed to go to the toilet, and it was time to go back to the recordings.

> I hope you're warm enough? Close the door between the dining room and the lounge – if you start to feel cold, you must light the fire. There's kindling under the window seat and some nice dry mānuka at the back of the shed. Some of the wood is a bit big, so you'll need to chop it. The axe … I don't know where the axe is, to tell the truth. I think George took it back to Otago, you know, although he's never going to admit that. I miss your father when it comes to these sorts of things.

There she goes, thought Artemis, blaming George for the missing axe. They'd laughed about this at the funeral. Evidently, she'd phoned George about it and that had been their last conversation. So typical of her mother, these ideas she got into her head and couldn't let go. They'd laughed until they cried, Artemis and her three brothers, at the very thought of George with an axe under his arm, boarding the flight south,

placing the axe in the overhead locker, surprising the air hostess when he disembarked, the shiny blade over his shoulder.

Artemis's fellow passenger returned looking anxious and pale. The cabin crew announced they were shortly due to land, so Artemis put her iPod into her shoulder bag and patted her companion's arm to comfort her as the plane fell out of the night, lumbering almost, the bulkhead rattling above them. When the plane hit the tarmac, the overhead lockers shook and the condensation that had accumulated throughout the flight rained down. The hostess rushed to swab people with airline travel blankets.

'*Danke.*'

Here she was in Greece, finally, and the first word she uttered was German.

MAID OF ATHENS

Panic struck when Artemis found herself outside the airport looking for a taxi to take her into the city. What had she done! Her mother in a bag. Ashes for God's sake! The night was still and in her head was the voice of Evanthe: 'Only the yellow taxi, Artemis, only the yellow taxi.'

In spite of this, she succumbed to the flattery of the first cab driver to approach her. It wasn't until she was seated in his sleek, black car that she realised she'd fallen for one of the rogue drivers Evanthe had warned her about. The driver had no ID, and Artemis had no idea what to do.

She berated the driver in Greek, aware now he was an unofficial and possibly even unlicensed taxi. It was a relief to rail at someone. But all he did was laugh and shrug his shoulders and welcome her back home, and this familiarity, this welcoming home, disarmed her completely. The driver insisted there was *not a fly on his sword*, and Artemis recognised the protestations of honour and manhood, and laughed with him.

What better than an unlicensed taxi to carry illegal ashes, she decided.

The cab driver was promising a very good rate as a special courtesy to celebrate her homecoming, exclaiming loudly the superior features of his car: the leather seats, the air conditioning, the tinted windows, and with the boastful Greek bravado that you had to be Greek to understand fully as pride. She did, it was so familiar. And, secretly, she prided herself; she'd fooled him, he thought she was Greek.

The driver continued his extravagant boasting all the way to town, and it was soothing and funny even though she was exhausted. The banter back and forth, her own efforts at speaking the language filled her with elation. And then, as if he sensed her excitement, he gave her an unscheduled tour of the city at night, her own personal guided tour that no doubt she would end up paying for, but she was too captivated to protest.

The Parthenon, floodlit, stood sentry over the city, timeless and almost a cliché, astonishing and familiar all at once. She could have stayed in the sumptuous leather seat, going around and around Athens until morning broke, she was so happy. When they finally pulled up outside her three-star hotel, Artemis felt let down.

'Only ninety euro for you because you are Greek!' said the taxi driver with such good humour that Artemis paid him without doubting the fare, momentarily thinking in New Zealand dollars. It was afterwards, on the pavement that the conversion rate from euros registered. But here she was, whatever the cost, in Athens.

The night sky was luminous. The city held its breath.

In a small room with a view of the Acropolis, Artemis separated her mother's ashes from the bottle of brandy and took them both up to the rooftop terrace. 'There,' she said, with quiet satisfaction. 'There you are, Mama. Here is Athens.' And she held the bag aloft and cried. Later, in bed, weakened from emotion and excitement, her body was racked with arousal, unbidden physicality … Adonis from Frankfurt airport, but Declan's face.

There was no hot water in the morning. A handsome yet disdainful young man advised her that the problem with the water would not be fixed until that evening. It was the same young man who had thrown her suitcase into an antiquated, elegant elevator the night before and insisted she walk up the marble staircase to her bedroom. But the cold shower was invigorating. She felt resilient. Briefly she'd listened to her iPod, a recording called *Athina*, but decided to finish it after she had explored the city. She wanted to greet Athens for herself, to meet the city on her own terms first.

In the dining room Artemis helped herself to the warm eggs, fresh bread and creamy yoghurt. In Melbourne she'd found authentic Greek yoghurt, but her mama had always lamented the strict pasteurisation rules in New Zealand. *Po, po, that's not real yoghurt.*

A haze filtered her view of the Acropolis as she stepped out of the hotel. The splendour of the night-lit Parthenon blended with the heat and now, unlit, revealed unsightly scaffolding. The air was thick and warm, edible almost, the way Mama used to describe it.

Directly across the road was a small church, almost obscured by street vendors but beautifully juxtaposed against the chaos of commerce. She smiled at the thought of this holiness lodged between the food and the handbags, God and the traders, happy bedfellows. Already, she loved Athens. She would start her tour with this church, why not?

Inside, people were moving about, kissing icons, unabashed, pious and indifferent to her curiosity. One woman was polishing the face of the Virgin with a corner of her sleeve. All this palaver over a virgin, Declan would have said. And yet it seemed her own mother had carried her virginity like a prize to the other side of the world, saved it and gifted it to her father. Something precious to be revered.

From the church, she walked up the street to explore the Central Market, the famous agora that her mother often spoke of. Artemis's vegetarian self was repelled by the smell of freshly killed animals, while her newfound Greek self was suddenly curious. She watched transfixed, as a woman purchased a whole lamb, blood dripping from its nose, and carried it off down the road, slotted carelessly under her arm. Even in Melbourne she'd not encountered something so oddly distasteful but strangely compelling. There were cows hung in rows, sliced through so that their ribcages were exposed, perfectly equal halves, hearts on their sleeves. It disturbed her, this ordered brutality, but then too, she couldn't help but laugh at the sight of a pig, possibly still breathing, with a Greek flag stuck in its bottom.

Further along was a fresh fish market. Now and then Artemis did eat fish, but not often. Declan had tempted her with raw oysters, one crazy champagne-filled illicit breakfast, and having broken so many rules already, she allowed herself the sensuous swallow, the taste of the sea, and as Declan put it, 'Well, you've already tasted me and I'm no vegetable.'

Men in white gumboots were hosing down the concrete floors,

diluting the blood and viscera, the fins and fish scales, the spillings. She went deeper into the market amid the clatter of crates and the urgent sounds of trading. Nearby, lobsters crawled and crabs were split open, their fleshy white meat already cooked, it seemed. She watched a man with tattooed fingers filleting fish the way a farmer in New Zealand might shear sheep at an A&P show, without stopping to pause, the pile of fins growing beside him. His only focus was the work in hand, the admiration of his public.

Artemis's sneakers squelched on the slick floors as she dodged crates and tried to avoid getting wet feet. She thought of the Island Bay fishermen who had waved to her from their dinghies when she'd slipped out of the house to escape all the memories. She'd had enough now of dead meat and fish on ice waiting for death.

Further along the road were smaller, individually owned stalls. She stopped to watch a woman braiding garlic with deft fingers and a clicking tongue. *Tsk* one bulb, *tsk* another. She was retrieving the garlic from a black rubbish bag, which rather spoiled the romance, but nevertheless Artemis was spellbound.

'*Yiasas*,' said the woman in greeting, without breaking her *tsk* rhythm.

'*Yiasas*,' said Artemis, smiling, happy to speak at last to someone.

Next to the garlic, in buckets, lay sweet basil, sage and oregano. Overflowing, wild and aromatic. Was it the warm air? It was humid and hot in Melbourne, but Artemis was transported by the fug and aromas around her, as if she had never before noticed herbs in this way, or smelled them so strongly.

Fleetingly, she indulged the idea of her mother, on this same street, in this same market … Artemis found a place to sit and unhooked her shoulder bag.

'Lost?'

A suave young man was speaking to her, possibly flirting even, practising his English. How did he know?

'Can I help you, show you around, buy you a coffee maybe?'

But Artemis didn't want company or a coffee. She was recalling

conversations over the years, Mama's memories, the things she'd barely listened to, and yet it seemed they had somehow assimilated into her own memories and had come spilling out now like the herbs from their buckets.

She could hear her mother's voice over the years, telling them about Athens. American women in Chanel suits clambering over cobbles in the Plaka, their mascara running in the heat, lipstick leaking, their loud bright voices, their polished pink elbows, pillbox hats – and Nysa had never felt so alive, so full of hope. Anything was possible. The worst was over – for what could be worse than to lose your mama and baba? – and there she was: the teen Queen of the Plaka. Men smiled at her, smiles that Yiayia would have censored. Nysa smiled back, uncensored. They were locals who ran tavernas, operated nightclubs, played chess or backgammon into the small hours just like her father did, and Uncle George.

Wellington, when Nysa arrived, was nothing like that. If a man smiled at her, it was different; it made both of them self-conscious, and it made her careful. She had a curfew, and a responsibility to the whole of Greece somehow – unspoken obligations, implicit rules that if broken could mean her deportation. The shame would be not just hers, but Yiayia's, Daria's, Uncle George's; and people back home would say, 'Just like her mama'.

Monastiraki was the area in Athens where Nysa had lived with the mythical Eleni, a close friend of Uncle George's. Oh, Artemis had heard it all, many times, inflated memories no doubt, her mother extolling the glamour of post-war Athens and of the dreadful shock she got arriving in Wellington.

'It was a village,' she would say, 'just a village. I imagined high-rise buildings like Athens, and there were none, just verandas, strange verandas everywhere. I thought Courtenay Place was a suburb, even the Cretan girls thought Courtenay Place was on the outskirts of Wellington. We all kept wondering for a while where Wellington City was.' So many memories of her mother's were carefully lodged in secret places, and now

all at once the Greek sunlight was dislodging the debris.

The Plaka was beckoning, so Artemis turned back now to walk towards the Acropolis. She came upon the labyrinth of gold and fake marble busts of Aristotle, broken pavements, tavernas, checked tablecloths and noisy waiters courting tourists. Not the Plaka her mama had spoken of, but a clamour of tourists and hawkers.

The words of Byron sang in her ears – Declan's parting shot when he'd phoned to wish her well.

> *Maid of Athens! I am gone:*
> *Think of me, sweet! when alone.*
> *Though I fly to Istambol,*
> *Athens holds my heart and soul:*
> *Can I cease to love thee? No!*
> *Zoë mou, sas agapo.*

My life, I love you. Indeed. It was getting hotter, close to midday, and for a moment Artemis lost her bearings, dazzled by the glitter, caught in the glare of gold. She stumbled and then looked up – the Parthenon high on her right, the Acropolis, a jewel itself, momentarily free now of the pollution haze, resplendent against a new blue sky.

At that moment Sax Rohmer broke the silence. Her phone. Artemis fumbled as she hurried to answer it.

'I can't hear you …' Impatience, all the way from Australia.

Artemis covered her left ear to shut out the noise around her.

'I'm in Athens,' she whispered into the phone, unsure why whispering was necessary but wanting intimacy.

'Hang on a tick.'

And she did: she stood quite still, trying to channel Declan, and she heard him talking to someone else, asking them also to 'hang on a tick'. Two people, hanging on a tick for Declan, and suddenly *she* was impatient. She shut her phone, pushed the off button and headed back into the heart of the Plaka.

Declan could hang on a tick.

Shaken a little by her boldness, Artemis sought comfort in food. Handsome waiters accosted her, waving menus, speaking French, English and German, whatever it took to fill their tables. They were flirtatious and flattering. It was a dance of seduction, impossible to resist, her spirit lightened by their banter. She ordered a frappé, forgetting to speak Greek, and immediately the young waiter, eager to prove his credentials among the tourists, pounced.

'Australia – Sydney? Melbourne? Am I right?'

But Artemis wanted to distance herself from Declan and so she corrected the young man who was waiting for her approval.

'*Ochi*, I'm from New Zealand, Wellington, but I'm Greek … my mother is … my mother was Greek.'

'Your mother, she was beautiful, *etsi?*'

Just the sort of riposte that would normally have annoyed her but instead she enjoyed the moment, feeling beautiful and to hell with Declan. The frappé arrived in a flourish and the waiter, aware he'd won her over, moved on to new seductions with a parting wink.

'New Zealand. I've always wanted to go there.'

An attractive guy brought his coffee to her table and sat down. He had a designer close-shave that spoke of grooming designed to look careless. His jeans were pressed and faded, his T-shirt a size smaller than Declan would have dared. She allowed herself admiration where her usual instincts would have probably been to disregard such obvious vanity. The young man ripped the cellophane from the brittle biscuits served with his coffee, broke them and fed the crumbs to the cats underfoot. He leaned down to stroke one of them, a slender marmalade tabby.

'The cats are more at home than the customers.'

Artemis felt the cat rubbing against her bare leg. She thought of Horse, how out of place he would be here, overfed, *sub-urban*. The frappé was cool and refreshing, the caffeine potent. It was easy to blame the coffee. Thoughts of Declan surfaced briefly, but they were swamped in the sweaty clamour of something else.

'Gregory,' he said, raising his right hand in greeting.

'Artemis.'

'*Yiasas*, nice to meet you. On holiday?' His English, like his grooming, was impeccable.

'No, no, I'm here to …' Artemis stopped. She wasn't about to explain to a total stranger why she was here. '*Nai* … yes … a sort of holiday.'

'Your first time in Athens?'

'*Nai*.'

'Let me show you around. The Parthenon, the Acropolis, have you been?'

Artemis shook her head.

'You can't leave Athens without me taking you to the Acropolis.'

The waiter, passing with two platters in hand, stopped to insist she really had to go and see the Parthenon.

'How can you refuse such an offer?' he said, waving the two platters precariously as he spoke.

'You see, how can you refuse me?' said Gregory, as if it were a fait accompli.

'Okay, why not?' Artemis smiled.

'My uncle emigrated to Australia, but me, I've always wanted to go to New Zealand.'

Artemis felt sure that Gregory would have emigrated to wherever the girl in front of him was from, but it didn't matter. She was enjoying the attention and having attractive company. Gregory looked at his watch, and suddenly he was in a rush, an important meeting. He finished his coffee, insisting he would return to take her around the Parthenon that afternoon. A date.

'You'll wait for me?'

She agreed, for what better than a local to show her? Hungry now, she ordered fried *kefalotyri* with *horiatiki*, the so-called Greek salad. The waiter cajoled her into a glass of house wine, a soft and cloudy rosé. She was surprised how good it tasted from a squat glass tumbler. By the time the food arrived, she was close to tears, the wine making her sentimental,

imagining her mother as a young girl here in Athens, learning to speak English.

A dribble of oil ran down her chin. Artemis dabbed at her face with a napkin and raised the tumbler.

Athina.

The waiter, watching her, raised his laminated menu in solidarity.

After lunch, true to his word, Gregory returned. It was awkward now the initial flirtatious rush had receded, but Artemis wasn't about to miss the Acropolis. It surprised her – the steep climb, the broken marble steps, the swarms of tourists.

'*Eine orea?*'

No. Artemis didn't find it beautiful, she found it disappointing. The scaffolding, there as part of the ongoing restoration and protection, marred the authenticity of the antiquity. She preferred the memory of last evening, the illuminated illusion.

'My mother never came here. She said it was for the tourists.'

Something Artemis had not believed, but now she understood.

'Would you mind?' It was two women she recognised from the taverna in matching tracksuits. They wanted Gregory to take their photo. After wiping their faces with a small hand towel, which they shared, the two women stood beaming beside the scaffold. Obligingly, he managed to take the photo just before a noisy tour group arrived to obscure both the women and the view. The tour group was led by a man with a megaphone proclaiming history as if it was a sideshow.

Artemis sat with her new friend on a cool marble plinth and looked out through a filter of smog at the sprawling city. Mile upon mile of white morphing into white, until it blurred at the edges and she couldn't see an end to it. And she knew that was Athens out there, not up here. Her mother had been right.

Gregory edged closer to her. His aftershave, perhaps newly applied as she hadn't noticed it in the taverna, was overpowering. She breathed out, an almost sigh, ready to succumb. But then his phone rang. He leapt up, covered one ear and spoke in rapid Greek. Not wanting to eavesdrop,

Artemis checked her phone in case Declan had left her a message. He'd sent a text to say he'd try again tomorrow, with kisses, three of them, the standard, nothing new to surprise her. Three kisses, the way some might place an ellipsis.

From a distance, she thought she heard Gregory mention his mama and drycleaning and she chuckled to herself. He returned, full of apologies, but he had to go.

'You are alone tonight?' he asked.

'I am,' said Artemis, somewhat recklessly.

'You like to dance?'

'Dance? Yes …'

'Where are you staying?'

Artemis lied. She remembered the name of a hotel Evanthe had suggested and said that one. They made a date to meet at nine that night and he would take her dancing.

'If you like, ecstasy … *en taksi?*'

She didn't reply, he didn't expect her to, it was an open invitation.

On her way back to the hotel, Artemis found the church her mother often spoke about, named after the patron saint of childbirth and easy labours, according to Nysa. Inside it was the faded Saint Filothei who caught her eye, staunch Filothei famed for her stance against the Ottoman invasion. The paint was falling from the face as Artemis touched it. In a moment of unplanned tenderness she kissed the painted wall. It was cold. A woman beside her smiled. Her small brown face crinkled. Artemis smiled back. The woman crossed herself three times and kissed the wall too.

Later that evening Artemis realised she was going to be a no-show at the hotel where the young Greek man would be waiting for her. One part of her fancied a fling and the other could hear Nysa's voice, her disapproval, and tonight her dead mother held sway. Instead, she sat on the hotel rooftop with a group of young Polish tourists who shared their bottle of retsina with her. They assumed she was a tourist and she

realised she probably was. Tonight the illuminated Acropolis looked like a photograph from someone's travel album.

Just a little tipsy, Artemis left the Polish tourists and went to her room, eager now, after exploring Athens, to hear her mama's voice. She recklessly unscrewed one of the miniatures from the hotel fridge and sipped as Nysa spoke to her through the small earphones from the iPod, the shiny blue metallic iPod that Declan had given her, inscribed with her favourite quote from Katherine Mansfield: *To have the courage of your excess – to find the limit of yourself.* (Had he been hinting at something?)

> I dream of Athens, Artemis, more often than I dream of Kalamata nowadays. It was a time of dreams, the Civil War behind us, when I arrived in the city. Yiayia had been persuaded by Uncle George to let me go and live with Eleni, to go to school and learn English. Eleni was a mythical woman, Uncle George's friend, and I'd met her only once before, when she was a prisoner in Kalamata at the end of the Civil War. Back then she was just one of the many black widows in jail who Uncle George used to visit. People said it was his guilty conscience, because he had farmed wheat for the Italians and collaborated with the Germans, and because … because his sister … was a communist, a dead communist, the only sort of good communist.

Nysa's voice seemed to chant the last sentence like doctrine, something that she couldn't say in her own way but only as she had heard it said many times, almost involuntarily.

> I barely knew Eleni but I'd never forgotten her baby. I went once with Uncle George to the prison in Kalamata to visit Eleni after her baby was born, a strange child with hair all over its body, and everyone back then said it was the curse of communism, a sign from God.

Artemis had heard about this hairy baby many times, and about Eleni,

but her mother had never mentioned Eleni being in prison before. She had never really believed in this hairy baby. It always sounded like a Greek myth, something her mother had imagined from her childhood.

I knew, too, that the hairy baby was something to do with my missing mama and baba, and that Uncle George knew this. And people said it was guilt that made Uncle George visit the prison and that he had a lot to answer for, growing wheat for the Italians …

But, Artemi mou, I don't want to talk of the war; I want to tell you about Athens, the city, my *Athina*.

By then Eleni was no longer a black widow. She was a glamorous woman who lived in Monastiraki, and knew everyone who mattered from the tavernas to the *kafenions* there and in the Plaka. She didn't wear black any more, Artemis, she wore cream. Eleni ran a club at night where musicians would meet and talk politics and sing. People say the Plaka is very different now, that it's filled with jewellery shops for the tourists and that I won't recognise it. But I will; I know every street off by heart. Athens is where my new life began.

It was the year that President Kennedy was elected. America and Athens were somehow intertwined in my mind, and even Yiayia thought President Kennedy was a handsome man, but not as handsome as King Paul. Yiayia was distraught when King George died, but she found new hope when his brother took over, even though she disapproved of Frederica, his German-born wife. But politics, back then, were far from my thoughts, and I loved the fur coat that Frederica sometimes wore.

I would catch a bus to school in the mornings and spend the afternoons in the Plaka. People knew I lived with Eleni, so I could

drop in anywhere at any time, even in the kafenions where only the men sat drinking coffee. It was a time of hope, you could feel it in the air, and everyone was dreaming of a new prosperity. The *laiko* music was everywhere, and people sang of love and immigration and injustice, and I felt their passion even though I didn't fully understand – but I wanted it – the love especially. Eleni knew Ria Kourti and Panos Gavalas … and she met Nana Mouskouri.

There was a self-conscious cough, as if her mother anticipated Artemis's scorn. Name-dropping! But Artemis was riveted. Music had been a feature most Sunday evenings when the Cretan girls came over. They'd all styled their hair in the mode of Ria Kourti, even when a side bouffant was decidedly out of date.

'*Kathe limani ke kaimos*'. How could Artemis ever forget them all singing this song, over and over, and she would sing with them, the chorus so beautiful – these Greek women had filled her heart, her childhood. The haunting sound of the bouzouki was a scar on her heart, like a Greek tattoo.

Evanthe, who often travelled back home to Greece, would bring gifts for them all, a large can of Kalamata oil for her mama that she'd stowed in the overhead locker, jars of sweet black olives (contraband practically) and the latest music from Greece. One year she arrived back with Nana Mouskouri's latest album on the new CD format.

'Indestructible,' Nysa told Sandy. You could dig them into your garden, Evanthe had said, and then dig them back up and it wouldn't matter. Artemis had believed Evanthe and buried Nana Mouskouri near the artichokes, digging the CD back up on the Sunday afternoon before the Cretan girls arrived. The CD did not survive its week in the garden, but the Cretan girls laughed and said, 'Serves Nana right for making a German album.'

I was in the heart of things, Artemis, the very heart of everything. Back then Athens was more important than Paris, you know. Jackie

Kennedy came to Athens, and we all fell in love with her, even Eleni who disapproved of America. She wouldn't let politics get in the way of fashion. We caught a glimpse of her – Jackie – the day she visited the Parthenon, in a car, flashing by, but we knew it was her. And afterwards we heard that she had gone for a ride in a sports car with Prince Constantine, just like that, at the drop of a hat … oh, we loved her.

You can't imagine how it felt after all the sadness of my childhood to suddenly be so free and without Yiayia there to remind me – because Yiayia represented all my sorrows. All our losses were woven into the black threads of her headscarf, and they were behind me. I'd left them in Kalamata.

Eleni was everything that Yiayia was not and, although I never admitted it back then, she reminded me of my mother. Eleni knew everyone, and everyone knew Eleni. She mixed with famous musicians and important men, and she even knew people who knew the King and Queen.

This sounded like one of her mother's exaggerations, the sort of comment that used to infuriate Artemis, but that her brothers and Sandy had just laughed off – happy to believe, if it pleased Nysa. 'The King and Queen, and who cares?' was the sort of thing she would have said back then, but instead now Artemis was happy to be carried along by the story.

Uncle George used to catch the bus up from Kalamata once a month to check up on me and take news back to Yiayia. It didn't occur to me until I was a married woman living on the other side of the world that he really came up to Athens to see Eleni. He always brought food from home – oranges and olives, and once a small pig. Yiayia had packed the freshly killed pig into a suitcase and it dripped all over the marble tiles on the landing and in the elevator, and the neighbours complained. Uncle George told us that was

nothing compared to what the bus driver said.

Artemis realised that had she not walked around the Agora this morning, she might not have believed her mother. A whole pig! And in a suitcase!

On the surface, Artemis, everything seemed glamorous and exciting, and I had no idea that Eleni was still involved in politics. I don't think Uncle George cared one way or the other about politics. Of the politicians he always said: *keratades* – the horned ones, cuckolds, the lot of them. Uncle George believed in family. He never took sides; the only side he knew about was family. He was the glue that held all our hearts together.

Eleni was friends with a man called Grigoris Lambrakis. I knew him as a famous runner – and he was a doctor too – but I learned years later that he was much more than this. He was also a politician and a pacifist. Once when I had earache, and even warm olive oil would not soothe me, he came to the apartment and gave me an injection of antibiotics because my eardrum had burst and the pus was pouring onto the pillow. I just remember how kind he was, and that he and Eleni sipped retsina together, watching over me while I fell asleep, and when I woke he was gone. Eleni and I went to watch him run at the stadium, and then he was murdered one day at an anti-war meeting. As your father would have said, Artemis, 'There was all hell to pay,' and this is why Yiayia wanted me back home.

My life in Athens ended with the death of Grigoris. There was a huge demonstration on the streets of Athens, and Eleni was in the thick of it. Everyone at my school was talking about Eleni, and once again I had the feeling that the people I loved were always on the wrong side. Whichever side they were on, left or right, it didn't seem to matter, but always the wrong side.

Our school closed for the funeral and Eleni let me go with her to walk with the people. All of them grieving for this man who had cured my earache. My being at his funeral may have been another reason for Yiayia wanting me home. Who knows who told her, but in Greece it's the same wherever you go – somebody always knows somebody, who knows someone who knows your family, *yakkity-yak*, even as far south as the Peloponnese, *yakkity-yak*.

And the day after Grigoris's funeral a statue was erected in honour of President Harry Truman, and the same people who crowded the streets for the funeral were out on the streets, but not united in the way they had been the day before. Oh, I was used to this, Artemis, from my childhood, all the political undertones, but I didn't understand it. I imagined everyone in Athens loved America, but not everyone did.

I was speaking quite good English, most of it in my head, and I decided I would emigrate to America. I was brimming with dreams, my heart overflowing with adventure. On my way to school each day, I would see the TWA sign in Omonia Square – I knew that one day I'd be on one of those planes.

And then President Kennedy was killed. Politics, Artemis, always politics ruining my life, and Yiayia was shaking her head and saying that I couldn't go to America. But I was determined, Artemis, just like you when you went to Melbourne. I was determined. But there's a Greek saying that Yiayia was always quoting: *Shoe from your own place, even if it's patched.* Even though Yiayia's mother was a Turk, she still believed that there was nothing grander than being Greek.

Artemis stopped the iPod and pushed the back arrow to hear again '… just like you when you went to Melbourne …' Was this acknowledgement, finally?

Just like your baba, Uncle George took my side. He went with me to the immigration office. They said that the American quota was full but New Zealand and Australia were taking immigrants, and that I had to choose. Uncle George reckoned the man at the immigration office held a grudge against him because of the war, but whatever the reason, I had to choose. I used my dead sister's birth certificate, and Uncle George signed the papers. It broke Yiayia's heart, but he knew I needed to go. Uncle George understood … I understood, Artemis, why you went to Melbourne.

She replayed the last sentence over and over … her mother understood. Why hadn't she said so before? Artemis twisted the top from a second miniature brandy to dilute the ball of grief that was growing, knowing how much her mother had wanted to see Athens again, wishing she was here, regret for herself indistinguishable from regret for her mama. The brandy and the ball of grief collided; her throat ached with the effort of quelling the unshed tears.

I'll send you a postcard, Artemis, and I've promised myself I will visit the Acropolis. It's crazy, you know, crazy, but I've never climbed up to the Parthenon. We always said it was for the tourists, *po, po, po*, you know, as if it had nothing to do with us locals, as if it was built especially for them. How stupid I was, to be living in Athens and not to go there. But now I will, Artemi mou. Your mama will stand on top of the Acropolis, finally. Me, Queen of Monastiraki, that's what they used to call me – well, the tobacconist on our corner, anyway. Queen of the Plaka, too, I thought. Oh, you cannot imagine how happy I was. We lived in a nice apartment, and Eleni had her own fridge. Other people had to wait for the man selling ice to come, but not Eleni.

We used to laugh at the tourists back then, especially the Americans. We laughed and at the same time we envied them. *Stupid shoes*, we used to say … oh, how I wanted some of those stupid shoes, but we

would laugh when they tripped on the cobbles, satisfied that our own practical, unfashionable shoes were superior. I'll send you a photo, Artemis, of your mother on the Acropolis in a pair of *stupid shoes*.

Artemis had worn a pair of sneakers to climb the Acropolis, practical, flat-soled, unglamorous but comfortable. Now she wished she'd planned this better, worn a pair of crazy, stupid shoes up the cobbles, risked falling even, just to hear the fabulous hollow crack of heels on ancient marble.

After a warm shower in the morning (a miracle, the man said, the plumber was able to come yesterday) and thick yoghurt, Artemis decided to try to find the Truman statue before catching the bus to Kalamata. Most likely she'd walked past it yesterday without noticing. With all its philosophical heroes, why, she wondered, would Athens want to fete an American President?

She found Truman, tall, suited, bespectacled and with pigeon poo at his feet. He'd evidently been erected in gratitude for American financial and military aid during the communist uprising. Her mother's history was a muddle. All this reverence for things American, and yet from what Artemis could gather from the tapes, her mother's own family had been a part of the communist uprising. Nothing made sense when it came to her mama.

On the way back, she bought an apple. She sat on her suitcase outside the hotel, eating it, aware that Nysa would have disapproved of both, the sitting on a suitcase and the eating of an uncut apple. She watched a yellow dog negotiate the traffic, crossing the road three times, casually, with the air of a true Athenian. A text came through from Declan, apologetic that he would be out of range for the next few days. She deleted the text, annoyed that he was making excuses; he could have tried to phone her. But something else too – each deleted text, another thread snipped, the way her mama used to snip the final thread when sewing buttons, a theatrical flourish, the end. Was she practising?

Her taxi arrived, and soon they were negotiating the back streets of Athens, the undressed parts of the city, side streets without the curtain of smog to hide behind, or the elevation of the Acropolis to romanticise; things were more cracked here, much darker, the white city morphing into grey.

GOOD ROAD

As suggested by Evanthe, Artemis bought a ticket for the express bus. It occurred to her how often she had disregarded any advice her mother's friend had proffered during her childhood, and now here she was grateful for it. There were so many bus bays, and people boarding and people queuing, it was impossible to know which bus she should get on. She waved her ticket at one of the drivers and he gestured for her to join the queue beside the bus where he was stowing luggage. There was a mild frenzy to the activity, as if the passengers thought the bus would leave before all the bags were stowed. The driver took Artemis's bag from her, dropping his cigarette underfoot and indicating with a slight turn of his head that she should board the bus now.

Artemis hurriedly purchased bottled water, calculating the risk of an almost four-hour bus journey evidently without a toilet stop (if you believed Evanthe). An old woman wearing a black headscarf and matching cardigan, flat shoes and thick support hose tried to engage her in eye contact. Artemis averted her gaze. It was too late now to find a toilet. The doors opened and people swarmed on board, filling the seats. Artemis stood back, unenthused at the idea of having to sit at the back of the bus, but unprepared to join the fray. When she finally boarded, the old woman was in the front-row seat by the window, patting the plastic bags she had placed on the space beside her. Artemis hesitated, but the bus was full, and so she sat down, helping the woman rearrange her bags under the seat and on the overhead rack. In turn, the woman patted the gap between them, encouraging Artemis to spread out. Reluctantly, Artemis smiled, and got a smile back. She had no teeth. They both rearranged themselves and later, after about an hour or so, the old woman's head tipped sideways to rest on Artemis's shoulder.

She had planned to listen to more of the recordings. Her iPod was in her handbag and the difficulty was that she would disturb the old woman,

now snoring, if she moved. As though he had heard her thoughts, the driver leaned down and inserted a disc into a portable player, filling the bus with the singular sound of the bouzouki …

… she is eight years old and wearing a blue bathing suit. The hairs on her legs are still soft and blonde. Her big toe is much bigger than Laura's big toe, which is smaller, for some odd reason, than the toe next to it. Laura, who is always the benchmark, has come on holiday with them. Sandy is standing in the thermal pools, taller than almost everyone else, his thighs like tree trunks above the steamy water. His back is freckled. Nysa is wearing a black bathing suit that sags in the front from the weight of her breasts. Her nipples are erect and visible through the stretch nylon.

Artemis is embarrassed. Her brothers are too aware of themselves to notice. They are boisterous boys who have grown used to admiring glances: their height, their dark good looks, their confidence both in and out of the water. Artemis shivers at the side of the pool. Unexpectedly, it is snowing, and *much warmer in the water*, her mother insists. Her mother is fingering a gold chain around her neck, no longer shiny, but dull and blackened from the thermal waters. Laura pushes Artemis. Not maliciously, perhaps not even intentionally. She doesn't recall exactly how it happened. Just the slipping from snow into the water, mouth open, slowly sinking, swallowing the sulphurous liquid, unable to surface. It is her father who reaches down and rescues her.

Her mother is yelling, over and over, 'You stupid, stupid girl!'

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

As if stupid was the only English word she knew well enough to convey fear or perhaps embarrassment.

Stupid.

Her father lifts Artemis up out of the water, rubs her back as she expels the surplus water, and places her safely at the side of the pool. Sandy then tries to soothe Nysa, wrapping his arms around her as if she is the one who needs consolation. The more her mother rants, the less her father says, and then, eventually, she ceases.

Laura is nowhere to be found.

A tall Dutch woman wearing a white bathing cap with a strap that strangles her chin comforts Artemis's mother. Again, it is as if it is her, not Artemis, who has fallen into the water. This is what she mostly remembers. How even in her moment of almost-drowning, it is Nysa who commands the most attention, receives the most affection. She sits bundled in a towel as Sandy re-enters the water, stands behind her mama and encloses her, creating a shelf with his sandy freckled arms for her breasts to rest on. The tall Dutch woman tilts her head to avoid watching, so that her profile is side on and two pieces of chin bulge either side of the white strap.

Laura reappears, smirking at the strange overt affection that Nysa's parents are displaying, and satisfied that even her small big toe isn't *that* bad. But where were her three brothers?

Artemis is woken by fierce nudges, and the sound of the old woman next to her who is thumping on the window of the bus. For a moment she thinks it is her mother, and then she hears the other passengers joining in the protest, sounding almost anguished. The bus slows so that the outraged passengers can take in more keenly the very thing that is so painful to them. They all insist that Artemis must look, bear witness.

The remnants of incinerated olive groves stretch forward and back as far as the eye can see. The hillsides are raw earth barely held together by the black and auburn shadows. Instead of the dazzling silvery groves her mother had spoken of, all that is left of the trees are their charred limbs … acres of tree ghosts.

Her mother had phoned her in Melbourne to tell her about the fires. She'd been speaking to Daria when the fires took hold, and at the time they already looked like spreading from northern Greece down into the Peloponnese. Daria was worried that the wind would change and bring the fires south. Kalamata might burn before Nysa got home. Artemis recalled the conversation, her mother's fears and her own dismissal of them, but perhaps Daria had been right, perhaps Kalamata was on this

path of destruction. It had been impossible to imagine disaster from so far away; she wasn't programmed like her mother for theatre, and so she had played it down, imagining a few trees, nothing like this.

Apparently, Aunt Daria had prayed to St Sophia, and Kalamata had been spared, and they were still wiping the ash from their windowsills, counting their blessings. *Ash, Artemis, thick ash through all their houses.* Artemis thought Daria sounded theatrical like her mother when she'd called her to confirm the flight details, and Daria told her that she was hoping to be rid of all the ash by the time Artemis arrived.

Another passenger leaned forward to tell Artemis how the fires had destroyed the pine forests of the Taygetus and lapped at the edges of historic Olympia, scorching the sacred ground around the museum. People had been incinerated in their cars, trying to flee the fires. Kalamata had been spared, but Nysa had died.

It was these hillsides and their trees that her mother had waved goodbye to all those years ago, pretending to be her older sister, leaving home. How old had her mother really been – seventeen, eighteen?

The old woman beside her was crying for the trees, and the man across the aisle had begun taking photographs. The bus was filled with a strange grief, the clicking of tongues, explanations for the fires ranging from the gyppos, the roadside rubbish, the government and the local authorities to global warming. Nobody was listening and everyone was talking.

Po, po, po, panagia mou.

One of the passengers from the back of the bus, taking advantage of the bus having slowed, made his way to the front and began berating the driver about needing a toilet stop. Twice the old man made his way up the aisle, with his wife pushing him forward. Artemis couldn't understand everything he was saying, but he finally wore the driver down. And so, although it was the express bus, they were forced to make an unscheduled toilet stop at a roadside garage.

The old man who had needed the toilet so badly stopped outside the bus and lit a cigarette.

Artemis was glad of the toilet stop. She joined the other passengers as everyone took advantage – most of them to light up, but she needed to pee. The impulse receded at the sight of the porcelain foot stands either side of a large dark hole in the floor. She squatted nervously, feeling fragile in the face of squalor. Her knees began to shake and she began to laugh, verging on a mild hysteria, peeing and laughing, her grief leaking from her, the tears spilling, the ones she wouldn't cry in the bus, her mother's trees all burned. Christ, she was falling apart.

Filling the grubby hand basin with water, she cupped her hands, and splashed the cold water all over her face. Seven times in all, remembering Nysa's advice. *Your skin needs to drink* – a dirty basin too, but the water was deliciously cold – *seven rinses, Artemis.* Her mother had good skin, and vanity meant that this was the one piece of advice Artemis slavishly followed.

Back on the bus, everything, including the passengers, seemed lighter, and the air of agitation was diffused. The bus driver lit up a cigarette as he pulled out onto the road, and the smoke wafted back towards Artemis. She inhaled the second-hand nicotine, tasted it, realised it was probably homegrown Kalamata tobacco. Perhaps the very cigarette the bus driver smoked had been packed, rolled and stacked by her Aunt Daria. Karelia Lights. Daria had worked for years stacking cigarettes at the Karelia factory.

Not long after, they stopped again and this time a young man boarded the bus and began checking tickets. Artemis looked helplessly at him, unable to summon a sentence, or even to flirt for her fare. She had no idea where her ticket was. The old woman patted her knee and beamed at the young man, and he moved on down the bus. Later, the driver and the young man struck up a conversation about the fires, ignoring the two signs in English above the driver's head: 'No Smoking' and 'Do Not Converse with the Driver'.

They were wheeling downwards now, descending through the mountainous landscape, each corner a masterpiece of engineering and another charred hillside. A conversation started up again behind her

about who had started the fires, and why. There was argument and agreement, and one prevailing theory appeared to be something about land claims. Artemis could not understand all that was said, but felt the intense emotions that were expressed. She knew, too, from what her mother had told her, that most people didn't have titles to their land; it was held through history and family and land usage. A piece of land without olives or forest was ripe for residential development, she heard someone explaining loudly to a tourist further down the bus. The old woman beside Artemis joined in, abandoning her tears for fury at anyone who could do such a thing. At this point, the driver turned around to join the conversation, completing a very tight corner almost entirely while facing his passengers instead of the road ahead. After that he resumed his concentration, wound down his window and blew out cigarette smoke.

And so Artemis arrived in Kalamata, grateful to have survived the bus journey, disturbed by the scorched landscape she had passed through and once again enveloped in the soft breath of her snoring neighbour.

SLOW THE CABBAGES

The bus terminus was more modern and much busier than she had expected, and it filled her with regret already. It was without doubt too modern, with drink vending machines, espresso coffee and an air of urbanity that did no justice to Artemis's second-hand memories of the day her mother left Kalamata. Of course, she realised now, the bus station would not be the same at all, was possibly not even in the same location. How was it that she could regret the things she'd never known?

And there was no one here to meet her. She wasn't sure whom to expect, but her disappointment was turning to impatience when a young man pulled up on to the pavement on a large blue touring bike. Helmetless, he dismounted, took off his sunglasses and had embraced Artemis before she realised it was Manolis, her cousin.

'*Yiasou*, Artemis.'

He kissed her on one cheek and then the other and then stood back to admire her, and embraced her and kissed both cheeks again, as if in approval.

'Sorry to keep you waiting, I planned to come in the car, but it's still in the garage. Mama's waiting at home. She's been counting the minutes, the years, waiting for your mama, and now you, Artemis. And here you are.'

Artemis took stock of her cousin. Manolis was wearing a lightweight bomber-style jacket with 'Armani' in bright pink down one of the sleeves. Attached to the belt of his jeans was a mobile phone hanging from the big amber beads men carried around, *komboloi*. As she watched, he fumbled inside his jean pocket and retrieved a packet of cigarettes and offered her one. Deftly flicking it into a cupped hand, he tossed the cigarette so that it spun in the air, caught it and then handed it to her. She thanked him, *efharisto*, and he placed a cigarette in his own mouth.

'Karelia Lights,' he said in English. 'A woman's tobacco, you know,

especially for women. Mama makes them.'

And then he took his sunglasses off. Artemis caught her breath. She was looking at all of her brothers in this one cousin. He had hair like Dimitris, eyes like George and the height of Antony. It was overwhelming.

This was a homecoming, Artemis realised, as they negotiated the chaos of late afternoon traffic, not exactly windblown but deliciously unfettered on the back of Manolis's motorbike, of which her mother might have disapproved. Her luggage was to be uplifted later by her cousin when he picked up his car from the garage. Manolis insisted on a detour down Aristomenous, the main road to the waterfront that Artemis had heard so much about over the years – *the orange groves, Artemis, the oranges we picked on our way to the waterfront*. But now there were no orange groves, instead there were café awnings, fountains, paving, shops and stylish gardens. Manolis kept a running commentary and constantly turned to point out landmarks in the same careless way the bus driver had driven over the mountains. And then her breath was stolen as they turned down towards the waterfront, the wide esplanade, the panorama and the astonishing proximity of Kalathi.

Always there, Artemis, so close, so close, some mornings I could touch her face.

Artemis lifted her hand from Manolis's shoulder and reached towards the face of Kalathi, this mountain, a part of the Taygetus, the lodestone of her mother's childhood.

The air was warm, but her skin was chilled.

Manolis's recklessness was infectious. She laughed, and leaned in to her cousin's warm back, clutching his jacket as he sped through traffic lights, racing several cars along the road out of the city. Yet she trusted him, felt safe, her hair flying, her heart partly too.

Daria's house was on the main road heading out to the Mani, a stylish clifftop home with a view of the Messenian Gulf where the family orchard and olive groves had once been. Now, instead of a humble dwelling, there was a three-storey Greek mansion with an orange-tiled roof, a sweeping driveway, exotic palm trees, a grove of oleanders, roses, potted geraniums

and what looked like an acre or two of fruit trees. Artemis could see lemons, oranges and olives, but there were more. Grapes too.

On the top balcony stood her aunt, watering plants and looking for all the world like an ancient Greek statue of Pandora. The image was disconcerting. All these years Artemis had carried a picture of her aunt in her head. Of course, she'd updated that image with photographs, but this … Daria waved, then disappeared. She reappeared on an external circular staircase, slowly winding her way down, holding a cigarette which Artemis had not seen on the balcony. Daria was smiling now, calling out to Artemis, repeating her name.

It was Manolis who lifted Artemis, her damp skirt sticking to the bike seat as she sat, paralysed momentarily by the striking resemblance of this thin, blonde woman to her own darkly greying and plump mother. She was placed like a gift in front of her aunt. They were centimetres apart, having been separated forever by thousands of kilometres; they barely knew each other, and yet …

Artemis was encircled in a smoky hug, and then released suddenly as Daria was racked with a fit of coughing. She patted Artemis on the shoulder, pushing her towards the door, beckoning her inside, unable to speak, doubled over.

Artemis sat down and took the glass of ouzo that Manolis offered – that, and a plate of small green olives. Daria recovered her composure.

'Olives, olives, fresh green olives, your mama's favourite – picked only two weeks ago and they have been marinating in lemon juice and waiting for your … for you.'

Daria shook the bowl she was holding and the olives rolled, glistening.

'*Po*, everyone thinks you have to pickle them, but these are delicious, Artemis – taste them.'

She did, and they were sweet, tender and lemony. In recent years, as olives became fashionable and people in New Zealand spoke with affection of the fat black Kalamata olives, assuming Nysa would agree, she would contradict them … speak pretentiously, Artemis felt, of the little green olives. And now Artemis could agree with her mother. The

taste was clear and fresh, sweet and new, a gentle poke in the ribs – there you are, Artemis, your mama said so.

Meatballs and feta were produced, and more ouzo. Artemis dropped ice into her glass and watched the liquid cloud, feeling greedy for everything that was Greek, even (traitorously) one of her aunt's meatballs. Remembering with guilt the blow she had dealt Nysa when she decided to become a vegetarian, and turned down her mama's meatballs. Nysa silently divvying up the food between her brothers who were more than happy to eat their sister's share – unaware that a silent war had begun, and Artemis considered herself one up.

'Ah, you are your mama's daughter,' said Daria, topping up the ouzo for Artemis and offering her another meatball. But one meatball was quite enough. She was regretting it already, the strange taste of meat in her mouth.

Daria started coughing again, at first just a small polite clearing of her throat, and then she struggled for breath, patted her chest, wheezed and ran from the room.

She soon returned, lighting a cigarette, apologising, breathing in through her mouth and nose as if sucking the life from the small filter-tip.

Karelia Lights.

Daria laughed as she waved the packet of cigarettes towards Artemis.

'It's too late, too late, too late to stop,' she said, and Artemis noticed for the first time the lines on her aunt's face, faint etchings around her mouth, and just how thin and wiry she really was.

Daria had worked at the Karelia cigarette factory ever since leaving school, and then later, after Manolis was born and his father had run off with a woman from Stockholm, she had returned to the factory. There was shame in being left for another woman, a foreigner too, but the shame was twofold when the woman was older than you. She had found solace with her old friends at the Karelia factory.

Yakkity-yak.

Karelia Lights.

Artemis had heard it all over the years, all about her Aunt Daria.

'I didn't tell your mama … I was waiting for her to come home,' said Daria.

'Cancer,' mouthed Manolis behind his mother's back.

At the exact same moment, Artemis remembered. She'd left Nysa on the bus. The ashes – her mother's ashes – were still on the bus. She'd wanted to tell Daria, 'I've brought Nysa with me', but she couldn't find the words to frame such a strange sentence, and now …

Her shock must have been visible to Daria, who assumed it was about her, and she patted Artemis in consolation.

'Don't worry about me. It's so good to see you, Artemi mou. I'm so glad you decided to come and see your old aunt.'

They ate, drank and ate some more, and then Daria nodded off. Manolis said he had to pick up his car from the garage where it was being serviced.

'I'll pick up your bags from the bus station and bring them back with me. Don't worry about Mama – she'll be wide awake soon. She was so excited about you coming, Artemis, but she's tired and she got a shock when your mama died, you know – she thought she was going to die first. It's so good you could come.'

'I've left a duty-free bag on the bus, can I come with you?'

'Don't worry. Here in Kalamata nobody will steal your duty-free from the bus station. A local will have handed it in. Someone will know someone who was on the bus who saw your duty-free bag.'

Artemis wasn't so sure, but Manolis was certain she shouldn't be worried. He would find her bag and return it. She couldn't bring herself to tell her cousin exactly what was in the bag. She followed him outside and waved him off on his motorbike.

It was early evening and the scent from the garden filled her nostrils. There was daphne, sweet and aromatic, the heavy scent of geraniums and rotting lemons. She could hear cicadas and the faint hum of traffic from the road above. Artemis walked in the garden. Stretching across

the hillside were the olive trees unharmed by the recent fires, silver in the fading light. She fell asleep in a chair in the garden waiting for Manolis to return and woke to her Aunt Daria's voice.

'Look, Artemis, look – your mama travelled to the other side of the world, but look, look, your cousin, *he has the birds' milk*.'

Startled from her slumber, Artemis thought for a moment that Aunt Daria knew about the ashes. Her mouth was dry, her senses disassembled. She stood up and tried not to let the panic show on her face.

Manolis was back, unpacking her bags from the boot of his car. Daria was listing all the spectacular attributes of the car, pointing out the leather seats, the GPS, the spacious storage – the benefits of a Mercedes.

She should have known. The saying was familiar to her, something her mama often said about Evanthe, married to a dentist, his own practice on Courtenay Place and then her own travel agency – *she has even the birds' milk*. There was relief first, that her aunt was none the wiser, and then anxiety as she watched Manolis empty the boot of his magnificent car, and still no duty-free bag in sight.

'Take your cousin for a ride,' insisted Daria, and she went inside the house to collect the rubbish, muttering about the obligations that came with four toilets, Artemis, four toilets.

'*Slow the cabbages*,' she heard Manolis say tipping his head back in emphasis.

Artemis must have pulled a face, as her cousin quickly explained. 'Ha, nothing to do with the eating of cabbage, cousin, just a saying we have here in Greece. Mama always going on about how many toilets – it's embarrassing.'

Which made Artemis smile with recognition. 'Yours and mine.' Daria returned triumphant, with four sealed plastic bags that she handed to Manolis as if they were found treasures.

'Take your cousin, Manoli mou,' Daria insisted.

Manolis shrugged as if helpless in the face of his mother, but Artemis understood because it had been the same with her own.

'How I suffer,' said Manolis, once they were in the car, but without

conviction.

On the short journey to the local dumpster, her cousin explained about the plumbing in Greece in general and why they collected the soiled paper in enamel bins beside each toilet.

'*Po*, Athens, it would overflow if everyone put their paper in the toilets.'

Artemis recalled guiltily that she had used the toilets in the three-star hotel in Athens as if they were Kiwi toilets, and wondered if the disdainful young man who informed her of the cold water was now managing another problem.

At the dumpster, flies swarmed and the rubbish was spilling onto the ground. Manolis took the rubbish from the back seat and hurled the plastic bags up into the air, and somehow they landed successfully on top of the festering refuse. For just a moment, Artemis imagined one of the bags was her mother's ashes, that her cousin had found the bag and forgotten to say, throwing it away with the rubbish in front of her.

'Did you find my other bag? The duty-free one?'

'Don't worry, it will turn up. Someone might have taken it by mistake. I'll check again for you tomorrow.' He touched her cheek with his warm knuckles.

Now Manolis was pointing out a roadside shrine covered in crimson bougainvillea, the oil lamp evidently kept alight by Daria. A Scandinavian tourist had been killed on this corner.

'*Tsk, tsk, tsk*, too many drunken tourists,' said Manolis as he imitated Daria, and they both laughed. But it wasn't funny, not really; it was intensely sad, this small shrine beside the dumpster.

'Mama takes care of the shrine because there is no family to come and pray for them. She feels responsible somehow because it happened on the road above us and, who knows, maybe some scandalous Greek taverna sold the man one drink too many.'

How could she tell Manolis that she'd lost her mother's ashes when his own mother was so piously looking after a complete stranger's memorial? They would think her careless.

‘Artemis is tired, Mama,’ said Manolis when they returned.
‘Your mama is tired too,’ said Daria.

CAREFUL THE EGGS

Artemis barely slept, dreaming of Kaikoura and her father. Together they were spreading her mother's ashes into the wild surf, except even in her dream she knew something was wrong, that her father ought to be dead, and she panicked because if he were still alive, then why had they gone to Kaikoura to throw his ashes into the sea? And instead of the sea, there was a mound of rubbish on a dumpster at the roadside, and a shrine beside the rubbish with two lights burning, one for her mother and one for her father. Worse, instead of a tall South Islander, her father had morphed into a Scandinavian, and he was both alive and dead, talking to her beside the dumpster, sympathising with her about her mother's death.

The dream hurtled her into the morning, wide awake, relieved to be dreaming, confused about where she was, relieved again (how awful) – but truly relieved – that her mother and father were really dead. Because if they were not, what was she doing here, in her mother's place?

Now, for the first time, she understood her mother's panic when they journeyed south with Sandy, the irrational fear that not all of Sandy was there. This was far worse because she had no idea where her mother's ashes were. She might well be still on the bus.

The thought of her mother unaccompanied, riding back to Athens, propelled Artemis out of bed in a panic. She opened the shutters and saw the balmy bay, the blue sky already suggesting the perfect day. The Ionian and the Aegean somewhere out there joined sides, begged to differ, as her mother had suggested. Further out to the farthest peninsula were the Venetian fortresses of Methoni and Koroni that Manolis had spoken of while they rode recklessly through Kalamata.

Someone had placed a jug of water beside the bed for her. She lifted the white lace cover from the jug, admired the delicate beaded border. Perhaps this was her great-great-grandmother Azime's handiwork.

Artemis poured herself some water, careful not to let the bay leaf and lemon quarter slip into her glass. She watched a centipede climb the wall, a small grey grub against the pristine white room. But she knew not to touch it, aware that it would curl in on itself and emit the foulest stench if she did. How did she know? Her mother, of course – all these unbidden memories. She grew up ignoring them, and now they came to her as if her own.

Downstairs she could hear voices – Manolis, Daria and someone else. The voices were muffled. She strained to hear what they were saying. There was laughter and coughing, and she heard her mama's name. More laughter from downstairs, and more coughing. Every year, Nysa wrote to Daria urging her to give up smoking, and every year Daria wrote back to say that Greeks eat so well they never die.

She was still smoking and she'd outlived her sister.

Artemis wondered what Nysa would have thought about the opulence of this lovely hillside home. Artemis felt betrayed by her aunt's very good taste, the modernity of it, aware that her family home in New Zealand reflected Nysa's nostalgia for things past. A mosquito net, like a bridal veil, hung from the ceiling. She'd almost ripped it getting out of bed. One half was wrapped up and knotted out of the way, the other fell onto the bed. Artemis lifted the netting and covered her face, looking through it into a mirror across the room. She imagined Nysa, the virgin bride, who had left Kalamata with dreams of America and arrived in New Zealand to marry her father.

And that was how Eleni found her, covered in mosquito net, wrapped in a gauze shroud, straining towards a mirror to find herself.

'*Yiasou*, Artemi mou, *yiasou, yiasou, kardia mou*.'

She was enfolded in the arms of the mythical Eleni: a woman in her late eighties, still tall and beautiful, grey hair coiled gracefully at the nape of her neck. An Athenian goddess.

'*Eisai omorfi*,' said Eleni. 'Beautiful, just like your mama.'

Eleni – the legend, mother of the hairy baby, and scandalous lover of Uncle George.

Artemis couldn't speak, the words wouldn't come. She had no idea what to say to this stranger who felt so familiar. More familiar even than Daria.

Daria called out from below, impatient with them, wanting them to come down for coffee. Eleni released Artemis from her embrace and they both untangled themselves from the mosquito net.

Downstairs, drinking sweet black coffee, Artemis became the centre of affectionate attention, almost subject to a competition between Daria and Eleni, for who knew Nysa better and therefore loved Artemis the most. Manolis appeared with fresh cakes from a bakery and they feasted and squabbled, recollecting Nysa's past, wrapping it lovingly in exaggerated memories, outdoing one another. Joyful, competitive, argumentative … everything that Artemis remembered about Nysa.

'Your mama was *always having them four hundred*,' said Daria.

'A clever girl, that's for sure, she topped the English school in Athens.'

Eleni wasn't to be outdone, she knew Nysa better.

This was all new to Artemis, that her mother had been a scholar, and she put it all down to Greek exaggeration. But then, too, she had the recordings to consider. How articulate her mother was – something she'd taken for granted. Always as a child, it was her mother's mistakes, her habit of repeating herself that she'd taken note of, or scoffed at.

'*Kali* both inside and outside,' said Eleni, and then looking at Daria, she added, 'just like her younger sister.'

'I remember the time your mama burnt my hair at Easter,' said Daria, warming to the theme of comparison. She looked to Eleni for confirmation, but Eleni reminded her she hadn't been in Kalamata at the time.

'That was when Nysa returned from Athens, Daria, before she left for New Zealand.'

'*Tsk, tsk, tsk* … she burnt my hair, Artemis. She had curls and it wasn't the fashion anymore to have curls. She'd come back from Athens with her new ideas and wanted hair like mine.' Daria patted her own thinning blonde hair as if it were yesterday and her hair was still as lustrous. 'It was

Easter. We were holding the candles and your mama was behind me and she set my hair on fire.'

Artemis knew the story by heart, but in the story her mama told, it was Daria who set Nysa's hair on fire. According to the story Nysa told, she had worn a headband under her hat like the one Jackie Kennedy wore, and Daria was jealous and wanted to get her into trouble.

'*Ochi, ochi*,' said Eleni shaking her head and bracelets. 'It wasn't like that, Daria, George told me what happened. He said it was his fault. There were crowds outside the church and it started to rain and he pushed you and your sister indoors and somehow your hair caught fire.'

'*Playing it two doors*,' said Manolis under his breath.

'*Ochi*, Nysa set fire to my hair.' Daria reached up as if to swat at her hair still burning.

'*Arhizoun ta organa*,' said Manolis, strumming an invisible bouzouki. And then worried that Artemis wouldn't understand: '*Let the instruments begin*.'

But she didn't need it. Her childhood was steeped in such sayings, and whenever a group of her mama's Greek friends got together it would be inevitable that something akin to an argument would begin, but not a real argument as her mama would explain, not a *real* argument.

Although, Artemis decided, it was best she kept her mother's version of this story under wraps.

'Your cousin, Artemis – *may it be good luck* – his car, a Mercedes, what do you think?' Daria was rubbing her son's sleeve as she spoke, poking at his shirt, and for a moment it looked as if she might pinch his cheeks.

'*May it be good luck*,' said Artemis, for what else could she say in the face of this overt pleasure in her cousin's car.

'*Po, po*, it's not the car you should be talking about, Daria. Tell your niece about his work. Manoli mou, tell Artemis about your work.' Eleni's bracelets chimed as she shook her finger at no one in particular.

'Slow the …' began Manolis, but Artemis interrupted.

'I'd love to know about your work,' she said.

'*Po*, your cousin can speak English, German and Spanish, Artemis.'

Manolis raised his hands in surrender, aware that the two old women were about to speak for him.

'He's an archaeologist in the winter here in Kalamata, and a tour guide in the summer, down on Crete – *having them four hundred*,' said Daria proudly. 'And the tips! The tips!'

'The Germans, Daria, it's the Germans who tip the most,' laughed Eleni, and Daria scowled and Manolis looked uncomfortable.

'How else could he drive a Mercedes?' Daria added, leaning forward, her shoulders hunched, reminding Artemis of the photos she'd seen of Yiayia.

'*Careful the eggs*,' said Manolis, but Artemis could see that her cousin didn't mind his mother's overt praise, he was used to it, shrugged it off affectionately the way her brothers had with Nysa.

'You can show off tonight, Mama, show off your niece from New Zealand.'

Manolis put one arm around Daria and the other around Eleni, and he explained to Artemis, 'I've booked us in for dinner at a downtown hotel tonight. It's a fundraiser for local families affected by the fires. But everyone is looking forward to meeting you.'

Manolis nudged his mother and then Eleni with his left and right hips in a gentle intimation of what was expected – surely not dancing? He was off to work now and no doubt Artemis would need a quiet day after her long flight. They all agreed – she must rest. She wanted to ask Manolis if he could drop her off at the bus stop so she could track down the duty-free bag, but no one would hear a word of it – she wasn't going to town, and she wasn't to worry, because her cousin would track it down. He knew everyone and everything that went on in town. And no matter how she tried, she just couldn't bring herself to tell them what was in the bag.

'We'll find your duty-free,' said Daria, 'and if not, we'll buy you some new perfume, cigarettes, whatever you want, Artemi mou.'

Frustratingly, it felt like one of the old feuds with her mama – as

if even in death Nysa was trying to thwart her by getting lost. What would her brothers, or worse, her sisters-in-law, say if she phoned to tell them? She knew if she called Declan he would try to make her see the funny side, turn tragedy into comedy – it had once been his major attraction. There was no one else she could confide in. So she obeyed her aunt and spent the afternoon pretending to read in the cane chair in the garden, watching the birds, discreetly feeding them Daria's meatballs, listening to her iPod.

A NEW BEGINNING

That's what my name means, a new beginning. I am the second Nysa. My older sister, the first Nysa, was born at the start of the war and her birth was recorded. She only lived three months. So when I arrived at the end of the occupation and the start of the Civil War there was no record. It worked in my favour years later when I wanted to emigrate and I needed a birth certificate.

Right from the start, I was a new beginning, and that's what I thought about most of my life in Greece, growing up … about starting anew, getting away. And, in the end, I did.

Uncle George understood how it was and he supported me, but Yiayia never forgave me. I had to go, Artemis. I had to go away. There were too many memories and I was trapped in them. The Civil War tore my family apart, and I'm still not sure if all the wounds have healed. And you remember how upset I was when Yiayia died and I couldn't go home for the funeral? I know you thought I was being unreasonable, but you see, I never said goodbye to her all those years ago, and then it was too late – she was gone and I could never say goodbye. That's why I'm going home for Daria and for Uncle George: it's my duty, Artemis, to be there. An unburial is a strange tradition for you to understand, but it's common in Greece, because we re-use the land, and it makes sense, don't you think?

It was my good luck to be the second Nysa. When Uncle George gave me her birth certificate, it enabled me to have a new beginning. Yiayia would never have forgiven him if she'd known, but that was the only way I could get my visa. I think the man at immigration knew Uncle George. Maybe he was glad to see someone from our family

emigrating, going away. You see, scandal still haunted us, and Uncle George was a known collaborator during the war, and people have long memories in Greece. But what was he to do, Artemis? The Italians took over his wheat farm and if he worked for them he could feed his family, and that was all Uncle George worried about, feeding his family.

Yiayia refused to say goodbye to me. I understand now, but I didn't back then. Uncle George took Daria to the bus stop to wave to me, and he gave me the necklace with the gold tooth as a going-away gift. I only wore it a few times after I married your father, then I stopped wearing it because people in New Zealand didn't understand …

Artemis had almost fallen asleep listening to her mama, but the story of the tooth shook her awake with remembering. The story she'd heard Nysa telling the Cretan girls on many a Sunday evening …

… the moment at dinner when her mother had leaned across the table towards the fondue and a woman noticed her necklace.

'Goodness, what is that?'

New Zealanders asked lots of questions and Nysa never knew just how to respond. She'd blushed, but said nothing, half hoping the question wasn't for her.

But the woman had insisted. She'd tugged at the chain, brushing Nysa's breast with her determined curiosity.

'It looks like a tooth.' Her distaste conveyed with a slightly raised tone, as if making both a statement and an enquiry.

Nysa had blushed again, the painful flood of blood to her cheeks making her more beautiful (Sandy added that bit in), but not articulate, because she had repeated, over and over, 'A tooth … my mother's … Mama's tooth.'

There was a hush in the room, Nysa said, and a kind cough from somewhere, but otherwise nothing – nothing, except perhaps astonishment. Sandy filled the silence with a brief explanation about

Greek burial and unburial rituals. But this tooth had never been buried and the truth … Oh that night, at that table, the truth about the tooth, even Sandy didn't know.

'Ooh.'

The woman had flinched and dropped the tooth. Nysa remembered the feel of the cold gold as it nestled in her cleavage. The panic, the embarrassment.

'Don't you hate fondues that run and don't stretch,' said one of the other guests, with a tenderness that cheese didn't warrant (that was Nysa's exact phrase). And she stretched the cheese from the pot to her plate in an act of thoughtful distraction.

They'd left the dinner party early because Sandy, bless him, had a dreadful headache.

Why had Artemis never asked her mama the importance of the tooth, and the secret that even her father didn't know?

My last memories of Kalamata are of this necklace in a box on my lap as I waved out the window to Uncle George and Daria. I promised to come back for Daria, one day, and she promised to visit me. Of course we never did, not until now.

But truthfully, I was dying to get away.

Eleni came to see me off in Athens. Oh, you would love Eleni, Artemis, and she you. I'd love you to meet her …

Artemis sensed her mother wanted to say more but she was holding back. This was how they'd always played it.

Eleni came to the airport to see me off, and that made up for Yiayia not saying goodbye. She was a fashionista and her parting gift to me was a Hermès scarf that I still have. You can see me in the photograph if you look – it's black and white, but I'm wearing Eleni's navy and gold

scarf. Do you remember how upset I was when you lost it? I never explained to you why, I'm sorry. It was just a scarf, but it meant the world to me.

I wore that scarf the entire journey from Athens to New Zealand. It was the height of fashion and I felt invincible. Can you imagine it, Artemis, a plane-load of mostly young girls, all smoking, and all of us, our first flight on an aeroplane. We all smoked all the way … I flew in a blue haze across the world to Wellington, wearing my navy scarf. There was brandy on board too, but your mother didn't drink brandy, although some of the girls did. They were sick when we hit turbulence across the Pacific.

The Cretan girls all wanted husbands, *po, po, po*. But not your mama, Artemis, I wasn't looking for a husband. No, I was wanting to be rich, to buy a house, to make money so that one day I could go home to Greece, make Yiayia proud of me. All the way across the world, we talked about our futures. The Cretan girls wanted husbands and I wanted a house. There were German boys on our flight too, and they were like me, they wanted to be rich.

Mostly, *agapi mou*, all I really wanted was to be so far above the world, getting further and further from my guilt, watching it disappear out the window. I left a part of my heart in Greece, but it was the part that hurt, and so it was a relief … a relief …

We stood on the cabin stairs and had our photograph taken for the newspaper. I'm in the front of the photo, the gloved hand waving. Your father always said that he saw the photo in the paper and he found me at that moment, but I think he made that up. It's his romantic nature.

Artemis stopped listening for a moment. The word romantic did not fit

her version of her father. Practical, resourceful, reliable were the words that came to mind when she thought of him.

She recalled the photograph her father had framed of all the young Greek girls stepping off the plane. How happy they'd looked. You might have expected some trepidation from a group of young, more-or-less refugees, but not Nysa, joy was writ large in black and white.

All of the girls were wearing blouses and one woman was in trousers. Perhaps that had been the scandalous Phaedra the Cretan girls whispered about. Her mama looked back at them from the photo on the sideboard and now, here in her aunt's garden for the first time, Artemis understood how brave her mother had been.

'She had guts,' Kevin from Taranaki told them at the funeral.

She'd heard the story many times. How during the Second World War the New Zealanders had defended Crete, Sandy's dad one of them. About the Greek girls, most of them from Crete and her mama from Kalamata, all of them resettled in New Zealand as part of a government scheme in the sixties. How they were all under thirty, and importantly – amid gales of laughter in the front room – the Cretan girls and her mother affirmed that of course they'd all been virgins. Then they would *tsk, tsk, tsk* about Phaedra and her frock and complain of the low-paid jobs they had to take. And look at them now, they would say, in their flash frocks with their flash homes and their families.

Over and over, on a Sunday evening in the front room, she heard how they took up work in New Zealand's hospitality industry, which meant laundries, hospitals, hotels – the bottom of the heap really. Some, like her mama, became nurse aides or cooks at the hospital, and some of them later studied and qualified, but not Nysa. She'd married Sandy, her own personal triumph.

And then there was Evanthe, who'd become a socialite, according to Nysa, by marrying a dentist and then opening her own travel agency. Nysa revered anyone in a profession. She loved Sandy, but she envied Evanthe. Evanthe's husband's private practice afforded her status, and the money to wear the right shoes with the right frock. She was known

for the 'ensemble', three matching pieces where two would do.

Evanthe had attended Artemis's twenty-first birthday in a gold lurex, *on-somme*, as Nysa liked to say. Her mother had worn, she had to concede, a stunning cream silk dress, and stolen the hearts of most of her friends *and* her brothers' friends. She had tried not to resent her beautiful mother, but at your twenty-first a stunning mother is the very last thing you need. Artemis had lined up the shots on the fashionable bar that Sandy had rented for the night and then vomited quietly outside, when no one was looking. Not even her eagle-eyed mother who, if she recalls, was dancing exuberantly with the poet from Levin that Artemis was dating at the time.

After your father and I married, we rented a house first in Lyall Bay. Norfolk pines lined the wide streets. I grew to love those trees, their bright green fingers, my favourite New Zealand tree, except they are immigrants like me. I felt like one of those trees with my new green shoots, and people treated me like an exotic, took me under their Kiwi wings – and that's a good joke, Artemis, a bird that can't fly takes me under its wing. But they did.

You see, even though we were Greek, the local Greeks did not approve of us, not entirely – we were the upstarts who had arrived without husbands, threatening the respectability of the established Greek community. We stuck together, the Cretan girls and I, and this is why my English took so long to improve.

Your father – well, I think that's how I won his heart: my inability to say exactly the thing that I wanted to. And so he stayed around hoping I might find the words, and the lack of exactness meant we took longer to find each other, and the longer we took the more interesting it all seemed. Of course he always says it was my beautiful black eyes. I couldn't so much as walk to the corner dairy without being stopped, invited in for cups of tea, given food, feted. Oh, I loved Lyall Bay.

When I got urinary infections in the early stages of my marriage, so unused was my system to the whole idea of this … Well, I wanted garlic, chopped and raw. One of my neighbours took me to the city to find the grocer who sold garlic – as far as I knew, the only person in Wellington who did. It wasn't on display, but kept out the back. You could lose customers if you were found selling anything too foreign and fancy. Can you imagine that – garlic as fancy?

And as for oil, if you wanted to cook with it …

Here Artemis joined in:

… you bought it from the local chemist.

I think New Zealanders imagined we were all from small villages without running water, but how wrong they were. I had lived in Athens where people had big dreams and anything seemed possible. Eleni had friends with marble bathrooms, gold taps, even a bidet.

There was a gap, as if Nysa knew that Artemis would be shaking her head at the mention of bidets. Her mama had always wanted Sandy to put one in the bathroom, but bidets had to be imported, and somehow they never got round to it.

So you can imagine what it was like to arrive in Wellington and people here thinking Formica was flash. Many of the Cretan girls were from smaller villages, so they were not so surprised by the size of Wellington, but for your mama, Artemi mou, it was a shock, I can tell you. You can't imagine Courtenay Place back then, but it was a shock after Athens.

I want to explain myself to you … Maybe, if I tell you something of my own experience, then you may understand something of yourself.

Her mother's voice faltered, and she cleared her throat, and the next words were wobbly and emotional.

> You were not expected in the way that your brothers were. I loved my pregnancies, my labours even, everything entirely … that is, until you, my dear. I didn't know you were there, growing inside me, fingers, toes, your sex knowable and, who knows, sucking your thumb. But I didn't know, not in the way I knew when I was pregnant with your brothers. You see, I had plans by the time you came along and it was a shock, an inconvenience. I did resent you. And maybe amniotic fluid is not thick enough to shield a baby from her mother's resentment.

There was a gap, as if Nysa was giving her daughter time to digest this new information, but it wasn't new, because all along Artemis had known. All along she had felt it.

> It's not that I didn't love you, but seeing you, I was afraid my heart would break. Your brothers had arrived to mend my broken heart, but you arrived to break it, and it wasn't your fault, I know. You were just a baby. And then the gap grew between us as I tried to hide my feelings.

Artemis paused her iPod, gripped by the words. When she pushed play, her mother's voice had recovered.

> And we both know that by the time you were a teenager, we were locked in battle. I was trying to find something of myself outside of motherhood, chasing an education to prove to you that I was clever, because I knew you resented my limited vocabulary. I chose the wrong time to find myself and I lost you somehow.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

I'm not looking for sympathy, or for your forgiveness, I just thought it would be good if we both knew more about each other, before … before … it's too late.

It is too late.

I'd begun night classes to improve my English. Already you were *having them four hundred*, as we say. You more than the boys. You know what I mean, don't you? It's what Yiayia used to say about me and Daria, it's about having four hundred thoughts a minute – no wonder you challenged me.

And then, do you remember, the crash in 1987? And your father had done a big job that he didn't get paid for? He was one of the small contractors, but it was a lot of money, and so I started work at the local supermarket in the evenings and I think you were mortified. I wanted possessions, I wanted two of everything, and I bought too much and I'm embarrassed by that now. But I always imagined going home, taking one of everything home to Daria. I know it was stupid of me, but there you are, that's how it was.

Another cough, like the flutter of a cicada wing or the stifling of a sob.

Go out for a walk, Artemis, get some fresh air; take a break from my voice. Come back with some sea spray in your heart, and perhaps an early taste of summer if you're lucky.

It felt strange to know that as her mother spoke, she was imagining Artemis at home in Island Bay, not here, in Daria's garden, where Nysa should have been.

Manolis returned, minus the ashes, but it was too late to tell her cousin why the duty-free bag mattered so much. He was much too excited about the evening ahead that he had planned for them all. She

didn't want to spoil it.

THE SUITCASE GOES A LONG WAY

The hotel was a grand old lady on Aristomenous, with balconies at bedroom windows overlooking the street. It had been refurbished recently, according to Daria, and she was proud of the stylishly tiled floors, the hotel's history dating back to the 1890s.

A local women's group had organised a *glenti* to thank the Turkish conservationists who had generously donated both money and trees after the recent fires. Manolis had cajoled the older women into joining him, in spite of their protests that dancing in a time of mourning was forbidden. They needn't dance he'd told them, but everyone wanted to meet Artemis. Daria's misgivings about a scandal had clearly been outweighed by her desire to show off her niece. The room was filled with mostly older women, well-shod, shiny-haired and smoking (this was what Artemis noticed first – the smoke signals across the room wafting from lip to lip as part of the conversation). In contrast, the entertainment was a youthful trio of musicians strumming bouzouki. Each table was strewn with meze platters and decanters of ouzo, and people were drinking and rescuing olive stones from their smoking mouths in delicate, choreographed movements.

Manolis led the way to their reserved table near the front and there was a chorus of *yiasou, yiasas*, the personal and the plural. Artemis could see people nudging each other, pointing, and she knew without having to ask that this was about her, Daria's niece from New Zealand. Many of these women now pointing and nudging might have known her mother, perhaps once been friends of Nysa's. And, too, Eleni was in town. Eleni, Eleni, Eleni, they called, and they kissed and they laughed.

Manolis decanted the ouzo, and once again Artemis found solace in anise, the comfort of intoxicating liquorice. Soon they were surrounded by people wanting introductions and Daria was holding court, in her element, hosting the head table as if this was all about her, and the fires

and the trees were merely the sub-plot. It was generally agreed from table to table, a whispering wall, that *she's the spitting image*, and the ghost in the room – Artemis already knew – wasn't Nysa, but Nysa and Daria's mother, her grandmother. The recordings had warned her, but now it was confirmed by nudges, little but exaggerated intakes of breath, gestures, with Daria presiding and confirming.

Manolis whispered to her, 'You're like one of the relics recently uncovered at Ancient Messene, except you are flesh and blood, Artemis, a living relic. Forgive them. Try to understand. You've been returned, you could be your grandmother … they're thinking *like the snows* when they see you, Artemis.'

The oddest thing, though. No one spoke her grandmother's name. And Artemis did not know it. Somehow, it had never been mentioned, and tonight was no exception. She couldn't believe that she had never asked her mother this one burning question: the name of her Greek grandmother. Oh, she'd been curious often enough, but there was always a reason not to ask, as if a mysterious barrier appeared whenever the conversation might have ventured near the topic. Nysa's dead mother was a very touchy subject and they all knew to avoid it.

Across from them was the group of Turkish conservationists who were indeed the 'head table', in spite of Daria lapping up the attention. Manolis struck up a conversation with one of them, who pulled his chair over to talk to them. He was a young man in his early thirties, ardently engaged with the topic of regeneration and how best to restore the burnt olive groves, the ravaged pine forests. Artemis was fascinated, watching Manolis and this Turkish conservationist, both passionate about restoration and recovery, one with the stain of the occupier upon his cultural conscience.

'The cypress trees,' said the Turkish conservationist, 'are of more concern than the burnt olives.'

'*Po, po, po*, but what about our olive trees? Have you seen the corpses of our olive trees, all burned in the fires?' said Daria, stubbing out her cigarette as if suddenly aware it too was burning.

The young Turkish man listened to Daria and then he spoke of changing weather patterns, and how he was working with people who were developing new canker-resistant cypress trees. He was polite, and diplomatic, but insistent too. When he spoke, he spoke English and Greek, translating for Daria and Artemis, and then Turkish to his fellow conservationists. Artemis was fascinated by the ease with which he moved from one tongue to another.

The music started up, and Manolis took Artemis by the hand and led her on to the dance floor; the flash, shiny-tiled floor. Soon even Daria joined them, and Manolis was banished to the sideline. Artemis was swept up into the famous Kalamatianos dance, the cool fingers of her Aunt Daria linked with her own. A slow step to the right on her right foot, and a quick step to the right on her left foot, and then there was no need to think (she stumbled twice). Just music, her aunt, her aunt's friends and the very public honour of being Nysa's daughter. She knew it was for this that they danced; the footwork, the laughter and the rhythms, and even more potent, more pressing, within the music, the very public honour, was the shadow of her unnamed grandmother … the woman she resembled. Each pause, each half and then double step, the meter of a Greek poem.

More than anything they had said so far, their moist hands and their damp excited scalps expressed everything. This was an anointing. And Nysa was with them in this moment, approving the dance of Daria and her daughter. Then, abruptly, Daria left the dance floor to sit, and her shoulders shook. She was coughing, but laughing too, mostly laughing. Artemis joined her aunt and they sat and laughed together. It was laughter that came from an old-time Greek dance: joy, a reunification, the old and the new. Happiness was not the right word; it was sadness too, and laughter was the only way to express it.

When Artemis looked up, the Turkish conservationist was watching her. Their eyes met briefly. He gestured with his head towards the dance floor, and shyly Artemis shook her head. She knew Daria had already broken with protocol tonight in her honour, but perhaps her niece

dancing with a Turk would be a step too far. You could never tell just what the unspoken rules might be. And Daria was struggling, her cough was not abating, and soon Manolis was offering to drive her home.

As they stood up to leave, the Turkish conservationist waved and Daria blew him an extravagant kiss across the room. She might be struggling to breathe, but she still recognised chivalry and knew how to respond. They left, conspicuously, Daria, Eleni and Artemis, damp hand in damp hand, amid a flurry of farewells and cheek-kissing. Artemis, who had not been looking forward to the evening, found herself reluctantly looking back as the musicians picked up their bouzouki to play again.

Her Turkish admirer was now busy talking to another table, but looked up in time to catch her watching him. He smiled. But Daria was tugging on her arm. Manolis whispered that she could come back later, after they'd dropped Daria and Eleni home.

'Your cousin is tired, Manoli mou, tired. She's been travelling a long time, and we want her home with us, not dancing with strangers.'

Just like her mama, thought Artemis. One minute this and the next minute that. You could never quite keep up. There were rules but you never really knew what they were.

Manolis dropped them home and said he was heading back to catch up with the Turkish conservationists. It was an offer, but one Artemis couldn't accept. The dancing with her aunt had bridged a gap that she wasn't prepared to lose, not even for a handsome Turk.

THE GRAPES OF EXOCHORI

After manolis departed, daria insisted on opening a bottle of wine saved especially for Nysa's homecoming.

'We planned to open it at Uncle George's unburial, but tonight is as good a night as any.'

Eleni agreed – that is, until the wine was brought out.

'Wine from Petroula's grapes, Artemis, the best grapes in all of Exochori, made from the grapes named after him. *Agiorgitiko*, George's grape. Your Uncle George made this wine, so we will drink it tonight to honour him,' said Daria, brandishing the bottle before Artemis, proudly.

Eleni's tongue clicked when Daria mentioned her rival's name, the infamous Petroula from the Mani, the other lover of Uncle George.

But Daria ignored Eleni and poured the wine. She toasted Artemis, and Eleni could not remain churlish, so she lifted her rival's wine to her lips and agreed it was very good, and maybe, reluctantly, yes, the grapes from Exochori were good grapes.

'To Artemis and to George.'

'To Uncle George,' said Artemis.

The wine, according to Daria, was best after five years, but they'd had to wait for Uncle George to decompose, so this bottle was the last one, and it was past its best of course, but it was still good.

'Your great-uncle trod these grapes, Artemis, with his bare feet – no fancy machinery – and maybe Petroula's feet too.'

At this, Eleni put her glass down.

Artemis sipped the wine – it was fruity and not acidic as she'd expected. It slid down and warmed her. The thought of her great-uncle's feet treading the grapes to make it seemed perfectly fitting after such a night.

Daria then lit a cigarette and offered one to Artemis. She declined.

Her aunt's coughing was working in a way that all of Nysa's protestations could not have. Instead she enjoyed the second-hand smoke while the red wine worked its way into her heart, arousing affection for a man she had never known but about whom she had heard stories all of her life. Uncle George and his two legendary lovers, one of them here with her, and the other evoked in the dark sediment left in her glass.

Daria painted pictures for her, possibly exaggerations, maybe a pastiche from things she had been told by others, a blend, like Uncle George's wine, of the very best of the grapes and the harsh earth and the times in which they grew. Eleni graciously conceded Daria's right to these memories, silent in her own, just the occasional click of her tongue when Petroula's name came up.

Her aunt spoke of an olive tree that straddled the pavement and a stone fence in the front yard at their old house in the city. She spoke of Uncle George up a ladder, passing branches down to Yiayia who was stripping the olives into an enamel basin in her lap. She told Artemis about two little Greek girls, Nysa and Daria, who ran around and under the ladder pelting each other with olives. They were orphans, Nysa and Daria, orphans, but they had their grandmother and their Uncle George.

'When your mama left for New Zealand, I was all that Yiayia had. Just me, Artemi mou, I couldn't leave her.'

There was an awkward silence. Her aunt's resentment filling it. Artemis wanted to comfort her. She half stood to do so but Daria continued.

'Yiayia talked about your mama all the time. Nysa this and Nysa that. Your mama was a legend here. Look, you're sitting on cushions that your mama sent home to us.'

Artemis lifted a cushion to look. It was one of those kitsch cushions her mother used to collect. Black velour garishly painted with a scene of Rotorua, edged all round with yellow tassels. There were more of them back home in the shed, waiting to be shipped to Oamaru – pictures of the cable car in Wellington, Mount Ruapehu – her brother George was sentimental.

'Mama was heartbroken when Yiayia died,' Artemis told her aunt. But

she couldn't tell her what really happened – about the strange grief they all witnessed; the anger, the resentment, her inability to accept that she couldn't go home, how she had blamed Daria, screamed even, and they'd never heard her scream before … her mother irrational and screaming and their father trying to console her. That was the start of the trouble between Artemis and her mother. Frightened by her mother's behaviour, she'd withdrawn trust and grown closer to her father, her reliable dad. And then, a year later, the economic crash and her father hadn't got paid for work he'd done, and her mother was once more irrational and difficult, and embarrassing, working at the local supermarket, buying two of everything, constantly talking about returning to Greece.

'I know she wanted to come home, but tell her, Eleni, tell Artemis how it was, how Nysa couldn't have come home, no matter how much we wanted her to.'

Daria was eager to convince her that it had been impossible for Nysa to come home when Yiayia was killed in the earthquake. The terrible time when Nysa fell to pieces and was inconsolable, wanting to return. Daria was full of regret and determined to explain how it was for them, on that evening, and afterwards.

'We left Yiayia at home that night. She'd just moved into her new apartment on the sixth floor. She didn't want to come down to the beach to see the ferry. She was getting old, and her legs didn't want to walk that far. She knew there'd be lots of people, and we didn't want to drive so we left her home. They say she was found sitting upright with a tumbler of wine beside her. All around her chaos. A steel reinforcement beam had fallen, killing her instantly. She'd been playing patience and the cards were still there waiting to be turned over. Her parrot was distraught. We took the parrot with us to the ship, but it was crowded on board – we were sharing a berth with everyone and his dog, and the parrot died a few days later. Uncle George said the parrot died of a broken heart, but I think the noise drove her mad – so much noise on the ship, so many people and she was used to being on her own with Yiayia. There was no room, Artemis, for your mama on board the ferry.'

'People were living in tents all over the city,' said Eleni, as if to confirm that Daria wasn't exaggerating.

'Perhaps your mama didn't understand, Artemis, maybe she thought I didn't want her to come home, but there was nowhere for her to sleep.' Daria emphasised this with her two hands raised either side of her face. 'We were fortunate that night,' and her aunt blessed herself the way Nysa used to, twice, as if in a hurry, not wanting to interrupt her own conversation. 'Because, apart from Yiayia, we were all down at the waterfront to welcome the new ferry. Manolis, Uncle George and I. We might have all been killed. Many people say God planned it, you know, the ferry's arrival and the earthquake, as if to give us all a good shake. A pregnant woman leapt from Yiayia's apartment building, from the fourth floor, and she survived, so God was watching out for some of us. And then afterwards we all gathered in the rain to thank God, umbrellas everywhere, an outdoor liturgy, because of course no one was going indoors to pray – no one trusted God *that* much.'

'Most people had to live in tents,' said Eleni again, reinforcing the point. 'You see, you can see, can't you, your mama couldn't have come back and lived on the ferry, not while people were living in tents? Daria and Manolis, they shouldn't have been on the ferry, it was meant for women with babies and the elderly, but because of Uncle George knowing so many people on the waterfront, he got them a berth. It set the tongues wagging – people hadn't forgotten the war, Uncle George growing wheat for the Italians, getting a berth on the ferry for his family …'

'Uncle George!' said Daria, regaining her composure. 'A toast, Artemis, to Uncle George.'

'Uncle George and Nysa,' said Eleni.

Artemis raised her glass and drank to her mama and Uncle George. She was feeling tipsy and emotional, remembering her mother's despair when Yiayia died. She hadn't understood the grief and despair then, but here now with these two old women, she understood, and she wanted them to understand.

She told them how her mother, after three years of wearing nothing but

black to show her grief for Yiayia, had surprised them all one day by putting on a cream dress, tailored linen, belted and off the shoulder, her womanhood on display. Artemis confessed to them just how much she had hated her mother wearing black, and how she'd hated this new cream mother even more. It was around that time that Artemis had gone out and had her nose pierced – a nasty little incision that festered and filled with pus because she'd been impatient to wear a ruby stud from a shop in Cuba Street instead of waiting. She showed them the scar, and they assured her it was barely noticeable … and it was true, the hole was tiny now. She just thought of it as being bigger because her mother had made such a fuss, and Declan … Declan for some reason liked it and so it assumed prominence in her mind. It was a war wound, a battle scar from the combat between her and her mama. Daria and Eleni *tsked* sympathetically, and she wasn't certain with whom they were siding. It didn't matter.

Later, in her bedroom, with the shutters wide open, Artemis looked out and watched the stars: old stars in what was for her a new hemisphere, shining a new light. She heard Manolis come home, she heard Daria coughing, but mostly she thought about her mother.

She was overcome with guilt for the lost box of ashes, as if it represented all her failures, all her resentments, as if she was still pushing her dead mama away, though she had never felt closer to her. And yet now she was finally engaged with her mother's history, wanting to know all there was – especially the secrecy surrounding the name of her grandmother. She'd been dying to ask Daria and Eleni, but something had stopped her. As a historian it was her natural instinct to ask questions, but as the newly arrived daughter of Nysa she was less sure of herself.

Tomorrow she would track down the lost ashes. How could she have been so careless? She could hear her mother.

God the assistant.

THE CAVES

Artemis slept fitfully, dreaming of ashes and cypress trees, and the cypress trees were strewn with Agiorgitiko grapes, each purple fruit a black eye. She woke at 4am. The house was silent. She tried to phone Declan but got his voice message. He might still be out of range, but he could also be with his family and ignoring her. Her body clock was all over the show and she didn't want to sleep any longer. She just wanted the morning to arrive so she could find the ashes.

Artemis opened the shutters, hoping to watch the arrival of dawn. She heard birds already and could smell the sea. She'd been too tired to continue listening to her mama's recordings last night, but the title of the next recording she knew was a quote from Byron. 'I hear thy name spoken and share in its shame.'

She was glad now that she'd chosen to read Byron at her mother's funeral against the advice of Ginny and Penelope, grateful to Declan for suggesting it.

> We lived in the river for three months. I sense already, Artemi mou, your disbelief. I can hear you thinking, 'She means *beside* the river.' But your expertise in grammar cannot rewrite history. I'm going to read this to you, Artemis. I wrote it down as an exercise I was given by a counsellor. You will be surprised, I know, to hear this, that I went to counselling. But after your baba died, I was all at sea, memories I'd buried began to resurface. The counsellor recommended that I write about the things that were troubling me. I didn't know that I was going to share what I had written, but as the time gets closer for me to leave, I realise there's so much you don't know about me, and I know you'll roll your eyes … but just in case – you know what I mean – just in case.

Artemis knows exactly what her mama means. Always catastrophising. No doubt she worried about the plane crashing or possibly the fires in Greece – who knows, her mama found concern in the furthest corners. And then it hits her, for the first time – perhaps her mama had chest pains before her heart attack, perhaps she even envisaged not leaving. But Mrs Cataldo had said, 'No, no, no, your mama was fine right up until I found her, she was excited, but not sick, no, she would have told me, no, no.' Something about her mother's voice changes, she is reading …

> We share the cave with small whiskered bats that hide during the day and disappear at night among the trees along the riverbank. Soon, Yiayia tells us (because Daria is frightened of the bats), they will hibernate, once they've stocked up on enough food. One of the women sharing the cave with us is certain the bats will bite her baby and give him rabies. Yiayia pacifies her by saying that the bats are the least of their worries, and rabies a minor misfortune compared to what would happen if they are discovered. Nobody explains what is happening, not like when the Germans were in Kalamata, and Yiayia is full of explanations dating right back to the Ottomans. Now there is an enemy within, and people don't trust each other.
>
> Sometimes we venture out of the cave to gather berries, but these assignments are carefully planned, with one of the adults going first to check if it is safe. Each foray into the outside world is an adventure, something to look forward to. We survive on olives and cheese preserved in oil, but mostly we live on what we can raid from the valley, rarely being able to cook food because fires are dangerous and will drive the bats out of the caves and someone will notice. Once or twice when the bats are out, we roast chestnuts over small fires but someone stands ready to fan the smoke back from the cave entrance.
>
> The women tell each other stories at night as they rock their hungry

babies to sleep. Yiayia is the lead storyteller. She demonstrates the lost art of the professional mourner to entertain us – tears at her face, scratches her eyes, rips at her hair and silently wails, and it is then, when the blood seeps from those scratches, that I realise that Mama is not coming back, that Yiayia is not really entertaining but grieving.

I make friends with small stones, the size of my hand. The white stones are my best friends and I spend hours looking for the perfect shape to fit one in each hand so I can feel their warmth or their coolness, depending on the time of day. I miss my mama, but that is too awful, and so I focus on missing Uncle George, certain that if he returns we will be okay. I miss the clack-clack of his *komboloi*, his extravagant sniffing whenever he crossed the threshold into Yiayia's kitchen, even when and especially if we were short of food. Uncle George could make peeling an apple to cut, quarter and share seem like a feast. I still smell oranges when I think of him, because he always had a segment in his pocket somewhere.

Stones can be good company for a child. I have names for all my favourite stones and I talk to them. One is named after my mama and one after Uncle George. It is as if my baba has never existed and Uncle George has replaced him. Perhaps that is how children deal with their grief – they invent a new truth. Sometimes my stones play chess, and sometimes my stone mama kisses me. She is still warm from my hand, so the stone kiss is warm. I can still feel my stone mama's kisses. There is something about a kiss, the warmth of one against the other, lips able to absorb the warmth, to hold the memory for a long time afterwards.

Late afternoons are my favourite time. The sun fades and a cool wind rises. Leaves on the trees outside shift from a glittering silence to a rowdy ruffle as birds return for the night – large black birds that look like swallows and yelp like puppies as they squabble and settle.

Yiayia doesn't know the name of these birds, which is proof enough to me that even Yiayia is lost. But the birds coming home at dusk is a sign that some things stay the same even if my grandmother doesn't know their names.

Let me tell you about fear, because this is something I do understand. In a field not far from the cave, corn is ripening, and there are even late crops of wild strawberries, and prickly pears. We have walnuts in brine too, from the previous year's harvest. But we are always hungry. There are foxes in the field, but they are the least of our worries. Night-time is the worst for a hungry stomach, the pain in your gut intensifies and becomes unbearable. Noise is our enemy, even a whimper is too loud, the cave a natural auditorium. Snuffles, whimpers and snores bounce off walls, and the bats are louder than any of us with their sudden departures and arrivals in the night. Yiayia says the bats talk to each other in a language that we can't hear. I try, when everyone else is asleep, to listen carefully because I want to know what the bats are saying, but mostly I hear my stomach talking and the stifled sobs of sleeping women, the whimper of anxious babies.

There is a boy named Vasilis, he is about seven years old. His mama is thin and bereft. She has left two other children in the care of their yiayia back in Kalamata and cannot reconcile herself to this separation. Vasilis, like me, is always hungry. When his mama falls into a fitful sleep just as the dawn comes creeping into the sky, he leaves the cave unnoticed. I've fallen asleep too, but we are all woken by his mama screaming. The sound reverberates, scattering the bats. But worse than that, we hear dogs in the distance. The other women subdue Vasilis's mama. They hold her down and cover her mouth. Her silence is louder even than her screams, louder even than the dogs in the distance.

I hold Daria close to my breast as if I am Mama. We rock together and

Daria falls back to sleep, her wet mouth half-open, her warm breath a caress. She thinks I am Mama. I think I am Mama.

We are wrapped in woollen mats from the house in Kalamata, and they are heavy and draughty and we shiver, and it is fear, not the cold, that makes us shake. The women hold Vasilis's mama and she stops struggling because soon she is unable to move. Who knows how long we wait like this. Eventually the dogs stop barking and Vasilis returns, jubilant, with a pocketful of ripe tomatoes. His mama is face down in the river like a sleeping starfish. I think she has fallen asleep. Vasilis calls to his mama to show her the tomatoes and she does not answer. She isn't dead, although it seems she is. The women pull her from the water, and her boy is a hero with his pocketful of tomatoes. But she has died in a way that you die while still living. Nothing Vasilis does now can ever bring the life-glow back to his mama. A piece of her spirit sank in the water that day, but we are safe.

Yiayia is unsympathetic – you have to remember her own daughter, my mama, is missing, and rather than making her compassionate it seems she has severed her head from heart.

Not long after that, Yiayia drops a jar of olives. It slips through her cold, blunt fingers and smashes on the rocks, emptying brine into the river. Instinctively, we all rush to rescue the olives and it becomes a fierce race as to who can scoop up the most. Yiayia, of course, but she takes no joy from her triumph, until the others begin to laugh. They laugh and they fight each other to get the biggest handfuls. It is the strangest time, so much fear, and the laughter comes out of the fear as unbidden, unwanted pleasure. I catch two olives in my cupped hands. I hold them as if they are amethysts or the eyes of the Blessed Virgin.

Summer is ending, our food supplies are dwindling … we grow hungrier and colder as autumn advances. Even the bats are ready for hibernation.

It is snowing when Uncle George comes, and we are happy to leave the caves because Yiayia knows we won't survive a winter here. Daylight is blinding and the snow glistens like cut glass the day we leave the caves. The blue of the sky is startling. At night I can still close my eyes and hear the river and the bats and Yiayia praying. I still see bats spreading flat against the limestone wall … they wallpaper my dreams.

Whatever danger has driven us to hide is now past. People are happy to defend their ground against outsiders, like the Turks or the Germans, but it is so much more complicated when you are hiding from your own people.

I cannot see Kalamata in my mind without seeing my favourite mountain, Kalathi, and the waterfront. Kalathi is part of the Taygetus mountain range that runs along the Mani peninsula. These mountains, people say, are the keepers of Greek secrets. They say the Spartans abandoned their handicapped babies up there somewhere. There are rumours that local mothers left their babies to die in the mountains so they could fight alongside their men during the Civil War … but nobody knows for certain, Artemis, because a mother doesn't tell anyone if she has discarded her baby in favour of her lover. And in Greece, *agapi mou*, it's usually more about people and their petty squabbles and neighbours who *yakkity-yak* and you can never be sure just what the truth is. Mama and Baba died because of gossip and petty squabbles and old grudges, but that's what a civil war is. It's anything but civil.

But we are safe because Uncle George is always there, watching out

for us, although at the time I didn't understand that.

We are covered in lice when Uncle George finds us. Remember, Artemi mou, remember how I made such a fuss when you came home with nits. I know, I was distraught and your father tried to console me, but even he didn't really understand. I'm sorry I made such a fuss, but there you have it – the lice brought back so many memories and I took it out on you. I can still see your face as I combed your wet hair on a Sunday evening determined to find every egg, as if my life depended on it. I wasn't chasing eggs, I was chasing the past away, but now I'm going back to make peace with it … forgive me, Artemis, forgive me.

They shaved our heads, and even though I was just a little girl, my hair mattered so much to me and I cried more about my hair than I did the whole time we were inside the caves. Yiayia wasn't sympathetic and everyone looked at us suspiciously. You see, women who had been communist sympathisers had their heads shaved when the Civil War ended. All around us, shaved heads and no one knowing exactly why. I don't think Yiayia ever removed her headscarf after the time in the caves. In fact, whenever I think of Yiayia I see a black headscarf and, of course, her black cardigan.

But I'm beginning to lose track, *agapi mou*, and there is something important I need to tell you … something much more important than our shaved heads and Yiayia's black cardigan. Something that I have tried to forget but never can. It is the reason I ran so far from Kalamata, and this piece of information I have held so close for so long, it has become grafted to my heart. It is lodged like a piece of ice that can never melt. You see, if it did melt, I fear I might drown in the flood.

There is anguish in her mama's voice, then silence, just the faint sound of the original tape moving forward, and Artemis holds her breath, waiting,

urging her mother to continue.

It is my fault.

Her mother stopped speaking and all that was audible now was her breathing, both the intake and the out breath.

No doubt Daria would know something about all of this. Daria was there in the caves with Mama. How could it be her mother's fault – she was just a small girl. But how old was she?

Just eighteen when I came to New Zealand.

Her point of difference among the Cretan girls – *see, I was younger than all of you.*

There was always a mixture of pride at having left her family behind, and something else: delight that the authorities had been fooled. Nysa's actual age seemed to move back and forth with the years, wanting to be the first-born Nysa so she could emigrate, and later, when Sandy died, wanting to be herself, the young Nysa, three or four years younger, but who really knew?

What a muddle her mother's life seemed.

Artemis dozed. She dreamed of whiskered bats and she chased olives as they fell and ran into rivers. Her cupped hands kept breaking apart so that every time she tried to scoop the olives from the water they fell back into the river and she desperately tried to catch them, and in the distance a woman, who was Yiayia but looked like Nysa, was tearing at her bleeding face, urging her on as if every olive must be caught and accounted for, and still the olives slipped through her fingers.

Artemis woke as the dawn broke. An eerie mist was rising from the sea. Her head was filled with the story of her mama and Daria in the caves. She was assailed with that memory of her own childhood, the time she came home from school with head lice, her mother's near-hysteria. Nysa telling them all that she'd left Greece and head lice behind. Sandy had gone with her to the local chemist to discuss the best treatments, but Nysa wasn't satisfied. Nothing less than a complete spring clean

would do. The mattress Artemis slept on was taken out to rest against the fence and beaten in full view of the neighbours. The boys teased her mercilessly, taunting Artemis with tales of her having wet the bed, and she knew what Mrs Cataldo would be thinking, and it was all over a few nits. Laura had them, everyone had them, it was just what happened at school. From then on Artemis was made to wash her hair every Sunday evening and Nysa would comb it wet, looking for nits, *tsk, tsk, tsk*, and the Cretan girls would have to hear all about it and shake their lovely curls in sympathy.

And now, of course, she could match the moment. Why hadn't she thought about this before? This was when her mama had insisted on enrolling her at the local Greek school, three afternoons a week from three until five.

'You need to learn more about your heritage, learn to speak Greek. It will be good for you.'

She'd hated the Greek school, losing time with her friends after school, Laura in particular, but she'd liked learning Greek and being able to eavesdrop on her mama and the Cretan girls, knowing more than her brothers.

DON'T EVEN TELL THE PRIEST

This morning Artemis was hoping to find time to talk to Daria about the caves. But as soon as she saw her, she knew that this wouldn't be possible. Her aunt wasn't well. She'd coughed most of the night and she was tired.

'Too much dancing,' Manolis scolded as Daria lit a cigarette.

Still, she had the energy to insist that Artemis should go and explore Kalamata.

'Be sure, Artemis, you visit the Agii Apostoli,' said Daria. 'Manolis can take you on his way to work. Remember to say a prayer for your mama and your old aunt.'

'And one for me,' said Eleni from the kitchen. 'Don't forget your mama's old friend Eleni. And bring me some tomatoes from the market.'

On the way into the city, Artemis finally plucked up the courage to tell her cousin just what was in the missing bag.

Manolis let out a low whistle at the confession.

'*Me doulevis* … but you should have told me, Artemis,' he said. 'I had no idea.' And he whistled again, a long, low, outward blow of disbelief and, as he ran his fingers through his groomed hair, he agreed she'd been right not to tell Daria and Eleni.

'*Panagia mou!*' Manolis shook his head vigorously.

And then, suddenly, they were both laughing.

'No idea,' he repeated, and he hit the steering wheel with his hand and they laughed even more. It was such a relief to laugh, even though Manolis's initial reaction only underlined how serious it was.

'*Don't even tell the priest*,' said Manolis, tipping his head back. And then, sensing he was alarming her, he reached over and placed his hand on hers. 'It's okay, Artemis. I'll find the box, trust me. I'll ask around for you. I'll stop by the bus station on my way home. It'll be in the lost property somewhere, I promise you.' But he couldn't resist adding, 'No

self-respecting Greek would steal a box of ashes, Artemis. Bones maybe, but not ashes.'

He looked at her, willing her to laugh again.

She was grateful to her cousin for his good humour. But she also knew it was tricky. It was one thing to laugh with her cousin and another to face his mother. Just how he was going to track down the ashes, she had no idea, but he seemed certain that he would.

Manolis was like her brothers in so many ways. His groomed hair and confident air, rescued from vanity by a sense of humour, was a bit like Dimitris. He was kind and reliable like George, and he understood her the way Antony did. It was uncanny to notice all these things in her cousin all at the same time, this overwhelming familiarity. Besides, she realised, Manolis would have more chance than she would of tracking down the lost ashes. She agreed to have faith, trust her cousin and try to enjoy the day.

Artemis was dropped off in the old part of town in the Square of March 23, home of the small Byzantine church that Daria had told her to visit and that her mama had often spoken of. This, her cousin told her, was the heart of the Greek revolution.

'The rest of the country might celebrate the revolution on 25 March, but we know it was here on 23 March, in Kalamata, in the Peloponnese, with the aid of the Maniots, that the Ottoman rout was started.' He said it with a hint of mischief, as if mocking his own history, but she knew he meant it, that this staunch thread of resistance ran through him too.

Manolis kissed her on both cheeks and they hugged, then he touched her nose briefly in brotherly affection. She clung to her cousin, momentarily emotional, and then he left her, full of promises and reassurances, telling her to relax and enjoy. The worst was yet to come; Petroula was due and all hell would break loose: *tha ta spasoyme*. He was letting her know there were worse things than losing your mother's ashes.

The golden stone building was smaller than she had imagined, less

ornate, inauspicious even. At its entrance was a laminated photograph of the church in ruins after the 1986 earthquake. Amid the rubble of half-buried cars was a large cross, exposed by the collapse of the bell tower. If you were religious, you could have seen it as a sign from God. Her mother would have. She had been distraught when Daria wrote and told her of the church collapsing, of the frescoes lost forever. Outside it now, it was hard to imagine the bell tower had ever fallen. The tiled cupolae sat like little brick hats.

Artemis pushed the worn wooden doors and entered. She peered at the pale restorations of the frescoes, nothing like the images her mother had spoken of. But more and more Artemis realised how unreliable any memory really was, even her own. We bring our own colours to them, she thought, remembering her first dawn with Declan, Melbourne rising in an orange haze, and how she'd mistaken lust for love. Her mother had probably magnified the frescoes, re-imagined them, coloured them with her grief.

In a gesture intending to honour, Artemis lit four candles, one for her mother, one for her father, and two tapers for two women she had never met – her great-grandmother whom she knew as Yiayia, and Yiayia's nameless daughter.

Artemis placed four euro in the box beside the candles. And then she remembered Daria and Eleni had asked her to pray for them. She was about to light another two tapers when an elderly man bustled his way over, muttering something she couldn't hear. He licked his fingers and one by one extinguished the flames. Artemis opened her mouth to say something, but he gestured towards the door, looking at his watch impatiently, and somehow silently conveyed to her that the church would be shut until later in the afternoon and she would have to come back. Did he think she couldn't speak Greek?

Through all this palaver, she could hear Declan mocking her. She felt her mama's hand in this, too – thwarting her by being lost – and now her attempt to pay homage to family had been extinguished, the flames barely lit. She felt spooked at first and then she laughed, startling the old

man and herself. It was ridiculous, this strange awareness of her mother trying to spoil things, but she felt it, and she ran from the church to show both the caretaker and her mother that she didn't care, hearing Nysa all the while. *Stupid, stupid, stupid.*

Artemis sought comfort in the Square. She roamed around the neo-authentic shops with their pots, pans, brushes and rustic garden tools; this strange mix of old and new, especially for the tourists. She admired the herbs claiming to cure every ailment – basil for constipation, valerian tea for insomnia, chamomile for heartburn and borage to bring joy. She purchased some borage and brushed the blue flowers against her face, as instructed. Then she bought a white cotton cloth embroidered with olives as a gift for Daria, and a tube of sun cream evidently made from olives. She dabbed the cream on her nose and it smelled awful. There were soaps too, olive soaps and hand creams. She tripped on a sack of coffee beans, spilling its contents onto the pavement. She didn't know if she should stop and scoop the beans back into the bag, but that seemed wrong and the owner of the shop just smiled at her, beckoning her in to buy some of the fresh beans. So she bought coffee beans for Daria, and the man ground them while she waited.

Further along, in the old part of town, she found a cramped *kafenion* where locals ate. People were smoking in spite of notices forbidding them to do so. She admired the cluttered anarchy of it all, and sank into the first available chair right by the window. A plump woman with black eyes and thick ankles wiped down her table, replaced the checked tablecloth and waved a menu in front of her. She spoke rapid Greek, and Artemis responded as if suddenly possessed by tongues, found Greek words that she'd forgotten she knew, and ordered up a storm, more food than she could ever eat and a glass of wine.

The bean soup, *fasolada*, had been her mother's favourite. It was delicious. She ordered the *mezethes* platter. It was oily but tasty, and she didn't eat the meat. She ordered more bread with olive oil, and more wine. The waitress clucked approval and wiped the bottom of the wine glass with her apron before refilling it and insisting the second glass was

on the house.

Later, sated, Artemis climbed up towards the old castle, remembering her mother's second-hand stories of the Italians and how they had stationed themselves there during the occupation. It wasn't such a grand sight any more. The streets around the castle were rutted and overgrown, though further on was an enclave of opulent, well-kept gardens with high stone fences and fancy gates. The view over the rooftops was beautiful, the shining cupolae of churches, right down to the haze over the harbour.

Artemis remembered she needed to visit the markets and buy tomatoes for Eleni. She wandered down the hill behind the old town and found the markets. Some of the stalls were being packed up, the food covered, as if readying for siesta. She stopped in admiration at the large jars of olives in brines of gold and chartreuse, lingered over the figs, and then realised that more stalls were closing and she still hadn't bought Eleni's tomatoes.

From across the way, a voice called out and she looked about. An old woman sitting beside crates of tomatoes was beckoning to her. Next to her stood a man with a cigarette that moved when he spoke, as if part of his mouth. Grey hair spilled from the open neck of his white shirt, climbing upwards, clutching at his throat. He noticed Artemis looking at him and preened a little, stroking the back of his head. His grey sideburns were as lavish as his chest hair, shiny and well groomed.

The man lifted a stem of tomatoes for Artemis to inspect. Dark hairs covered the backs of his hands. He snapped one of the small tomatoes from the stem and handed it to Artemis who took it. Beside him, the old woman was jabbering excitedly, pointing towards a stack of plastic crates. As if he already knew, the man shifted the crates to reveal what she was talking about. He held aloft a duty-free bag, to the old woman's delight, her toothless grin a revelation. Artemis knew already which bag this was, but she was so startled that at first she couldn't claim it … it was the duty-free bag containing her mama.

The man said that his mother had found the bag on the bus from Athens, and she was returning it. Stunned, Artemis couldn't take it in

at first. How did his mother know that Artemis would find her here at the market, she wanted to ask. The man laughed, sensing her confusion. 'Mama knew you were a tourist, and every tourist that comes to Kalamata eventually comes to the market. She was sure you would come by, and so you have.'

Artemis fought indignation and the urge to complain, knowing she would sound ungrateful and probably hysterical. Hadn't they realised how important this bag was to her? But of course not. And she couldn't very well tell them what was in it. Tears of relief welled and spilled, and she dropped the tomato she'd been given. It rolled in front of them, a distraction, a lone tomato, something she could focus on to quell the flood of emotion.

The gratitude Artemis felt was tainted with indignation. What if she had not come to the market? What if … but she was here, and she'd found her mother. The man passed the bag to her and she reached out and took it, held it in both arms, close to her heart.

She thanked the two of them – *efharisto, efharisto poli* – backing away from the stall, holding her mother, and then as she went to turn away the man slipped the tomatoes he'd been holding into the bag. She thanked him again, eager to be gone, but she turned just once more to look, and they were waving, the toothless old woman and her son, as if she were an old friend.

The relief was enormous, and once Artemis was out of the market she phoned Manolis to tell him she'd found Mama. He didn't answer, so she left a message which she knew would sound crazy when he cleared it. The sun and the wine she'd had at lunch were taking their toll, and she was desperate for a coffee. Her cousin had advised her to try the trendy cafés further downtown when he dropped her off in the morning. She almost ran into the town, clutching the bag of ashes.

Here in the new part of town were crowds of young people. It was almost like Melbourne. Artemis stopped under a stylish red awning, ordered a

drink and placed Nysa on the table so she wouldn't lose sight of her. It was one of the cafés Daria had warned her about, selling non-traditional food – pastries and gateaux masquerading as authentic Greek fare to the undiscerning. *Po, po, po*. But it was just the sort of sweet food she craved.

'I've found you, Mama.' She wasn't sure if she spoke aloud or not, but she didn't care anymore, such was the turmoil of the morning.

'*Yiasou!*'

Someone was calling out to her from another table. She looked across and saw a group of men, the Turkish conservationists from the hotel yesterday evening. They were gesturing for her to join them. She shook her head, pointing to her drink as it arrived, as if it would be impossible to shift, but really it was her mother who prevented her from moving.

One of them got up and came over to her, the one who'd struck up a conversation with Daria about the cypress trees. The man who had more or less asked her to dance and whom she had refused. He introduced himself. His name, he said, was Bagtash, and she would be safe to talk to him because his name meant friend of God. She knew he was teasing her, but also that he was partly serious. It was an introduction that would normally have made her wary, but something about his amber-splashed eyes softened her.

'We're planning a trip up into the mountains next week, to see the burned forests. You're welcome to join us. It's a party really, to celebrate the Greek and Turkish communities. I told your cousin to tell you that you must come. We'd love you to join us …' He hesitated as if trying to recall her name.

'My name's Artemis.'

'A goddess … are those arrows in your bag?' said Bagtash, pointing.

She laughed, and he put his hand out. They shook hands.

'Every goddess needs her back-up,' she said, then blushed.

Cheeks burning, Artemis promised to consider the tour and Bagtash seemed convinced that she would. She finished her drink and discreetly peeked inside the duty-free bag to confirm that Mama was still there with the tomatoes. By the time she'd finished, the Turkish group was

leaving. Bagtash came back over to say goodbye, and to persuade her once more that she should join them next week. Again she promised to think about it. He touched her shoulders lightly and kissed her on both cheeks now, like an old friend, and after the strange encounter at the market she welcomed this attention, his cheeks warm, lingering just a little longer than such a greeting required.

This time she waved too, and all the conservationists waved back to her. Buoyed a little by flirtation, Artemis decided to shop, an activity she knew her mother would have approved of. She bought a white cap with a long peak to cover her face, and a pair of cream, heeled sandals with crossover elastic.

There you go, Mama, she thought as she paid for the sandals, some crazy, stupid shoes.

'Would you like to wear them?' The young woman held out the sandals with a wide smile revealing dimples and dental braces. Artemis hesitated and then succumbed as the assistant knelt down and secured the straps for her.

'*Oraia*,' said the woman enthusiastically, gesturing towards a full-length mirror so that Artemis could admire the sandals. She had to admit they were gorgeous.

The waterfront was much further away than she remembered from her trip on the back of Manolis's bike. She found a park to rest in. She couldn't stop thinking about her mother's ashes waiting for her at the market under a crate of tomatoes. And bumping into Bagtash like that. She checked her phone to see if Manolis had texted back. He had – three smiley faces. That was exactly how she felt.

In the park she found a memorial to New Zealand soldiers. She recalled Manolis telling her to look out for it, something about a battle on the Kalamata waterfront where New Zealand soldiers had defended the port. Her grandfather from Kaikoura had served on Crete during the war, but she hadn't known about Kiwis on the mainland. Perhaps her grandfather had been here? Sandy blamed the war for his father's drinking, so they'd not talked about it much. But she did recall her

grandfather, in one of his sober moments, speaking of the young German boys who fell from the sky like Icarus onto the island of Crete. Once the unburial of Uncle George was over, she would ask Manolis, he might know something …

Her feet were sore, but the waterfront was waiting. She wanted to know everything there was to know about her mother's city.

Artemis walked the length of the promenade beside the white umbrellas and then down onto the pebble beach. The women last night at the Hotel Rex had spoken of a famous British author, a hero of the Greek resistance, who, one legendary evening, had shifted his table from the beach and into the sea to dine with his friends. When the waiter had returned with the food, he had simply rolled up his trousers and waded into the water. It sounded like one of her mother's stories, hard to believe but you couldn't be sure it wasn't true.

Two young girls ran past her, skipping, leaping, almost flying into the sea. She watched them swimming … Kalamatan nereids …

She took off her new shoes, gathered her skirt and waded in. The ferry to Crete they'd spoken of last night was in port. She imagined the crowds on the beach on the night of the earthquake and thought of Daria, Uncle George and Manolis sleeping for over a year on what was now a very rusty old tub. She wasn't sure how long she stood there until her reverie was interrupted. Without warning, a wind whipped up, bowling deck chairs and smashing glasses. Waiters shooed their patrons indoors as the blue sky darkened.

Artemis could hear her mother whenever a southerly was brewing back home.

The rain in Kalamata is fatter and friendlier.

The rain fell, and she stood for a moment watching the drops pelt the water before running to shelter.

Artemis crouched under an awning, protecting her mother's ashes from the benign wrath of Zeus. And then, almost as quickly as it began, the maelstrom ended. Zeus had said his piece by whipping up mayhem along the beachfront and was moving on, perhaps following the ferry

which was now sailing out to Crete. She was soaked to the skin but her bag and all its contents – ashes, sandals, coffee, borage and tomatoes – were dry.

The missing sun reappeared boldly for a golden moment before it dropped from the sky to a spread of red on the horizon. Her phone rang. It was Daria, almost incoherent with worry. Where was she? Was she all right? *Yakkity-crackle-yak* … questions, questions, worry and incoherence through a strangely remote connection that was travelling all the way to New Zealand and back, global roaming with no sense of direction, and Daria sounded just like Nysa calling Artemis and her brothers in for tea as they roamed the waterfront, chatted to the Island Bay fishermen, watched them unload their boats … Daria had despatched Manolis to find her.

Waiting for Manolis to come and pick her up, Artemis thought back to Nysa's funeral. How she had slipped out of the house, hoping not to attract Mrs Cataldo's attention, and then across the road and down towards the beach. The quiet surf had greeted her at the edge of a low tide. She'd made footprints one way and tried to walk back matching her feet to the existing prints, and then became self-conscious when she saw a group of fishermen watching her and laughing. She waved to them. Her mother would have liked that.

Further around the bay was a small rocky island, only metres from the shore, and across from that someone had erected a replica lighthouse. And right there on that particular shore, some years ago, a man had left his child on the beach while he swam to the island, apparently misjudging the distance, the tides, the cold water. He had died before he could return to his child – something that seemed impossible today, for the distance from the shore to that rocky outcrop looked a mere stone's throw. It fascinated her, this ability that people had to misjudge things with such dire consequences. History, Artemis realised, was written mostly about such moments, and not about steady, reliable, ordinary

decisions that most people made most days.

Manolis turned up in his Mercedes and she placed the ashes safely in the car boot.

'Don't tell Mama just yet, will you?' he said.

They looked at one another in affectionate silence. No, she wasn't about to tell Daria about finding Mama. It was too complicated, and as Manolis had said, a box of bones was one thing, but ashes …

Kalamata was bathed in the wolflight, *lykofos*. An almost untranslatable light, it guided them homeward, up from the bay to the house on the hill. The inbetween nature of day and night, 'twilight' back home, had a nature all of its own here.

Daria was at the front door to greet them with castigations about not phoning home. Oh, it was all so familiar and Artemis couldn't take umbrage, and even Manolis was getting his share of scolding for not having rung his mother to say he'd found his cousin.

Eleni welcomed her with fresh towels and a running bath. A glass of tsipouro was poured to warm her, and olives were placed in a small white dish on the side of the bath. Artemis gave in to her ministrations; she wouldn't even have minded if Eleni had offered to sponge her back, the way Nysa had when she was a little girl.

Afterwards, the tsipouro loosening her tongue, she filled in the two expectant women about her day, where she'd been and what she'd bought. There was no fooling Daria, though – she'd noticed the duty-free bag and demanded to know what was in it. Manolis rescued Artemis and produced the new sandals and the coffee by way of distraction.

'*Oraia, oraia* … where did you buy them and what did you pay for them?'

'Shoes and more shoes, Mama,' said Manolis, throwing his head back in a gesture of despair at the way women shopped … and then he produced the white sunhat.

Daria was delighted with the hat and approved of the shoes. They all loved the blue borage flower that had lodged in one of the sandals. But there was disappointment – only one stem of tomatoes. They would get

some more tomorrow. Her cousin was now her accomplice and Artemis was grateful.

Later, between more sips of cloudy tsipouro, Daria and Eleni told her off for shopping in all the wrong places. There was a much better shoe shop near the train station, where Artemis would have found a better-quality shoe at half the price. She should have waited, they said, they would take her to the gypsy market where she could buy the same shoes and probably the same hat for – *po*, half the price.

'I bumped into Bagtash, you know, the Turkish conservationist that Manolis was talking to, he mentioned …' Artemis, now a little uncertain of her aunt, stopped.

'That nice young man. Where did you see him?'

'I was having a coffee and he was there with his friends. He mentioned the possibility of joining him on the bus tour for the replanting next week.'

'You're not going to fall for a Turk, are you? Not my Greek niece. There are plenty of nice Greek boys – let Manolis introduce you to his friends.'

'Bagtash is a nice guy. He's serious about the restoration, Mama. Artemis could do worse than a man who cares about the trees. Turk or no Turk, he's okay.'

'That's no way to meet a man, planting trees! Where's the romance in that? What happened to romance? You should take your cousin dancing. When Nysa and I were girls, there was such a thing as courtship. Men knew how to woo a woman. Dancing, singing. Who wants to get muddy planting trees, I ask you?'

And Daria began to reminisce about a time in the sixties when the streets of Kalamata were filled with young cadets completing their military training and looking for love. Even Yiayia approved. She might have been a folded old lady with grief in her seams, but she still loved romance. The sort of romance that a serenading youth (a soldier on leave) can bring to the night air, watched from the first-floor window through open shutters by two shy young women – Nysa home for the

holidays. Daria began resurrecting youthful memories, orange segments, honey, warm steamy pavements after rain, the sound of laughter, men abandoning clacking *komboloi* for the twang of courting mandolins. She beckoned for tsipouro and Manolis poured the shots. They toasted romance and tasted nostalgia through the clouds of milky aniseed.

'Nikos with the moustache,' said Daria, and Manolis went down on one knee to play air bouzouki. 'Oh, what a moustache, so big you couldn't see his mouth! Your mother liked Nikos, but what good is a man without a mouth, I ask you, what good?'

'A man without a mouth is a very handy thing for a Greek woman,' said Manolis. 'Because what would a man need his mouth for when he has a woman to do the talking for him?'

Daria swiped at her son. He ducked and she swiped again, the sort of thing Nysa used to do to her brothers – swipe and dodge, swipe and dodge – and sometimes she actually hit them, but not hard, just this whole physical thing that the boys loved.

Oh, Manolis and her brothers knew how to dodge, and more importantly when not to. Unlike Artemis. Right from the start, when it came to her mother, Artemis always wanted something other.

But at home, after her mama died, Artemis longed for another chance to know her. It was while searching through George's room that it had struck her how compliant her brothers had been when they lived at home, inhabiting bedrooms that reflected their Greek mama and not themselves. She'd opened George's bedside drawer, looking for a remnant of her brother, something that represented him and not their mother. Inside the drawer was a pack of cards, an unopened pack of batteries and a book. She lifted the book out and knew immediately it didn't belong to George. She rubbed her hands over the cloth cover, a small book minus a dust jacket and speckled with age freckles. She opened it to the front page. Someone had crossed out the original owner's name, written in ink, and written in pencil … *Nysa V.* It was her mother's book. As Artemis skimmed the chapters, she found a pressed bay leaf marking Chapter VII, 'The Liberation of Women'. She turned the book

on its side to read the spine … *Marriage and Morals* by Bertrand Russell. She was even more astonished to notice whole passages underlined in pencil as Russell interrogated chastity and the rights of men and women, the family and contraception.

It felt personal, as if Artemis had been lured into George's bedroom and the book put there for her to find. What was the point when there was no one she could talk to, her mother dead, all the conversations they might have had. Anger was her only shield against the grief that threatened. She'd shut the book, and slid it back into the drawer. Later, in her own bedroom, she found one of the Easter good-luck eggs, dulled with age but still red. She had lifted the egg out of the drawer and rubbed it between her hands. The brittle shell cracked and splintered. The albumen had shrunk. In the palm of her hand lay an amber almost-stone, the yolk a perfect jewel. As if all that mattered all along was this core, this yolk, the very heart of the matter, lying here in the palm of her hand. This was the lucky egg George had given her, when she cracked her own against Dimitris's playing *tsougrisma* and cried at losing the game.

Easters were always eggs – boiling in onion skins, changing, eventually, from a dull orange to a dull red, the colour of blood, the colour of life, always death and the resurrection, always contradictions. They'd hunt through Mama's drawers to find flawed hosiery to wrap the eggs in, remembering how once they used a brand new pair because there were no flawed tights left. Mama, such a stickler for no wastage, but when it came to Easter the rules could be broken. And then, when the eggs cooled and they removed the blemished hosiery, the pale imprint of a leaf or a petal from the garden would appear on the egg. Later, cooling in the fridge, the eggs would grow a darker, bloodier red.

In bed that night, putting on her iPod, Artemis thought about Daria's romantic recollections earlier in the evening – stories of suitors who sang to the sisters as they hung from a balcony over Yiayia's shop. She remembered Daria's words: 'Yiayia never wore a watch but always knew

the time. She could look at the sun and say it was half past one precisely. We never doubted her. We thought Yiayia was in charge of the sun, of when it would rise in the morning and when it went to bed, when to open the shutters and when to close them.'

Artemis had heard it all before but never taken any notice, and now she was hungry to hear what her mother had to say.

When a Greek cruise ship came to Wellington they would phone the hostel, looking for Greek girls. It was all so innocent, Artemis, a different era. The night I met your father, there was a cabaret at The Pines and the Greek sailors had all been invited. I know what you're thinking, but The Pines was a flash place back then. I always think what a shame it is that it has been let go. But you probably don't know what a cabaret is, do you?

I loved to dance. Perhaps I take after my mother. The Pines is on a hillside overlooking the sea – you do see what I mean, don't you? I met your father in the same way that my mother met my father, except of course there was no war, just the roar of the sea, and no scandal either. But there were lanterns, if I remember, Chinese lanterns hanging from the veranda.

We made our own clothes back then. I was wearing a yellow frock. That was the difference, Artemi mou: you wore full-length dresses to a ball, but for a cabaret you could wear a short frock, a cocktail dress. The dress had a fitted bodice with darts and a zip that I had to fit twice before it sat flat. I'd just finished putting in the zip when the taxi came to take us to the dance. We would run up frocks in an afternoon back then.

Many of the girls wore their hair in the beehive style, all sprayed and teased and folded like petals on top of their heads. They slept with their heads wrapped in toilet paper. But not your mama. I was proud

of my thick hair and wore it out, curling down my back, rinsed in beer to make it shine, and that's what made me stand out, your father said – that and my black eyes.

So instead of a Greek sailor, I met your father. He was the tallest man in the room. I hear you saying that wouldn't be difficult in a room full of Greek sailors, but it wasn't just his height, it was the way he silently chose me. We went outside for a cigarette together. You didn't know that, did you, that your mama once smoked? Ah, but only because it was fashionable and everybody smoked back then. Going outside to have a cigarette was a way of telling a girl that she was the one. It seemed natural. I don't think either of us even spoke, but we crossed the road and climbed onto the rocks and down onto wet sand. Your father carried my shoes, a pair of satin slingbacks. My shoes would have been ruined in the wet sand, so he made me take them off. And when he kissed me, Artemis, I had to stand on tip-toe, my feet sinking in the sand, and your dad bending down, one arm around me, the other holding my shoes.

Artemis imagined her mother and father at Houghton Bay in the sand, the crazy undertow and wild surf, Mama barefoot, Baba stooping … oh, it hurt, this knowing her mother as a young woman, it hurt … why hadn't she asked her about it all before, shown some interest?

Your father talked to me about Kaikoura where he grew up, about crayfish, dolphins and whales, the Māori trenches where he played as a young boy … and from where we stood in the moonlight we could still hear the band playing up on the hill, a very popular dance song about the Māori Battalion. Although back then I mistakenly heard the words as 'many Italian'.

Your father and I were married in the Greek Orthodox church. Your father had been raised a Catholic but he didn't mind. He was in love

and would have walked over broken glass, he told me, but I told him he didn't have to, that was Jewish, not Greek. Even though he barely understood a word of the ceremony he didn't care … he only had to be there.

Artemis loved the thought of her father, deaf to the words and blindly in love, marrying her mother. If you removed the personal, it was romantic. But it was impossible to sustain an impersonal view of her parents. She saw her father, devoted, hard-working, with her mother on a Greek pedestal, and was reminded of their wedding photo on the dresser in their bedroom. Her mother, aware of the moment, was smiling at the photographer, while her father was smiling at her mother. Even in black and white, her father's freckles were colourful.

Behind the wedding photo were more frames, photos of George and Ginny and the apricot twins; Dimitris and Penelope in their Rose Bay garden with a view of the sea, as much as to say 'infertility has its compensations'; Antony, studious, alone, well-groomed, saying very little from his ornate frame. A photo of herself, taken at the Victoria markets, laden with shopping, looking maddeningly cheerful and, God, so young, ten years ago, newly arrived in Melbourne.

There were photos of her Aunt Daria, Uncle George, Yiayia too, all of them in black and white, all of them in ornate silver frames.

I wore Phaedra's frock. I've told you about Phaedra, haven't I? She was one of the Cretan girls who came out with me on the flight from Athens. Lots of the girls were looking for husbands, Artemis, and Phaedra was one of them. She broke the curfew going out at night with her boyfriend. I hear you scoff, but it's true, we had curfews.

Phaedra was sent home for breaking the curfew. Before she left, I bought her wedding dress, because by that time I'd met your father and Phaedra had no use now for her frock. No one ever spoke about Phaedra again, as if breaking curfew had brought shame on all of us.

You see, even the local Greeks here in Wellington looked down on us when we arrived. We were a scandal, all of us unmarried, bringing shame to the Greek community. Phaedra just fulfilled their opinion of us. I often wonder what happened to her.

The Greek Consul was our chaperone. He was the kindest man I ever met, after your father and Uncle George. He had to send Phaedra home, but it wasn't his fault. The government had given us this chance and we had to stick to the rules. Can you imagine it? We had the honour of Greece on our shoulders. It's not possible for you to imagine, but it's true. So, I won't ask you to understand, but curfews were a part of my life … and it was only natural that I tried them with you. I know you resented me for it, Artemis, but I thought I was doing the right thing.

Artemis snorted. For years, she'd battled her mother's curfews, the ignominy of having her brothers as chaperones, turning up in their cars to pick her up from parties all over town. Somehow they always tracked her down. Only Antony had sided with her, but when he left to live in London she had no ally. Leaving home to go flatting was impossible with a Greek mother. Laura's flat, where she'd slept on weekends, was the beginning of Artemis's asthma attacks. She never quite knew if it was the damp Thorndon bedroom or the panic caused by disobeying her mother.

Sandy would never undermine Nysa, even when he understood how Artemis felt. But in the end it was her father who took her side when her mother went a step too far, trying to suggest what amounted to an arranged marriage. People she'd lost touch with years ago, and suddenly there was a suitor willing to travel to New Zealand to marry her daughter. That was when Artemis fled to Melbourne.

We all dreamed of husbands back then. It was my good fortune, I suppose, that Phaedra didn't want to take the frock with her. The dress, if you're interested, is in a box in the garage. It's made of

white taffeta and tulle, a tea-length dress, the height of fashion, and handsewn.

I thought you might wear my dress one day, but I know now how silly that is, of course you wouldn't want to, and I wouldn't want you to either, Artemi mou, but the fabric is beautiful and I've often imagined a christening gown …

Nysa's voice tapers off, as if she's realised she's gone too far. Her mama had been so theatrical. Her father was the opposite. Sandy was the rock on which they all leaned. He had remained Catholic and always went to Mass on Sundays, but he wasn't a deeply religious man. It was his sense of devotion that Artemis liked, never flashy and always sincere.

Declan thought it outstanding that Artemis had both Catholic and Greek idolatry in her upbringing. He was a great believer in the richness of such childhoods as long as you knew when to let go. But Artemis could never let go of the image of her dad's neck when his head was bent in prayer, the scruffy edges of his hair. She liked that this man, who worked so hard physically, was still able to be vulnerable. She loved the sight of a stray grey hair on the back of his suit as he got older, sitting there curled on his back, a part of him and yet separate, a sure sign that he was, if not falling apart, then able to be less than perfect. She'd loved the way he genuflected, when he pulled at the legs of his trousers, making room for his knee, his long legs able to fold, his humility. Her dad, or 'Baba' as Nysa insisted.

In contrast, her mother was always so complete, from her perfectly styled hair to her perfectly groomed nails, with shoes to match everything she wore, unable or perhaps unwilling to ever disassemble. Mama who was now in a plastic bag, stashed under the bed, waiting for her moment to come on stage.

THE CRACKED GLASS CANNOT BE FIXED

At breakfast, on the top terrace, they watched a flock of migrating birds.

'Heading for Africa,' said Eleni. 'Going away before winter.'

Birds flying across a freshly ironed sky.

Artemis was familiar with the birds in Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne, settling into the trees at dusk, but nothing like this, the density and purpose. A lone falcon appeared, menacing and watchful against the emerging blue of the morning.

'The falcon is trying to scatter them,' said Eleni, 'There's safety in numbers. Always a falcon somewhere, *tsk, tsk, tsk*.'

Eleni had lifted her head upwards and closed her two palms together as if in prayer for the birds.

The birds scattered and regathered, swarmed and reswarmed, seemingly synchronised.

Daria appeared looking refreshed and youthful. She had the chameleon quality that saw her tired and unwell one minute, radiant the next. There was an inner spark that transformed, and Artemis recognised it. Her mother had always been able to summon from somewhere the spark she hoped to be the tinder to yours – but Artemis evaded it, leaving others like her brothers to the conflagration.

Daria had been listening to Eleni, and she sat and lit a cigarette, blew out a single almost-perfect halo, and began.

'Your mama and I, Artemi mou, we were like those birds flying to safety when we hid in the caves. The falcons back then were our own people during the Civil War and you couldn't always tell who was in your flock and who wasn't.'

'Not that I actually remember the detail of it. Sometimes images come to me and mostly they are of your mama and the water, and she is

holding me. What I do know is mostly what I heard from Yiayia … as the years went by and she went on *making black eyes* for your mama, she talked more and more about things that she didn't speak of 'before Nysa left us'. She missed her and, right up until the earthquake, she talked of her coming back, always. Nysa coming home. Nysa, the golden girl who had escaped Kalamata. Oh, every letter she sent was read and re-read, and sometimes, I'm ashamed to admit, I was sick of hearing about your mama.'

Eleni interrupted. 'Artemis can ask Petroula about the caves. Tell Artemis to ask Petroula when she comes. Tell your niece to ask Petroula what really happened.'

Daria looked stricken and shook her fist at Eleni.

'You don't know what happened, you can't say that. No one knows, Eleni, not even you.'

'Ha, you're always wanting blind man's justice, Daria, but you'll see! You wait, you wait and ask Petroula.'

Artemis looked from one woman to the other. Although she desperately wanted to talk about the caves with Daria, she didn't want to be the cause of any trouble between these two.

'I dreamt about Horse, last night …'

'Horse?'

'I mean Rambo.'

She knew that both Eleni and Daria were looking at her, bemused, but it didn't matter, she was trying to distract them. This was what Sandy would do, when she and her mama argued – switch topics, confound them mid-flight.

'Rambo … Rambo is really Horse. Horse … Horse is our cat.'

'A cat with two names, bravo!' said Eleni who clearly approved of the idea. 'But why?'

'It was my cat originally, but George liked Sylvester Stallone so he renamed the cat Rambo after I went to Melbourne.'

'*Tsk, tsk*,' said Daria, 'You can't call a cat Horse.' And then she began to laugh, warming to the idea, coughing, insisting that George was right,

Rambo was the right name for a Greek cat.

She'd distracted them, but still, a sense of panic had crept in. The caves … what was it about the caves that her mother hadn't told her?

While Eleni and Daria debated the merits of a cat with two names, Manolis came to tell them Petroula was here.

'Here comes trouble,' he whispered to Artemis, and then loudly again so Daria could hear, 'Mama, Petroula's here.'

Eleni muttered something and Daria leapt up, urging Artemis to follow her, tugging at her niece's arm.

'Nysa, it's Petroula.'

Daria had called her Nysa.

Artemis followed her aunt down the circular stairs from the terrace, impressed at how nimbly Daria descended the wrought-iron treads. She watched her stub out her cigarette and rush to greet the old woman who was coming towards them, stooped with kyphosis, one eye on the ground, the other looking at Artemis.

'See, she's come home,' said Daria, pushing Artemis towards Petroula. 'I told you!'

Petroula was a wiry old woman dressed all in black. She reached out and embraced Artemis askew. She was all sharp edges, her embrace fierce, and Artemis felt shy and uncertain. She'd heard so much about her, and now here she was: Uncle George's other lover from Exochori, Eleni's rival.

Eleni and Manolis had waited and were now descending from the top terrace, Eleni's bracelets a war dance of sorts. Daria was calling: 'Come and help Petroula.' Manolis stood patiently, balancing boxes that Petroula was retrieving from the taxi, while Eleni busied herself in the kitchen making coffee.

'Fresh fish. From the Mani. Caught today, waiting in the bay for George.'

As she spoke, Petroula waved her hands and instructed Manolis to take the boxes into the kitchen. Then he was summoned back to the car for yet another parcel. This box, Petroula insisted, should be taken

upstairs immediately. It was taken as instructed, with quiet reverence. Not a word passed between them but Artemis could see the affection Manolis held for Petroula. Artemis offered to help, but Petroula shooed her away. She dismissed the cab driver in the same way, a woman who was used to being obeyed.

Coffee was served again, this time in the garden where the last flush of roses suffused the air with their sweet, mellow fragrance. Small birds, unafraid, were diving for the green grapes spilling from the close-by portico. Petroula fed them crumbled crackers from her pocket.

Eleni and Petroula sat across from one another. Eleni coiffed, golden and upright in contrast to the stooped, wiry old woman from the Mani. Petroula's curved spine became vulnerable in a chair, whereas standing, even stooped, she was feisty. Eleni still had allure, thought Artemis. She was the kind of woman men might have ransacked Troy for. Petroula, on the other hand, was bent, gnarly, her face a withered olive. She was the sort men didn't want to cross, who still managed an olive grove in the hills single-handedly, unafraid of hard work.

How funny, thought Artemis, that these two such different women had both been loved by Uncle George.

'We're taking Artemis to the gypsy market this morning, Petroula. Will you come with us?' Daria was looking back and forth between Eleni and Petroula as if uncertain of the answer she wanted.

'*Pou pas?* A waste of good money that I haven't got to waste, and what would I be wanting from the gyppo market?'

From the looks exchanged between Daria and Eleni, it seemed this was the right answer. Now Petroula turned to Artemis and looked her up and down. This time her eyes were both working together.

'*Pou pas?*' Petroula's voice was scathing. The old lady knew exactly where they were going, even though she'd repeated the question. Why was she frowning at Artemis? A rapid exchange took place between Eleni, Daria and Petroula. Artemis couldn't quite catch what they were saying, but she knew they were discussing her. At last Daria spoke.

'You can't wear shorts, Artemi mou – only tourists wear shorts, and

you are not a tourist,' said Daria. 'Nobody wears shorts in downtown Kalamata, not even to the market.'

Petroula was nodding and Daria became flustered looking at Eleni who seemed about to say something but changed her mind.

Twice in one month! Last time at her mother's funeral, there was Penelope insisting she wear a black blazer over her blue dress, and now, Petroula insisting she not wear shorts. Artemis headed upstairs to find a more suitable outfit. Something she would never have done if Nysa had asked her.

When she returned wearing a skirt, Eleni's face lit up. Eleni had changed too, into a lemon silk trouser suit, a double-strand of gold at her throat. Then Daria appeared wearing a cream sundress with a pretty pink bolero. She looked positively coquettish. Petroula was in the kitchen, still in her headscarf but minus her black cardigan. She was wearing Daria's Wellington cable car apron, a gift from Nysa one Christmas. The apron was too big for her and she had folded it over, so the cable car was stalled on its uphill journey.

Her home-made filo was stretched on the bench with a damp cloth, and she was chopping nuts with a sharp knife, fleet of finger, ferocious in attention.

Manolis drove Eleni, Daria and Artemis to the Gypsy market leaving Petroula at home with the fish and the filo. Daria directed him to a carpark, predicting carnage and ruin, or at the very least a scratch on his beautiful car amid the congestion of late-model utilities. Whole families and their produce were riding in the trays of the vehicles. Artemis was filled with admiration for Manolis's restraint and constant good cheer in the face of these women and all their demands. He parked safely and left them, promising to return, and showing just a hint of exasperation for Artemis's benefit.

It was rowdy chaos at the market, and Artemis wasn't sure she would find her way out if she lost sight of Eleni and Daria. The place

was a jumble of trestle tables groaning with clothing and shoes, and locals scavenging for bargains.

'Feel this, Artemis,' called Eleni, holding up a bolt of blue shot silk. 'Do you sew?'

Artemis shook her head, but fondled the fabric as instructed. The bolt was lifted and the fabric flung across the trellis table to be admired.

'See how it changes colour, Artemis, like the sea,' and Eleni turned the material back and forth to catch the sunlight, demonstrating her point. And then she saw a flaw in the fabric and rubbed the spot suspiciously. The stallholder, watching her closely, made an offer:

'I won't go any lower than eight euro a metre.'

Eleni sniffed, Daria sniffed and they turned their backs, beckoning for Artemis to follow. At the next table were more bolts of shot silk at similar prices, and the sales dance was repeated.

'Choose a colour and I'll make you a blouse,' said Eleni, but it was Daria who chose the fabric, a fancy pale bronze as close to cream as she could find. Artemis was defenceless when it came to pleasing her aunt. Satisfied, Daria and Eleni left Artemis to wander by herself for a while.

She tried her hand alone at one stall, but faltered in her resolve, disarmed by the wild young woman standing on the trestle table with her megaphone. She looked the same age as Artemis, but there were dark rings under her black eyes, and three scruffy children circling the trestle. The woman eyed her up, and it was Artemis who dropped her gaze first and, according to Eleni, paid double what she should have for a cream skirt that she didn't actually want. But cream they all agreed was the perfect colour.

'They're not all *real* gyppos you know,' said Daria. 'Some of them own retail outlets down by the wharf, selling the same stuff at three times the price. Manolis refuses to buy anything from them and won't even accept a silk tie as a gift from me, unless he can see I've paid the right price from a real shop – he doesn't believe they're one and the same, stupid boy.'

'Stupid boy,' echoed Eleni warmly, as if being a stupid boy was the

loveliest thing Manolis could be.

The only thing missing from the morning, they all agreed, was Nysa. Artemis realised this treat had really been intended for her mother. Now they were standing before a trestle spread with bras of every description, padded, uplifts, lacy, strapless, zircon-studded, all waiting to dress breasts of every shape and size imaginable. Eleni held up a pretty push-up bra insisting Artemis feel the quality, and Daria checked the stitching on the shoulder straps. They tried to entice Artemis with a black lacy strapless bra, but she knew from experience the lace would scratch and rub, and turned it down. Disappointed, the two older women insisted she must at least buy some shoes.

'You can never have too many shoes,' said Daria.

And on this, Eleni and Daria were in agreement. Artemis picked up a pair of khaki sneakers to please the two women.

'Sneakers? You can't buy sneakers!' said Daria.

'And not *green* sneakers,' said Eleni chuckling. 'What would Petroula say?' Artemis sensed it wasn't so much what Petroula would say as what Eleni thought. Obviously sneakers and green shoes were out of the question. To demonstrate her point, Eleni found a cream court shoe, impossibly high for an old woman, but that wasn't going to deter her. Artemis watched in admiration as Eleni stood, miraculously balanced on one foot, hunting through a stack of shoes to find the matching other. Once found, she put it on and walked a short distance, parading briefly for the benefit of Daria, Artemis and the stallholder.

'Too tight,' she said at last. It was the sort of stamina Nysa had when it came to shoes, comfort came a distant second.

'But it's not me who needs shoes,' said Eleni to the stallholder, pointing towards Artemis.

A pair of black suede stilettos were produced, the sort of shoes Evanthe would have loved.

'Try them on – go on!' insisted Daria.

The stallholder seemed to sense Artemis's reluctance, and reached for a pair of cream satin peep toes, insanely impractical but preferable to

the black suede. She was forced to try them on. Eleni understood the sales dance, the delicate footwork required, and just how much to pay and how far to push. While Artemis was practising walking in the crazy heels, Daria bought them for her.

So now, Artemis was the owner of two pairs of *crazy, stupid* cream shoes.

Back home, Petroula had spent the morning baking baklava. The kitchen smelled of butter, baked nuts and honey. Now she was dealing to the tuna. She had bled the fish, and there was ice and blood on the marble bench-top. Artemis got the feeling that Petroula wanted her to see the bloodstains as much as she wanted Artemis to watch her and learn how to prepare a tuna.

'Contraband,' said Manolis pointing at the tuna, diverting Petroula's attention while he snuck a piece of baklava.

'Not when you're a Maniot,' said Petroula who was holding the kitchen knife as she spoke, and when she saw what he was eating, brandished the blade at him. Manolis feigned fear and Artemis thought she caught a small smile escaping from the grim mouth of Petroula. But the smile disappeared as Eleni came into the kitchen wanting to help. The two women began to argue, their voices growing louder. They were debating how George best liked his fish.

'That's what killed Uncle George,' said Manolis, pulling his cousin aside, laughing. 'He'd kept his sweethearts apart, one in Athens and the other in the Mani, but then what's a man to do when they're both on his doorstep fighting about how to cook the fish? He'd been *playing it two doors* for too long, and it caught up with him.'

'I wish I'd met him.'

Artemis liked the sound of Uncle George with his glamorous Eleni and her smart shop in the Plaka, and his other Greek girl stashed away up in the mountains near Exochori. A feet-on-the-ground kind of girl who preferred a black headscarf in the heat of the day, and a good woollen

cardigan when the nights drew in.

'It should have been bled sooner,' shouted Eleni.

'*Ama pia*,' said Petroula. 'I've had enough!'

'What does it matter, what will Uncle George care?' Daria said, rushing into the kitchen. 'Who cares, the fish bled properly, *po, po*, the fish not bled properly? Who cares? I ask you!'

'This fish has been waiting for its moment in history. Waiting for George. It was caught in the harbour in Stoupa this morning. How can you argue with that? All these years, no tuna in Stoupa. But today, the tuna is ready for its moment on the plate of history,' Petroula growled. And then softly, 'Like bread and salt: George and his fish.'

Even Eleni was silent, for how *could* you argue with that?

They all gazed fondly at the fish on Daria's stone bench, convinced that Petroula was right. But then she started to complain she may not have bled the tuna soon enough.

'What does it matter?' said Eleni. 'What would the difference be? Who cares? It is only a tuna – and at the end of the day, when Uncle George has been uncovered, what will it matter …?'

Just like Nysa: one minute this, and the next minute that. The rest of the day was spent in food preparation, with Petroula in charge.

'I only buy my pigs from the farmer on the road out of Velika,' said Daria, 'and then I know what the pig has been eating.'

'The only good pig is a pig from Exochori,' countered Petroula. 'My own pigs, I kill my own pigs, but I wasn't bringing a pig for George. He would have wanted the fish. George liked fish best. Anyone can get a pig …'

'Artemis, you can help me with the potatoes. Do you know how to do potatoes?' Daria deftly cut and quartered the potatoes leaving their skins on. She supervised as Artemis toss-roasted the wedges in a skillet with garlic until golden and crispy, just the way Nysa used to. And when the coughing caught up with her, Daria sat down, sending Manolis on errands.

First to the cellar for wine, and Daria did not want the filtered

French-style wine with all the good flavours refined from it, she wanted Greek wine, unfiltered, properly fermented, Uncle George style. They would marinate the goat for the spit in this wine, but not before Manolis filled and re-filled their crystal flutes with the bold hues of those perfect dark grapes, the sediment like tiny clots of blood in the bottom of their glasses.

Later, Daria lit the lamp in the lounge, casting light on a photograph of Yiayia. She hadn't been fond of the camera, they said. It had caught her side-on, the wrong side, exaggerating her disappointment, the particular way she held her chin. In contrast, a photograph of Uncle George was on a sideboard below it, in a pewter frame, his eyes twinkling bright. And just in front of Uncle George were two gangly, almost-adolescent girls, Nysa and Daria, standing beside a stepladder under an olive tree.

Everyone agreed, as Daria held up the photo, that Artemis was the image of her mother … and although they didn't say it, she guessed from the silence immediately afterwards that they were also thinking she resembled her scandalous grandmother.

Daria rushed to get a photo of Nysa and Sandy on their wedding day. She had it in her bedroom. Artemis knew the photo well, having re-examined the same one at home after her mother died, deconstructing the way her father looked at her mother, the adoration in his eyes. But Daria only wanted to talk about the frock.

'It wasn't her dress,' said Artemis, 'It belonged to a girl called Phaedra, one of the Cretan girls who, according to Mama, broke curfew and was sent home in shame – Phaedra gave it to Mama.'

Tsk, tsk, tsk. Daria rolled her eyes upwards, her tongue clicking. 'She never told me. A borrowed dress. What would Yiayia have said about that? Oh, I'm so glad Yiayia didn't live to hear that her beloved Nysa wore a borrowed dress.'

Artemis laughed, because she could see, or at least hoped, that Daria was partly joking. She'd begun to notice that – just like Nysa – her aunt took a bet both ways, complaining with a light in her eye that meant you couldn't be sure, not entirely, that she wasn't joking. But as a teenager,

Artemis had ignored that light, reacted whenever she could.

'Curfew?' said Eleni. 'What curfew, *po* – there wasn't a war in Wellington. A curfew, what was your mama thinking?'

'Nysa wrote to me, Eleni,' said Daria. 'She told me about the curfew. She wasn't free to just do what she liked when she went to New Zealand. Thank goodness, or what would Yiayia have said about that! All the Greek girls had to obey a strict curfew like all good girls.'

'Not any more, not in Athens,' said Eleni. 'Greek girls don't listen to their mothers like they used to.'

Tsk, tsk, tsk.

Artemis had heard about the curfew all her life and the consequences for anyone who dared to break it. She wondered what they would think about her battle with Nysa, the curfews she fled to Melbourne to escape. Instead, she told them about the dress, how she found it in the garage.

She had gone there after Ginny and Penelope left. The sisters-in-law had sorted through her mother's hoardings, labelling boxes. What was left behind nobody else wanted, it was over to Artemis.

'Two of everything. Mama always bought two of everything …'

Artemis stopped. Of course, it hadn't really occurred to her, not really, that what her mother had been doing was building a replica of everything she owned in Wellington: two silver candelabras, two Crown Lynn dinner sets, the Meakin coffee pots (identical). She'd thought her mother a hoarder, but now it fell into place. Perhaps Nysa had been planning to return to Greece all along, and once there, to replicate the life she'd had in Wellington.

'… but only one wedding frock,' she quickly added, and they all laughed.

'Inside the garage, I found Mama's car under a tarpaulin. The car all washed and polished, probably by my brother George. And a new sheepskin.'

'Sheepskin? What's the sheepskin in the car?'

'Mama sat on it, and she had sheepskin on the seatbelt right where it rubbed on her neck.'

At this, Daria rubbed her own neck and smiled. Manolis pointed out his own mother did not drive, so how would she know about the comfort of a sheepskin, especially considering she never wore a seatbelt! Daria thumped him lightly, as if he'd revealed a hitherto unknown fact.

Artemis didn't mention the large framed picture, covered in a towel, on top of some boxes. She knew at the time without uncovering it what picture this was. It was their Norfolk pine, the picture they purchased together in Hanmer. Surrounded by all the clutter and dust of the garage at home, the painting took on a new intensity, a different perspective. Somewhere trapped inside this painting was the moment when Artemis, an almost-adolescent, was emerging like the new green fingers of the Norfolk (amateurishly painted, she could see that now), and her mother was the tall dark pine, lush and full, and ripe with everything Artemis resented.

'I found stacks of *Life* magazines in an apple box.'

Eleni's eyes lit up.

'I sent those to your mama.'

'She'd saved them all, especially the ones with Jackie on the front cover.'

'Your mama and I, we saw Jackie Kennedy,' said Eleni.

'*Po, po*, she was always going on about Jackie Kennedy in Athens.' Daria was rolling her eyes, 'But we weren't *eating stupid grass*.'

Eleni went to speak and then decided to let it go, her head on one side, just her chin the giveaway as if to say, it's true, we did see Jackie, but let's not upset Daria.

'Tell us about the wedding dress, Artemis.'

It had been sitting on top of Sandy's toolbox, she told them, a solid brown case that housed all his carpentry tools from the time of his apprenticeship.

'Your mama was a lucky girl, finding Sandy. Uncle George approved. He said there was no use having a useless husband who couldn't do something practical, and one day Sandy would build your mama a home in Greece.'

Artemis had caressed the hammer handles, worn from use, and run her hand along the rusty blades of an old saw, not noticing she'd grazed her finger. Then she'd unwrapped the wedding frock, lifted it from its bed of tissue. The tulle was torn a little at the edges.

'It was tea-length,' Artemis told them, repeating what she'd heard her mother say on the recording.

The two women nodded approvingly. She didn't tell them about the drop of blood that fell from her grazed hand, seeping red into the still-white tulle. All these years it had lain unspoiled, and now look what she'd done.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

The unfiltered, properly fermented Greek wine made her talkative. The smell of burning oil warmed her memories. Artemis spoke of her brothers, imbuing their lives with a newfound tenderness. She told the gathered family all about George and Ginny and the apricot twins; about George's work on the propagation of an apricot that would be ripe for export in the English summer, and they all agreed that he must have inherited this love of the land and growing things from Uncle George. Petroula had views on the infertility of Dimitris and Penelope, and remedies too, insisting that Penelope must plant a quince tree or at the very least eat quince, because this was the great love apple, the Greek love apple. Better than a peach, perhaps? Daria disapproved of Antony, all alone in London, so close to Greece and still he had not visited them.

'What about you?' Eleni asked.

Disarmed (she blamed the unfiltered wine), Artemis spoke of a young woman she barely knew who had left New Zealand to study and work in Melbourne, who had a Master's in history and was now planning a thesis for her doctorate, but in the meantime was assisting the Dean of the English faculty. Once again Declan became an objective other, not central to her life, just part of it, and nicely on the periphery.

'Ah, but what about boyfriends?' interrupted Daria. 'It's no good

being so ambitious that you forget to have a family.'

There was the sound of tongues clicking.

Manolis came to her rescue with a saying that Artemis remembered from her childhood. *Three birds sitting.* It was something her father would say. He'd learned it from Nysa and used it against her in fun, a dig when she ignored his advice. *Three birds sitting.* The old women were being told it was time to back off. And quite funny too in literal translation – the three birds, Petroula, Daria and Eleni.

Manolis took the conversation away from her to talk about the ancient city of Messene, the recent uncovering of all the local relics, the most significant uncovering of its kind in the whole of Greece and yet still largely unheard of. He even seemed to be suggesting that Artemis should think about this – her own rich history – in relation to her doctorate, although he didn't actually come out and say it.

Daria almost hummed approval as Manolis spoke, her head tilted down and on one side – pride, the same sort of pride Nysa had kept just for Artemis's brothers … but perhaps she was wrong. Daria knew about her thesis, Nysa had written to her.

Artemis encouraged Manolis; she was fascinated by his knowledge of the secrets of Messene. He spoke of the Olympic victories of the Messenians interrupted by wars, talked of a people expelled from their homeland who spent years waiting to return. It was in their blood, he told Artemis, this always wanting to return home, and eventually they had, people who'd been scattered as far as North Africa returned home.

'Like you, Nysa,' said Daria, patting Artemis on the knee. 'You've come home to Messene.'

No one corrected her. Artemis didn't mind being called Nysa any more; it felt okay.

But Daria's cheeks were bright with colour now, and her coughing started up. Her whole body convulsed when she tried to cough up the phlegm. Manolis fetched a handkerchief for her and there was silence as she struggled to breathe. Cancer was in the room with them, but it remained unspoken. Years of Karelia Lights had taken their toll.

Nysa used to say, 'Greeks smoke, but they don't get cancer; it's the oil, the beautiful oil protecting them.' Artemis had believed her when she was younger, and had spat it back at her mother when she voiced disapproval of her own smoking.

Petroula insisted that Daria should go to bed, and the two of them went upstairs together, calling out to Eleni not to forget to put out the oil lamp before she came up. A not-so-subtle hint that it was time for her to go to bed too. But Eleni wasn't ready for bed. She invited Artemis and Manolis up on to the rooftop terrace for a cigarette. 'I don't smoke very often, and never in front of Daria, not now that she's so unwell …'

Manolis said he would take care of the oil lamp and they should go on up without him, he had work to do.

Out on the terrace, Artemis took a cigarette from Eleni. It tasted good. Karelia Lights. The provocation was in the labelling. The idea that cigarettes could be light and therefore somehow not hurt your lungs. The sky was inky and starlit, the sea unseen though she could hear its surge. Eleni talked to Artemis about her mother, Nysa, in Athens as a young woman, confirming the stories about the pig in a suitcase, the famous doctor who administered the antibiotics. And then she spoke about Uncle George, things she perhaps would not have said in front of Petroula.

'He saved my life. I'd lost the will to live after my baby died, but Uncle George kept coming to the prison to see me, and it was through his connections that I was transferred to Athens. He met Petroula first, I know that, and that's why she's never forgiven me, but I didn't set out to steal him. Everyone loved your Uncle George. A good life is never simple. George was a good man, and he tried to love us both, and he stayed home too because he was a good son and he looked after Yiayia and your mama and Daria. And so we all shared him in the end.'

Eleni's cigarette had burned as she'd talked. She wasn't really a smoker, she told Artemis, not now, not with Daria so sick. She knocked the accumulated ash into her other hand and tipped it discreetly into a potted lemon.

‘Me neither,’ said Artemis. ‘Not now, just now and then. I only took up smoking to annoy my mother.’ Which, now she’d said it, was true.

BECOMING SMOKE

I'm sitting under a table on hot cobbles. If I stay as quiet as I can, they will forget I'm there, and that's what I do, I barely move, just waiting. I'm sitting between their two sets of feet. Uncle George has smaller feet than Baba. If I wait long enough, the moon will come out but I won't get cold, because the cobbles will keep me warm. Baba and Uncle George are drinking beer, and Uncle George will dip pieces of apple in the beer and pass them to me. Yiayia would growl if she knew, but she doesn't know. I suck on the apple pieces and listen to them, my baba and Uncle George. They're playing chess by candlelight and I'm still there, pretending to be asleep at their feet, hidden by the tablecloth. Maybe Yiayia knows I'm there. Daria is asleep inside and Mama is out singing somewhere. The Germans have left Kalamata but people still duck when planes fly overhead. It's safe under the table.

Baba passes me candle wax from the table. I make animals out of the wax, little pigs and donkeys, but really they're just small balls of candle wax. This is the last time I hear my father's voice. Mostly it's his voice I remember. I barely remember his face. When I try to remember, I see a black moustache already turning grey, or is it the froth from his beer that I see?

I remember donkey hooves on cobbles and the smell of fresh donkey dung. Yiayia comes out and collects it, she keeps it for her lemon tree, mixes it with chicken droppings. The night is full of scents and cicadas, and noises from the taverna nearby. There's music, but I'm not sure what music – the bouzouki and guitar, a woman's voice, maybe Mama's, I don't know.

And then Yiayia realises I'm not in bed and she comes to lift me out from under the table and put me to bed. I hear the *tsk, tsk, tsk*, before I smell her lemon fingertips, before I snuggle into the warm black that I have known forever, my cheek resting on wool, my head in the crook of Yiayia's chin and shoulder.

Through the night Daria cries, and Mama comes home to croon and soothe Daria … and then there is the sound of Baba and Uncle George arguing. Yiayia closes the shutters. Baba is with the communist fighters now and he travels a lot to the Mani, or that's what I hear them say, or maybe that's what I heard them say years later. All I know is that I barely know my father who has been at war all of my life.

The truth is these memories are not necessarily one and the same but they are all part of the same story. The donkey and the droppings could be any donkey, but the candle wax and the argument are melted together. What I do know is that when Yiayia closes the shutters, my baba is gone forever. There's an old Greek saying, Artemis, *becoming smoke* – and that's what happened. Baba disappeared.

No one speaks openly of Baba, not since he vanished that night, and Uncle George seems to grow taller, as if *he* is Baba.

Yiayia turns to lacemaking in the evenings while we children sleep, and in the daytime she plans to open her own shop. Mama is still out at night, singing. Uncle George sells fish to the locals, and there are rumours his fish comes from the Mani and that Baba is the fisherman. Fresh fish is a luxury. No one could bring the fish down from the Mani during the occupation, and so Uncle George is in demand. Except now the fish is tainted with the stench of the separatists, the Maniot communists. But still, fish is fish whatever

the stink, when you're hungry. Back then, according to Uncle George, the people of Athens were starving in the streets.

Unspoken, but underlying everything, is Baba's disappearance and the fact that Mama is the source of gossip with her singing career. She is becoming a well-known singer amid the scandal of her missing husband and his communist sympathies, but Uncle George tells Yiayia her daughter will be all right, because who can take umbrage at a beautiful voice. Everyone, he tells Yiayia, whether the left or the right, loves Sotiria Bellou, and Mama is purported to sing like Sotiria or, if you believe Yiayia, even better.

Uncle George *plays it two doors* with his fish and his wheat, and people whisper. People have long memories, Artemis, and the whispers never quite go away, but he put his family first. Political beliefs are a luxury, he always used to say.

Yiayia spent the rest of her life with her black cardigan, rubbing the face of the burnt Madonna in the Yappanti. I can still see Yiayia kissing the faces of Virgins all over town, but it was Uncle George who kept us alive, not God, and even Yiayia knew that.

Artemis was beginning to love Uncle George, this collaborator who put his family before politics, put food on her mother's table. Not to mention his having two feisty lovers. But she needed to know more, because hidden in the tapes was the story of her lost grandmother and grandfather. Uncle George was in the foreground, but in the background, central to her mother's story, were two other missing people.

Artemis fell asleep listening to her mother's voice, and dreamt of Princess Bay …

… instead of wild surf, it's a plump basin of warm water. Nysa and Sandy float on top of the water in their clothes, and although in her dream she worries about her mother's white slingback stilettos, it

is a vague insubstantial worry and the overwhelming sensation is of buoyancy, and the band is playing a song about 'many Italian'. Even though in her dream she knows the song is about the Māori Battalion, the two versions seem to merge and she is allowed to acknowledge them both. And then she sees Manolis with a box of fish that morphs into a giant skull with gaping holes like caves for eyes, and inside the caves, sparkling water, and then the skull's mouth opens and there are no teeth at all, just a hole and one shiny golden tooth in the centre. The tooth is beautiful and she reaches out for it, enchanted, but the jaw closes shut and the cave-like eyes become real eyes, her mother's …

… Artemis cried out, and Eleni came to her room.

Without asking, Eleni climbed into bed beside her lover's niece and held her, stroking her hair. She began to sing 'The White Rose of Athens'. The gravelly timbre of Eleni's singing soothed her. Eventually, Artemis fell asleep, her head on Eleni's shoulder, aware briefly when she looked up that Eleni had no eyebrows.

When she woke, Eleni was gone and Artemis knew she'd overslept. She could hear Daria calling her.

Downstairs she found Petroula shaking mats and sweeping the front courtyard, with Daria supervising, pointing out areas that Petroula has overlooked.

'*Yiasou, yiasou.* Come and kiss me, Nysa mou, kiss me, I've missed you.'

Artemis leaned forward and embraced her aunt, happy again to impersonate her own mother.

Eleni appeared, makeup on, eyebrows pencilled in, her bracelets gleaming. 'Coffee! I smell coffee. Daria, why are you up so early? Let me help make the breakfast.'

But Manolis insisted Eleni sit down while he set the table outdoors and brought out grapefruit and prickly pears.

'There's a storm coming,' said Daria.

The day was warm and cloudless, it seemed unlikely.

'Zeus will be here tomorrow, Artemis. Won't he, Petroula?'

'Yes, for George, Zeus will come and bring a rain blessing,' Petroula agreed as she picked up fallen lemons from the lawn, filling her apron pockets.

Eleni disagreed.

'*Po*, you can't call that a blessing, not rain at the grave with all the freshly dug dirt. *Po*, Petroula, no, you can't wish that on us.'

Manolis put his arm on his mother's shoulder and said that Uncle George would be happy if Zeus turned up to his unburial.

Daria and Petroula said nothing but from the look on their faces, that was Eleni told.

'Don't stress, Eleni,' said Manolis, laughing. 'Zeus won't stick around, and we'll take umbrellas.'

Artemis watched as her cousin deftly cut and peeled a prickly pear, and passed it to Daria, who removed her cigarette to suck on the red flesh. She admired her cousin, the way he looked after his mother and diverted the constant bickering between the old women.

Manolis was heading into town and asked if Artemis needed anything.

'I need an adaptor for my laptop. I left mine in the hotel in Athens. I should check my emails.' The truth was, she'd been glad initially to have no adaptor, an excuse to ignore Declan.

'You can use my laptop and catch up with your emails. I'll buy an adaptor while I'm in town.'

Artemis followed Manolis into the house to get his laptop. Out of earshot of her aunt and Eleni and Petroula, she asked him, 'Did Daria ever talk to you about the war, and why Mama emigrated?'

'There'll be time to talk about this. You can't rush these things. Have patience. When it's right, things will work out.' His hand patted the air as if calming it down. '*Siga, siga – slowly, slowly* – you know how it is here. You can't hurry the truth – *slowly, slowly, just go with the waters*.'

As he was leaving, Manolis remembered that Artemis would need his password and warned her how slow the connection would be.

> Have I ever told you about the New Zealand pilot? He came into our lives after Baba disappeared. I found out years later that he was a pilot in the RAF who defended Greece during the German occupation, and that he had returned after the war to help the locals who sheltered him when his plane crashed and he had to parachute to safety. Somehow he found his way to the tavern where Mama sings, and he was smitten, or that's what they said years later … *biting the sheet metal*, Artemis … a man can go mad for love.

Listening to her mama this morning, the idea of going mad for love had knocked her. She didn't feel like that about Declan anymore, although she had once, at the beginning. Mad with jealousy about his wife and mad with worry when Declan didn't contact her – mad with passion, or so she'd thought. But where was Declan? This return to Greece was the single most important event in her life.

Hang on a tick.

She'd been hanging on a tick now for four years, waiting for him to make up his mind.

Artemis opened Manolis's laptop. His screen saver was the site of Ancient Messene in the early stages of discovery, a swampy marsh from which relics and antiquities were only just emerging. It took three goes to get the password in correctly, because she couldn't remember how to spell General Epaminondas – the general who, according to Manolis, defeated the Spartans. She was pleased that Manolis had trusted her to spell it, assumed she would know.

There were thirty-five emails in her inbox. Most of them were from the history faculty, housekeeping emails, irrelevant right now. She moved them to another folder. It was the email from Declan that she read first.

Sorry babe – no wifi – I've had to sneak out to an internet café. C and the kids are having a spa. Bergamot – was that it? The stuff that you chose that nearly killed me? I should have been in touch. I'm a coward. I thought you needed to find Greece without me to confuse things – am I wrong? Tell me I'm right. Write to me. I miss you. I shouldn't, but I do. The bloody bergamot did me in – all I could think of was you in the bath. Write soon, fill me in on everything. Sorry about the dropped connection … gets tricky. How was Athens? Thinking of you.

The Irish Rover.

Bergamot was the essential oil Artemis had chosen for the bath they shared – their first illicit weekend, which just happened to be in Daylesford – at an earlier symposium, one that *C* hadn't attended. Declan had been overcome by the cloying citrus, almost fainting as he climbed out of the bath. She hated that he was there now and making jocular reference to this. She toyed with several replies and deleted all of them.

Laura had sent an update – a catalogue of her children's ailments and her husband's faults. She was witty and light-hearted about it, and signed off by saying she'd swap places. But Artemis wouldn't swap places with anyone, she realised, not with *C* and not with Laura.

The Irish Rover as a unique sign-off had lost its appeal. What had seemed romantic now looked unoriginal. Here, in the new light of the northern hemisphere, an Irish Rover sounded inauthentic.

An *affair.* What had she expected? Affairs were unoriginal. How silly that she'd imagined anything else.

It was early afternoon and others had left the garden to rest in their rooms. Artemis took her iPod with her to the top terrace and stretched out on a canvas recliner. She was wearing her scandalous shorts and the blouse from the market which she unbuttoned so that the warm sun touched her skin. Hot as it was, she knew she wouldn't burn, not the way she did in Australia and New Zealand. This Greek sun was medicinal. The scent of potted oreganum and the sound of the sea soothed her as she

turned once more to her mother's story.

We're going to the waterfall. I've never seen a waterfall before, but I've heard Uncle George talk about it many times. It's on the road out to Pylos on the other side of the bay. Coming with us is the New Zealand pilot whom Mama met at the nightclub where she sings. The New Zealander drives a truck and I sit on the back of the truck with Uncle George. Daria stays home with Yiayia. This much I know: how happy I am that Daria isn't coming.

Yiayia gives us a blanket from the house and makes me promise that I won't stand up while the truck is moving. In the war Mama saw trucks with dead bodies on them, but I'm too young to know about that now. Everyone says the Civil War will soon be over, and we're going to the waterfall.

Yiayia gives us a jar of olives and some fresh bread that she has baked especially. Everyone is falling over backwards to please this New Zealander. I don't mind, because he's taking us on a picnic. Yiayia doesn't even grumble when Uncle George puts a flask of ouzo in his pocket to share with the New Zealander. She laughs out loud, and that's a sure sign that everything is going to be all right.

I don't tell anyone, but in my heart I know that we're going to find Baba, that Baba will be at the waterfall.

The road is full of potholes and I have to hold on to Uncle George so that I'm not thrown from one side of the truck to the other. But it's fun, and we're hungry for fun, all of us.

There comes a time in your life when you realise that you exist, that you are separate somehow from your family, but are still a part of them. It was this moment on the back of the truck going to the

waterfall, when Uncle George fell asleep and I was alone with the blue sky and the forest around me, that I realised for the first time what it was to be alive, and to be me. So, this memory of the picnic and the waterfall is filled with both good and bad things – such a muddle, Artemi mou, my memories are such a muddle.

We got stuck on the final leg of the journey. The road wasn't sealed and there were big boulders in our way. I remember Mama laughing as Uncle George and the New Zealand pilot tried to shift a boulder from the track. They were all laughing, even though we were stuck and couldn't move until the boulder was shifted, but it was so much fun.

Then the pilot said, 'bugger' and I never forgot that word, and later on, whenever I said it everyone would laugh – even Yiayia – but I don't think we knew what it meant.

Bugger.

I never heard that word again until I met your father.

We had to abandon the truck and walk to the waterfall. But of course, it was an adventure. Uncle George carried me on his shoulders and Mama had an umbrella up to shelter from the sun. She was singing, and these are my last memories of my mother, her sweet voice competing with a chorus of cicadas.

There are moments in your life, Artemis, that stay perfect in their shape and colour, and this is one of them. Mama's voice, the scent of wild thyme, the blue sky, boulders, the waterfall … and later on the soft pine needles underfoot, but that's later …

First, I need to pee, and Mama covers me with the umbrella while

I squat on the side of the track. I know you scoff about me and bidets, but peeing outside crouched under Mama's umbrella, all I recall is peeing on my shoes, down my leg, Mama having to wipe me dry … even at that age, I was mortified.

Uncle George goes on with the New Zealand pilot. Ahead is the sound of falling water. Mama promises to wash my legs at the waterfall. We have to climb over large boulders, and I am passed from the arms of Uncle George to the New Zealand pilot and back again. All I can think of is the pee on my legs, but no one seems to notice.

Then we are at the waterfall and everyone seems to agree that this is the right waterfall, as if only this waterfall will do. The New Zealander gets out a map to show Uncle George. Mama spreads a blanket on the ground and we have a picnic – tomatoes, olives, ouzo for the adults, and Yiayia's bread.

Mama and I drink water from the waterfall that Uncle George fetches for us in a tin mug the pilot gives to him. Mama washes my legs and my shoes have dried already.

After lunch, Mama and the New Zealand pilot go for a walk together and they tell me to wait with Uncle George. I want to go with Mama, but Uncle George persuades me to stay with him and we play the sleeping game. He pretends to snore, but he isn't really asleep. I love this game. We played this game all the time when Mama was out singing and Yiayia was rocking Daria and none of us could sleep.

It's hot, and this time Uncle George really does fall asleep, or he's teasing me by pretending to be asleep, and I slip away. I decide to go and look for Mama, and when I find her, for a moment I think it is Baba with her. But it's not Baba. It is the New Zealand pilot, and he and Mama are kneeling beside one another, looking at a map. I

want to cry out, but I'm disappointed that it's not Baba and for some reason I hide, terrified.

The New Zealand pilot has a pouch that he hands to Mama, and they lean together, Mama with her face wide open, her mouth against his. It's nothing like the affection I've seen between Mama and Baba. I felt that kiss, Artemis. Fear down there in a shocking and physical way that I never understood until years later.

The next thing I know, Uncle George is calling for me, and he's there and I am running towards him, crying.

Mama sits on the back of the truck with me on the way home. She sings to me all the way home, and I have her all to myself, just me and Mama laughing and singing, and I pretend that everything is all right, but it isn't, and it never will be, and I think she knows that too.

When we arrive home, it is Yiayia who I run to for comfort, Yiayia who consoles me and Yiayia who washes my knees covered in pine resin, *the tears of the North Wind*, the dried pee forgotten.

No one knows that I saw my mother kiss the New Zealand pilot.

Artemis aches for the little girl who saw that kiss and kept the secret. Her heart is full of admiration for her mother and questions she can never ask. But maybe her aunt and Eleni, or even possibly Petroula, know something? Today of all days, she realises, the eve of the uncovering of Uncle George, it is not the time to ask questions. She phones her brothers to tell them about tomorrow and talks to her nieces in Oamaru.

Daria wants to hear all about the family and later, in the evening, Artemis hastily puts together a slideshow from her photos, grateful to Manolis for buying an adaptor for her – photos of Island Bay, the fishing boats, her mama in that cream silk dress the night of Artemis's

twenty-first birthday, and evidently they'd all already seen that photo, her mama had sent them a hard copy. She skips quickly over a rogue photo of her and Declan that has slipped into the slideshow, but not quickly enough for Eleni.

'Who's that?'

'A boyfriend?' says Daria hopefully.

'Go back, go back, let us see him.'

But Artemis has no intention of going back. Who's that? She isn't sure herself anymore, so how can she tell them?

'Just a colleague from university, no one special.'

But none of them are fooled, and she knows they have tucked this image away for further discussion, at another time. Thankfully, they are more interested in photos of her brothers and they have plenty to say about Ginny and Penelope.

'She's too thin, no wonder she can't make babies.'

This from Petroula who is thinner than anyone Artemis knows. Eleni agrees that a thin woman cannot make babies. And Artemis feels their eyes on her, examining her physical capabilities, her potential for motherhood, who cares if she has a boyfriend.

This whole biological clock thing is so one-sided, she realises. Manolis doesn't come in for a berating as he's a man and they assume he can make babies forever. Does he have a girlfriend? She wonders, but she doesn't ask, as she is certain if he has she would have heard by now, all about her from Daria. Thin, fat or barren, whatever her shortcomings, for certainly any girlfriend of Manolis's would never live up to Daria's expectations.

She doesn't remind them that tomorrow is her birthday. Her brothers had all wished her happy birthday on the phone because back home, officially, she'd already turned thirty-six. There'd be a message on Facebook from Laura, but no one else who mattered much, apart from Declan and he daren't. They avoided personal comments in public. Last year Declan had sent a special message, accidentally public instead of private. She'd deleted it instantly, but who knew which of her friends had seen it.

It was odd to think she was still only thirty-five here in Greece, and wouldn't turn thirty-six until the Greek morning. Well, that's what she told herself, despairing that this one significant number was tipping her further towards forty. Being forty was impossible to imagine.

And then in bed, she relented and checked her Facebook, instantly regretting it. There were photographs of the symposium in Daylesford. Declan and his colleagues and, of course, *C*. Silly photos, the sort people tagged without thought for the content. It all seemed so unimportant and Declan looked to be having too much fun. And then she checked to see if he'd remembered her birthday. There was, as expected, a message from Laura, and from three of her colleagues, but nothing … why did it matter? … nothing from Declan.

She scrolled relentlessly through friends' pages – photographs of plated food, a parking ticket with expletives, cats, dogs, babies, bridesmaids, a flood in Fitzroy (really, when?) and a rant about the trams. It all seemed banal and distant. Her emotions were too raw to write an update about Greece even though Laura had asked her why she hadn't.

An unburial wasn't something you could strike the right tone with for a post on Facebook, she decided.

UNBURIAL
EKTAFI

The storm cloud that Daria had predicted, or perhaps even summoned, arrived. It was picturesque rather than ominous, *the breath of Zeus*, on the day that they would disinter Uncle George.

Declan called.

'Happy birthday, my beautiful Greek goddess. I didn't forget.'

The way he said it, *I didn't forget*, she knew meant that he had.

'I was waiting to wish you a Greek birthday.'

But he'd forgotten about the unburial, and when she told him, he wasn't up to the shift. Typically, he tried to find his way through the awkwardness, searching for something appropriate, digging into his repertoire and coming up with Byron. 'In secret we met – In silence I grieve …'

The others were waiting for her. It was good to hear from him, she said – and she meant it – but she had to cut him off mid-flight.

'They're waiting for me, I have to go.'

And they were, all of them outside, about to leave for the cemetery.

She turned her phone off.

Manolis had cleaned his car especially for the occasion and it was shinier even than Eleni's gold bracelets. Daria sat in the front beside him so that she could give instructions. Artemis sat in the back between Uncle George's quarrelsome lovers, the two splendid octogenarians, one glamorous, the other grim. In close proximity, Eleni's perfume overwhelmed Artemis. *Capricci* by Nina Ricci … the bloody bergamot that Declan hated … her mama's favourite perfume. Nysa was everywhere. She was in the boot of the car, stowed discreetly by Manolis. The duty-free bag was next to the mysterious box that Petroula had arrived with, not to mention the mountain of food they had prepared. Artemis's breathing quickened and Eleni squeezed her hand.

As they drove towards the cemetery, another car joined them and started a convoy, but no one spoke of it. They travelled through small enclaves on the outskirts of Kalamata, and then began ascending rutted roads, the lush valley spreading below them.

'*Koitá*, Artemi mou! Look! There's the wheat farm that the Italians stole from Uncle George.'

They were passing through a village that seemed uninhabited, and Artemis wasn't sure exactly where to look, but Daria was onto a new story about the woman who lived next door to the wheat farm and how her house was now worth millions.

'Millions! If only Uncle George hadn't sold the farm when he got it back after the war.'

'And you with your beautiful house on the hill,' said Petroula, crossly.

The old women fell silent, not up to an argument, thankfully, as they left the disputed millions in the village and began ascending steep roads and sharp corners.

Artemis began to feel queasy. She was relieved when, on one particularly steep and sudden corner, they encountered a goat in the middle of the road and had to stop the car. Manolis got out to remonstrate with the defiant animal, and Artemis asked if she could get out too. But it wasn't a simple exercise for everyone to climb out of the car. Eleni and Petroula jostled inside and outside, with Artemis pulled this way and that between the two women. She took deep breaths, inhaling the sweet, warm air, aware that she might have been sick if they hadn't stopped.

Manolis, urged on by the three old women, his mother the loudest, chased the goat. Having stood its ground, it was now skittering over the side of the road and down into the scrub. In its excitement, it left a trail of manure, small hard balls that Daria insisted should be collected for her lemon tree. Artemis tried not to laugh as Manolis retrieved a small brush and shovel from the boot of the car and swept up the droppings. Eleni retrieved a shower cap from her handbag and the manure was wrapped in this, then placed in the boot between Nysa and the mysterious box

belonging to Petroula.

The car that had been following them had now caught up and pulled over. Manolis went and spoke to the driver, and then they resumed their journey up the steep road to the cemetery. Soon a third car joined the convoy. How strange to have buried Uncle George so far out of town, thought Artemis … but it was as if Daria heard her thoughts. She began to explain that it was here, up in the hills, that Azime's husband had been born. This was Yiayia's legacy, and so it was natural Uncle George would end up here.

One of the endearing surprises about this countryside was how lush it was, and how in the middle of nowhere, just dilapidated enough to seem authentic, there was a church or a chapel – as if any moment a shepherd or deer hunter might appear, grateful for the abundance, and need to give thanks.

Or perhaps even Artemis herself, on a horse, with bow and arrow.

Manolis pulled the Mercedes up outside one of the chapels, postcard-like with belfry and cupolae, and the other two cars stopped, too.

Daria was impatient for Artemis to meet the occupants of the second car. She recognised the man first, his grey chest hair now tucked beneath a bright white shirt. There was no mistaking the shiny sideburns. His mother unfolded from the car and embraced Daria, the shoulders of both women rocking rhythmically.

'Artemi mou, these are your mama's friends.'

But Artemis needed no introduction. Here was the old woman who had shared the bus journey from Athens. And, according to a very excited Daria, this was Vasilis and his mother who shared the caves with them all those years ago.

So, this was Vasilis and his starfish mama – Artemis tried to take in the strange coincidence. Vasilis and his mama had given no sign earlier that they knew who she was – either on the bus or when they gave her back the bag of ashes. But now was not the time to ask such questions. Everyone was delighted when Vasilis explained they had met Artemis at the market. Daria berated Artemis for not telling them.

She found herself in the embrace of Vasilis and his mother.

'Might have been your father-in-law,' whispered Manolis, and Daria heard him.

'*Panagia mou!*' said Daria furiously.

Of course! Artemis realised now. Her mother had wanted her to marry the son of her oldest friend, Vasilis. Ha! Instead of completing a Master's in Melbourne, she might have ended up at the market in Kalamata, selling tomatoes. The idea made her smile, and Vasilis smiled back. Hopefully he hadn't heard the exchange between Manolis and his mother.

They all moved towards the graveside. The gravedigger had started work earlier in the morning to prepare the burial site for them. A decent pile of dirt was growing beside the grave already, clods of dun-coloured earth, small rocks and pieces of clothing too. A stand of cypress stood guard, the piny resin smell a pungent antidote to the dust-filled air. Daria was coughing again.

Vasilis had two extra spades in his car, and he and Manolis joined the gravedigger. Daria called Artemis over to meet the occupant of the third car, a priest whose hand Daria was now kissing.

'A special favour to the family. For George only,' said Daria, explaining to Artemis that normally a priest would not be present until later.

Artemis acknowledged the priest who'd now, thankfully, withdrawn his hand. He was like all the Orthodox priests she had seen in the city, taller than everyone else, as if height was somehow one of God's blessings, or perhaps a prerequisite for the priesthood. He had watery blue eyes, an El Greco profile, a remote holiness at odds with the anarchy of his grey beard and his black hem, which collected dust as he moved.

'She bribed him,' whispered Petroula fiercely, out of earshot of the priest and Daria, 'He's only here for the money.'

'Don't spoil George's day,' said Eleni, loud enough that Daria looked over and Petroula shut up immediately and moved away. *Never* let it be said that she had spoiled George's day.

Eleni leaned in close to Artemis and gestured at the family and

the priest in conversation. 'All this is not usual any more, *agapi mou*, especially not in Athens, where there's no room left in the cemeteries and you pay a fortune to rent a grave. We're very lucky to have this land for George, and Petroula is just upset that the priest is here. She wants to be in charge of the uncovering, do things the old way, like in the Mani where the women used to be in charge. In Athens, *po*, the priests don't come, and not even the family bothers to turn up; they leave it to the gravediggers.'

And then, almost casually, Uncle George was being uncovered. They'd removed all the surrounding dirt and he was there, his bones cradled in the soil. Artemis was overcome. She'd expected them to uncover a coffin. No one had warned her it would be like this, these bare bones. It was shocking and beautiful all at once. She inhaled deeply to hide her emotions. The priest intoned a prayer.

One by one, the bones were retrieved. They lifted the skull first, and Daria leaned forward to kiss her uncle on the forehead. Then they passed the skull around from one person to the other. Some of his teeth were missing, and so was part of his lower jaw. Petroula wiped Uncle George's face with a gauze cloth, scraping the dirt caught in clumps under the eye sockets. And then it was Artemis's turn, and she was unprepared. He fitted between her cupped hands, and she locked her eyes on the gaps where his brown eyes might have once looked out at her. His nose was broken, and a tooth at that moment fell out of his mouth – and, shockingly, both Petroula and Eleni reached out at the same time to grab it. There was a tussle for the tooth until they remembered the priest, and it was Eleni who let go and Petroula who slipped it into her pocket.

The priest lifted out the clavicles – two matching pieces, one broken the other intact, the scaffolding for the tender soft corners where lovers' heads might choose to rest. Artemis looked across at the two old women, Petroula grim and determined, Eleni spilling silent tears. It was Petroula who cleaned the clavicle and held one piece to her cheek, exclaiming the bones would need time to dry. She passed the other to Daria, asking what she thought. Eleni moved forward to add her opinion, and they

held a clavicle each and then more bones, passing them from one to another.

They found pieces of his pelvis and a patella, rib bones, but not a ribcage as Artemis had imagined. The small bones, Manolis told her, would have disintegrated. This beautiful, muddy-brown, imperfect collection was all that was left of him, each relic representing a piece of the mysterious whole that was, or had been, Uncle George.

Daria pointed out that they had made sure he was buried in woollen socks because the natural fibres would degrade more easily, not like synthetic socks. People were uncovered years after burial, she told Artemis, and their bones were found still inside their nylon hose. Oh, it was horrible. Even so, after six years they found scraps of his funeral suit, a dark navy cloth that Daria lifted to her cheek and then passed to Petroula for verification.

'That's the suit George had made in Athens,' said Eleni, after inspecting the fabric close up, and in doing so upstaged Petroula with her intimate knowledge of the origins of George's clothing.

And then this strange ceremony was over. Uncle George had been disinterred and the priest was leaving. He would return, he told them, when Uncle George was fully clean and dry (perhaps in three days' time) and they would commit his bones to the ossuary.

Daria whispered to Artemis, 'It's not over yet, *agapi mou!*'

The family had plans of their own and the priest was not part of them. They waited until his car pulled away, Vasilis and his mother following soon after.

'Artemis, we have a surprise for you,' said Daria, and she was wiping away tears, but there was excitement in her voice. 'Mama is here.'

Together, Daria and Petroula went to the boot of the Mercedes. Artemis looked at Manolis, shocked. Neither spoke, but her cousin was open-mouthed as they opened his boot. And yet, thought Artemis, how could they know?

The two old women returned solemnly, struggling with the weight, carrying Petroula's mysterious box. Relieved, Manolis rushed to help

them. Close up, it was beautiful carved wood, a miniature coffin almost.

'It's Mama. Petroula has returned Mama to us, Artemis.'

Manolis whispered to her, aware that she wasn't taking it all in. 'It's our grandmother's bones in the box. Petroula has kept them all these years and finally she is returning them. They couldn't tell the priest or Vasilis and his mother, because they would not approve. The scandal, you see – she would not be allowed here in the chapel. But here she is, Artemis, this is your … this is *our* grandmother.'

'Yes, this is your yiayia,' said Petroula. 'Your real yiayia.'

'My mama,' said Daria, 'your grandmother.'

The nameless woman, Nysa and Daria's mother, Artemis's grandmother, in this box.

No one spoke for a moment, the enormity of it sinking in.

'Her name,' said Artemis at last. 'What's her name?'

'Maria. Your grandmother's name was Maria,' said Eleni, and a wail rose up from Petroula: the unspoken had been spoken. After all these years, finally, Artemis knew the name of her grandmother, the woman she evidently so resembled. The woman who had been at the heart of such a scandal all those years ago. All around her now, they were singing the name, the name even Nysa would not say.

Maria.

How strange, thought Artemis, that the Greeks, who love to bury their secrets, also revere and look forward to the uncovering of their deceased loved ones. And now, at last, they had uncovered the name of her grandmother.

Maria.

Why then, if she looked so much like her, why had her mother not given Artemis that name? Why when her mother had always made such a fuss of the name day of Maria without explanation? All these years … why had her mother said nothing? Not once. Instead, she was Artemis, such a pretentious name. And not even common. Years of teasing at school. *Arty-farty* they called her at secondary school, especially when she excelled at poetry. She longed to be Laura, or even Diana. 'Diana and

the Golden Apples' was her favourite story. Why not Diana then, if she had to be a Greek goddess?

It was shocking at first, the sudden arrival of something so forbidden and secretive. This woman, her grandmother, who had been at the heart of her own mother's grief, was here in front of her inside this ornate box.

Maria.

Petroula passed the box of bones to Daria.

'Here she is. I've brought her home.'

The box was opened and the bones were removed one by one.

'But there's no head. There's no head.' Eleni was wailing now, and Daria and Petroula wailed with her, a strange eerie sound, grief and protestations, almost a song. Their voices carried across the valley and a lone goat bleated with them from a nearby field. The sun had warmed the newly dug earth, and Artemis knelt beside the bones of her grandmother.

When they finished, Eleni refused to back down.

'Tell them, Petroula. Tell them why there's no head!' said Eleni.

Manolis lit a cigarette and passed it to Daria.

'Not now, Eleni,' said Daria. And she began to cough, passing the cigarette back.

'Go on, ask her,' insisted Eleni.

'It's Mama,' said Daria. 'It's Mama.' She was crying.

Artemis put her arms around her aunt. Manolis put a hand on the shoulders of Petroula and Eleni until they let the matter go, for now.

'The ashes,' whispered Manolis, dropping his hand and leaning towards Artemis, 'What about the ashes?'

It seemed this was the moment. If there was ever a time for a reunion, ashes or not, this was it.

'Mama's here too,' she said. And what had seemed macabre and terrible until now, suddenly seemed beautiful and right.

Manolis went with Artemis to the car and together they carried a second box to the graveside. She was shaking as she presented her gift to Daria.

'I'm sorry, but she's been cremated.'

Another wail went up, first Daria and then Petroula, and Artemis couldn't tell if they approved or disapproved.

Eleni hugged her. 'It's okay, my darling, this is a Maniot tradition, you mustn't mind us.'

Artemis wanted to wail with them, to let all her own sadness find a voice, but she couldn't.

And when Daria and Petroula stopped their lament, they thanked her, and their laments became joyful. They laughed too, shaking their fingers at Artemis, imagining the priest … if he had only known what was in the boot of Manolis's car! *Forbidden, absolutely forbidden!*

And then the arguments started. Why not? thought Artemis. *Let the instruments begin!* Why would today be any different? Daria, between bouts of coughing, berated her son for not saying anything to her about this before now. Eleni and Petroula had begun quarrelling about the rights and wrongs of cremation. Petroula said it was a terrible thing to burn a body, and Eleni was about to mention the headless Maria, but Manolis intervened, telling them to behave, for the sake of Artemis. But Artemis didn't mind in the least: she was thinking how crazy they all were, and yet how wonderful too.

She wondered if she should tell them that Nysa had requested cremation specifically so that she could join Sandy in the tide at Kaikoura, but she decided this was something they didn't need to know. Eleni claimed now that soon the government would legislate and cremation would be legal, but Petroula wasn't having any of it. It was one thing to have Nysa home, but there was no need to change the law, and how would she have brought Maria back to them without the bones as proof?

Artemis knew her mother would have joined the debate if she could have. Here on the hillside, death in all its variations – resurrection, interment and disinterment – were up for debate. Her mama would most certainly have had a bet both ways.

'*Po*, ashes, *po, po!*' said Daria at last, firing up another Karelia Light.

'It was the only way to bring her home,' said Artemis.

And they all agreed, in the end, how else could she have brought their

Nysa home?

Artemis handed the ashes to Daria who placed the bag on top of the box containing Maria's bones, and Petroula crossed herself. Artemis in turn leaned forward and touched the box of bones.

'*Maria*,' she said. 'My *own* yiayia.'

As if on cue, the dark breath of Zeus moved closer and they retreated inside the chapel to shelter, including Petroula, who would have stayed in the rain if they'd let her. Oh, but the rain was the perfect blessing for this day – this they all agreed.

While they waited in the church for the rain to ease, Daria went around and re-lit the oil lamps that had been neglected by local families and left to splutter and die – showing no respect, she said, for the owners of the bones inside the chapel.

'Was it Vasilis's son I was meant to marry?' Artemis asked, curious to have this confirmed.

'Oh, your mother broke Vasilis's heart. She went all the way to New Zealand so she didn't have to marry him.'

'Is that *true?*'

'You can't say that,' said Manolis. 'How do you know for sure?'

'It's true,' insisted Daria, but laughing too, before it became another bout of coughing.

'And she wanted me to marry his son?' Artemis was indignant now.

'Yes, and you broke Vasilis's heart a second time. His son went to Canada and now they never see him – *tha fas xilo*, it's all your fault, Artemis,' said Daria, warming to the topic in spite of her coughing.

More than anything, Artemis wanted to know now why her grandmother's head was missing. But she didn't want to provoke another disagreement between Petroula and Eleni, not here inside the chapel. She imagined Daria interrupting: *You can't say that*.

As quickly as the storm arrived, it dissipated, and they returned to the graveside, spread a rug on the damp ground and laid out the food.

'*Chronia polla!*' said Manolis, 'Many years, Artemis. Happy birthday.'

'You thought we'd forgotten, didn't you?' said Daria, '*Po*, how could

we forget your birthday, Artemis, how could we forget? *Kalo risiko* – it is fate that you are here.'

'*Kalo risiko*,' said Petroula. And Artemis couldn't be sure, but she thought it was the first time she had seen Petroula really smile.

They feasted on the fish fresh from Stoupa. They mopped their grief with the bread baked by Daria, sliced and ate the tomatoes Vasilis had given to Artemis, and poured from the bottle of Uncle George's red wine that Eleni had kept especially for this occasion. They were glad the priest was gone, and not just because of the illicit ashes and the headless Maria.

'This is not usual,' said Manolis, 'food at the graveside on such a solemn occasion. But for Uncle George, anything is possible.'

'And for Maria,' said Eleni. 'And Nysa.'

'A celebration,' said Manolis. 'A birthday, an unburial, the return of our grandmother.' And he clinked glasses with Artemis.

'A resurrection, Artemis,' said Daria, by way of mitigation.

Petroula produced a bowl of *koliva*, the traditional funeral food made from sweetened, boiled wheat, and insisted they eat some to honour George and the wheat farm that had kept his family fed, never mind the Italians. They ate and it was sweet and strange.

The conversation turned once more to the reasons for Uncle George taking so long to decompose, and Artemis found music in the rhetoric.

Yakkity-yak, yakkity-yak, as Sandy used to say, *yakkity-bloody-yak*.

They spoke again of cremation, its illegality and possible future legality. Eleni knew someone who had travelled across the northern border of Greece, flouting the law to cremate her father and had smuggled him back into Greece. The rest of them were scornful and admiring of this ingenuity. They lamented the future where there might be no more unburials if people were cremated, but Artemis was not to feel bad because it was a good thing that Nysa had been cremated, for how else would she have come home?

Artemis revealed the story of how she'd sat on the bus next to Vasilis's mother, and they were all delighted and wished she had told them sooner,

and that was funny, too, because she hadn't known until this morning when she saw them at the graveside, though that didn't stop Daria from scolding her.

Afterwards, they toured the small cemetery, Daria taking the lead because she knew each grave, both the person in it and the family who mourned – *po, po, po* – and they were all, according to Daria, *to kaimeno*, unfortunate. She had an opinion about the state of every grave, and knew without question the cause of death.

Suicide – *po, po, po* – cancer – *po, po, po* – heart attack – *ochi, ochi* – old age – *po, po* – the drink, another heart attack, a botched operation on a gall bladder, a broken heart (Artemis liked that one) and, finally, a hen-pecked husband, so hen-pecked he'd died just like that, anything to get away from his wife, they said, anything, even death.

And then it was time to go, except that Petroula was staying on to clean the bones of Uncle George properly. She would wash them in alcohol and dry them, and phone on her newly purchased mobile phone when she was ready to be picked up. In a day or two, God willing, the bones would be dry, and Uncle George would be safely reunited with Yiayia, Maria and Nysa.

'We have to let his bones dry properly,' said Petroula. 'You have to do things properly.'

And that was that, for who could claim that Petroula was lacking in Christianity and true feelings for George? Well, not even Eleni it seemed.

And Eleni didn't challenge this. She was happy to concede that, on this occasion, Petroula was the woman for the job – and as they left she turned back and handed Petroula her pink rubber gloves.

On the way home, Artemis sat in the front with Manolis while Daria and Eleni whispered in the back about the headless Maria.

'Petroula and her family,' said Eleni, 'they have a lot to answer for.'

'*Ama pia*, Eleni, not in front of Artemis, not today,' said Daria. 'And you don't know for sure. No one really knows, not even Uncle George

knew.'

Artemis was dying to ask them more, but sensed from the way her cousin tipped his head back that he wanted peace for the drive home. She would have to wait.

Back at the house, Daria lit the oil lamp and Manolis poured the ouzo, but didn't have one himself. He was staying sober so he could drive back up to the church, taking the camp bed and a thermos of coffee to Petroula. Together, they would keep watch through the night, looking after the bones of Uncle George.

'You're a good boy, Manoli mou,' said Eleni. 'You're a good boy. It's all very well uncovering Ancient Messene but it's of no use unless you understand your own history. It's time you knew what happened to your grandmother.'

Daria got up and checked the oil lamp. '*Ochi, ochi* – not tonight, Eleni, not while Petroula is watching over the bones. Not tonight.' She turned down the flame on the lamp. 'I'm going to bed.'

Eleni clicked her tongue and went silent.

'In Greece,' said Manolis to his cousin, 'there are two sides to every story, and a third. The third side is just in case, and it's why people are always saying *if you think that, you must be crazy*.'

Even Eleni and Daria laughed at this.

Manolis said he'd be back in the morning. They mustn't forget – tomorrow was Ochi Day and Artemis must come with them to the parade.

Eleni hugged Manolis and said he was a good boy, and she apologised for keeping them all up, for making a fuss about something that could wait for another day, and he must make sure to take an extra blanket with him for Petroula; it was cold up there, and even thoughts of Uncle George wouldn't be enough to keep Petroula warm. She hugged Artemis and told her what a brave girl she had been, bringing Nysa's ashes home, bringing Daria's sister home, *a brave girl*. And yes, history was one thing, and gossip was another, and in Greece you could never be quite sure which was which. Yes, she agreed, Daria was right … it was up to

Petroula to tell the story of Maria, because if anyone knew it was surely Petroula.

But Artemis didn't feel brave as she sat down in the silent house to listen to the next recording from her mother – she had a feeling that the history Eleni was so keen for her to know was waiting.

BEING A TOMB

After the picnic, Artemi mou, things changed forever in a way that I can now understand. But it has taken me all these years to forgive myself and my mother, your grandmother. When we are young, we hold fast to ideas as if they are treasures that we can store for our future, and we polish them with our own prejudice. But I didn't understand that until recently, after your father died. For years I have held myself responsible for what happened next, and I have blamed my mother too, and holding on to these memories has been my way of defining who I am – my identity. I am Nysa, the girl who came to New Zealand, looking for a new beginning. My name means new beginning, did you know that?

You see, Artemis, a few weeks after that kiss, our baba is still missing and Uncle George has been to the Mani, bringing back fish and secrets, and instead of shame, Mama is still singing at the taverna at night, and in my heart I imagine she is gone … Every night she leaves, I think she is gone forever. But I too have a secret now, something more than just the kiss.

There is a bag of money that the New Zealand pilot gave to Mama, and I know that she sleeps on this bag of money. It's hidden under her mattress on the floor right next to where I sleep with Yiayia.

I don't know if Yiayia knows about the bag of money and no one speaks of it, but twice when no one is looking I lift the bedding and check that the bag is still there. I have decided I will tell Baba when he returns. Baba must know about this bag of money – everything will be okay when Baba comes home.

But it's not Baba who comes, but men looking for Baba who know about the money. I don't really understand all of this, Artemis, not really, not until years later, but I do know one thing. I know where the money is, and all I can think of is that the men want the money and if I give it to them they'll bring my father home.

And so, Artemis, it is me, your own mama, who betrays her parents, even though Yiayia and Uncle George try to stop me. I pull the bag of money out from under the mattress and give it to these men. When I recall this moment, it is like the waterfall and the kiss – it is both magnified and reduced. It is technicolour and it is black and white. It is a frozen moment and a fast-reeling film. This moment that no one ever speaks of again, and that haunts me for the rest of my life.

You see, Artemis, when I handed over the money, I sealed the fate of my parents. The men were some of the communist fighters, and they thought Mama had stolen the money meant for them. No one cared about the New Zealand pilot. There had been hangings in the public square in Kalamata just after the war, collaborators murdered, and everyone said Uncle George was lucky, *playing it two doors*, that he wasn't murdered as well. Mama and Baba had been part of the resistance from the start, but now, because of the money, they were under suspicion, thought to be traitors. But how was I to know this? All I knew was that I wanted to punish Mama for kissing the New Zealand pilot. How was I to know?

How was I to know? Nysa's voice was full of anguish.

Downstairs there was an argument going on. Artemis stopped the tape.

'You know as well as I do who killed your mother!'

'If that's what you think, you must be crazy!'

'I'm not crazy, Daria, and you know I'm not – why is Petroula up there now with George? No head, Daria, your mother has no head.'

‘You can’t say that, Eleni, you can’t say that.’
Ochi, ochi, ochi.

OCHI DAY

Ochi day, and no matter that they had unburied Uncle George only yesterday, today was the parade and any Greek with any pride would be there. All the disputes of the previous evening seemed forgotten. Manolis had left Petroula in her vigil up at the chapel and returned home to take them all. Every school in the district would be marching through the city, with their top scholars carrying the Greek flag, to commemorate the day that Metaxas said, *Ochi! No!* and stood up to the Italians. Never mind that the Italians occupied the castle, never mind that the Germans occupied Kalamata, today was the day that everyone celebrated the anarchic spirit that is part of being Greek.

Artemis had heard about the Ochi parades from her mother but she could not have imagined anything quite like this. The town square was packed with people; flags were draped in apartments above the shops, and people were hanging from their second-storey windows, waving. It seemed that all the tall priests of the town had gathered outside the Agii Apostoli to tower over their community. They formed a circle, and the crowd thronged to get closer.

In the centre were three rifles stacked to form a tripod, holding a soldier's metal helmet. A fire was burning in the helmet and the smell of incense filled the warm air. People ducked between the priests to get closer to the fire, and Artemis moved back, her view obscured by the priests' tall hats. Schoolchildren were arriving in pods of glossy excitement, white shirts and white blouses, shiny dark heads, the boys with short hair and the girls with long hair. All around were smiling faces, a fervour of national pride unlike anything she had witnessed. There were brass bands in bright uniforms interspersed among the school groups, marching music everywhere. People lined the streets to watch the parade and Artemis found herself swept up in a cavalcade down Aristomenous.

Ochi, ochi, ochi.

The armed forces were out in full regalia. Tanks drove through the streets to a rapturous reception, and fighter jets swept low over the city, once, twice, three times, as if war itself had been declared, the sound of them exploding into the excitement as they departed.

Manolis linked arms with Artemis, and they ran alongside the parade until it became so congested it was impossible to run. A part of Artemis was critical of the naked nationalism, and the other part of her wanted to join the march, to carry the flag and to claim her heritage. She watched in admiration as the top scholars passed by, holding their flags, shiny-faced, unabashed. Oh, she'd marched down Lambton Quay when she graduated, and Nysa and Sandy had walked beside the parade, but she'd been embarrassed by the fuss and not nearly as proud as she should have been. Her brothers, thank goodness, had understood and stayed away, and this had upset Nysa. Yet again, her mama had managed to turn an event about Artemis into something about herself, claiming the disappointment as her own.

Artemis confided in Manolis about her graduation, and how different it had been from this pride, this joy in achievement – the uniformity of the youth unimaginable, she felt, back home.

'*Po*, it's not all how it looks. There are squabbles all over Greece every year on Ochi Day. Many of the top students are Albanian refugees, and there's a lot of debate about who can or can't carry the Greek flag. In some towns they will allow an Albanian to carry the flag and in others it is forbidden.' Manolis warmed to his topic as they walked along. 'There was a case where a Greek student refused to carry the flag when he was clearly not the top scholar, deferring to an Albanian student and creating a stalemate. The debate reached Athens, and there was talk of legislation. As for the Bulgarians, well, it's common knowledge that the Greeks and the Bulgarians often don't know who they really are. People say they are Greek, but they may have a Bulgarian mother or father, or Turkish for that matter.'

They both smiled at this, Artemis remembering Yiayia and her

Turkish mother, Azime.

A fighter jet swooped low over the parade again as if to emphasise the point. Manolis mouthed *ochi* and Artemis found her lips moving to form the same triumphant defiance. The parade was still spilling out from the square, an endless surge of students all heading down Aristomenous, so much youth, so much promise. She felt both kinship and distance. These students were so awfully young and it seemed like forever since she was like this, so new and innocent and full of promise. Momentarily, a shadow crossed her mood, the weight of what she now felt was a spiritual middle-age – a time to make choices, no longer just dodging her mother's choices, but truly time to make her own.

Rather than follow the parade to the waterfront, where it would be stifling among hordes of people, Manolis suggested they head back to the square and meet up with Eleni and Daria. As they headed that way, two young women waving Greek flags spotted Manolis and rushed to kiss him. Artemis saw her cousin in a new light as he dusted down the front of his jeans and glanced at his reflection in shop windows, briefly. He was chivalrous and funny, flirty and more than charming. So many kisses to count when there are two cheeks to kiss every time. They waved to each other. One of the women blew a kiss and tapped her phone, indicating that Manolis should call her.

Further on a man approached, clapping Manolis across the shoulder, wanting an introduction to Artemis.

'Artemis, my cousin from New Zealand – my very own cousin.'

There was a touch of theatre in the way he pulled his amber beads from his pocket, and swung them as he introduced her. He was like her brothers as young men, aware of his allure but able to deflect it at the same time, never too obvious. The man pulled Manolis aside to ask him something. Artemis couldn't quite hear but when he replied, she noticed his voice lowered and softened and his eyes changed. He glanced at Artemis and back to his friend and closed the conversation. She thought she heard the name Asta. Briefly, she wondered if her cousin had a girlfriend.

He was moving quickly now towards the square and she was rushing to keep up with him. She was out of breath and now was not the time to ask him about girlfriends, although she remained curious … another time.

They found Daria and Eleni waiting for them in a nearby café, nursing ouzo, drinking coffee. The best plan, Eleni said, was to finish their ouzo and head out of town to Ancient Messene.

'Let Manolis show you some real Greek history, Artemis.'

The journey took them first through the modern city of Messene on the outskirts of Kalamata, a picturesque village with a town square and a festive air about it. Then they headed up into the hills towards Mavrommati, where the famous spring waters originated, and where their great-great-grandfather, Azime's husband, had once lived. Mavrommati looked over the site of Ancient Messene which had been overgrown for centuries, a virtual swamp in winter, until the patient archaeologists, many of them German, had taken up camp in the area. They'd begun the painstaking work of uncovering, restoring, dating, verifying, cleaning, re-building and – *siga, siga, slowly, slowly* – out of the swamp and grass, the ancient city had taken shape.

'Bigger than Olympia, Artemis, bigger than Olympia.'

Manolis was their tour guide, and there seemed to be no one else there. The ruins were still not officially a tourist attraction, just a local treasure that would soon rival Olympia, according to Daria. They found the shrine of Artemis Orthia, and Daria insisted they take a photo of the real Artemis beside it. Artemis, the goddess to whom the ancient Greeks entrusted their daughters so they would become good women. And like the good woman she was, Artemis obliged her aunt. There were so many contradictions in the name – huntress, virgin, goddess of childbirth. What had her mother intended?

Eleni delighted in showing off the ancient Greek version of flushing toilets, but this time Artemis was not going to pose for a photograph.

She told them about Nysa's ambition to own a bidet, blaming Eleni for setting the bar so high, and making them all laugh. Daria and Eleni posed on the stone latrines, and insisted Artemis take their photograph instead.

After her visit to the Parthenon in Athens, Artemis found the embryonic restoration of Ancient Messene both humble and extraordinary. The ruins were still lying partially sunken and overgrown, with marble columns, numbered and awaiting their rightful place on top of their restored other halves. Manolis said sheep and donkeys had grazed here as archaeologists planned their initial excavations.

'Before the excavations began, there were olive groves and fields of figs,' he said.

Even now, with the almost fully restored propylaea, marble columns and plinths, the atmosphere was bucolic and restful. Mount Ithome overlooked the recovered site in maternal benevolence. Manolis was busy pointing out the massive stone walls, claiming they were the best examples to be found in Greece, and then took them to a stone commemorating four women commanders, Thiva, Lyso, Thelxippa and Gorgo.

'Female warriors,' said Eleni, proudly.

'A woman's place is looking after her children,' said Daria.

Manolis, ever the diplomat, pointed out the Asclepeion, the old town's central shrine, the place where heavenly power was assigned to women and worldly power to men, which seemed to settle the argument nicely as far as Daria was concerned. But Eleni wasn't listening, whispering instead in Artemis's ear.

'Your history, Artemis, is full of female warriors. They were buried as heroines in ancient times when women were just for childbirth and procreation. And not just in ancient times. Petroula was a warrior, you know, she had to be – and even your grandmother – both true daughters of Messene …'

'Not now, Eleni, not now,' said Daria. 'Artemis, don't listen to her. Listen to your cousin. Manolis knows everything there is to know.'

Manolis was walking ahead. He had access to the recently built

museum, which was closed to visitors, and would take them on a private tour. Once inside the building, they followed him to a statue of a naked Hermes, restored to his divine nudity.

'We have so much to thank the Germans for,' he said.

There was a small grunt from Daria, perhaps at the thought of thanking the Germans for anything, but she knew better than to interrupt him.

'The German archaeologists,' whispered Eleni to Artemis in case she hadn't understood. 'Manolis is right, the Germans have helped to recover this site.'

He was beckoning them to another exhibit, the famous Messenian beauties he was so proud of.

Standing before them in cold marble was a headless and handless woman. No doubt the others had seen this broken beauty many times, thought Artemis, but today it couldn't help but embody something less ancient, something more personally significant. The headless statue was a stark reminder of something they could only imagine all those years ago. Suddenly the day before was in their hearts – their own experience of the reunification of human parts, and in particular the headless corpse of the recently repatriated Maria. It was all too much. Daria began to weep.

Eleni wrapped Daria in her arms and held her, rubbing her back and gesturing to Manolis with lowered eyelids that it wasn't his fault, he mustn't feel bad.

'You must bring Artemis back here, Manoli mou, on another day, at another time. Show your cousin around properly, she'll want to see more, but not today, *ochi*, not today.'

Artemis was transfixed. She stayed to gaze while the others moved away. The headless beauty was partly armless, just a shoulder and forearm on one side and missing a hand on the other. But it was the marble folds of her robe, the way they swathed her body in womanhood that struck Artemis. The fabric yielded to the mystery which delineates man from woman, as if fertility itself was drawing the stone inward. Here was a

woman, beautiful without her head, strong without one hand, holding sway in spite of being stone. Nearby was a quote from someone known as Iphigenia in Tauris:

The position of women is deplorable.
At home and in war men rule.

Artemis thought about her grandmother Maria losing her heart, perhaps to the Kiwi pilot. Or maybe it wasn't that, maybe she was ambitious and the money mattered for her singing career. And her own mother, Nysa, orphaned and keeper of the secret, who had chased after her dreams, crossing from one side of the world to the other to find them. Artemis considered her own life. Here she was surrounded by strong women – this was her legacy and she needed to start living up to it.

On the way out, she stopped to admire Apollo's sister, Artemis, a goddess who started out as the Mistress of Wild Things, and somehow through the patriarchal legends became a maiden.

They stopped on the way home at a café. Daria had recovered from her grief and was now winsome, beautiful and teasing, drawing them all around her the way Nysa would have. She insisted on telling the owner that Artemis was a homecoming Messenian, just like someone from Homer's *Odyssey*. She flirted with the waiter and ordered extravagantly from the menu, beers and *mezethes*, and for a moment Artemis saw the young woman Daria might have been, and the waiter played his part nicely.

From where they sat, they could see out over the whole fertile valley to the sea and across to the Taygetus. Mount Ithome was behind them. Artemis agreed to be feted, and Manolis entertained them with what he knew about the Spartans and the Messenians, the people on either side of the seven mountains of the Taygetus. For the very first time in her life, Artemis inhabited her name with a sense of pride and belonging. It was she who ordered the retsina for the table, to Daria's delight.

Manolis spoke of the legendary Nestor, much-loved and

much-maligned, both wise and a bit of a joke, depending on who was telling the story. Homer's version of Shakespeare's Falstaff. Wisdom, Manolis reckoned, was often overrated and people soon tired of it, but imperfection was endlessly attractive. Nestor was purported to be one of the early conservationists around these parts, responsible for the valley's fertility, and for saving his people from starvation. He instigated replanting after the ploughs ruined the hillsides, which is how the figs and olives were introduced to this area, and the walnut too. And as if to prove the point, the waiter arrived with a plateful of freshly shelled walnuts. Then there were the terrible years when the vengeful Spartans raided the fertile valleys of Messene to drive the Messenians out.

Manolis leaned over, took a walnut and a sip of retsina, and continued.

'Nysa was following a long-held tradition of people from this area with her migration. The Messenians travelled right down to North Africa and all over the Mediterranean, biding their time for the return home.'

'Tell her,' said Daria with a flourish of her cigarette, 'tell her about Aristomenes, and how the Spartans cheated at the Olympics! How they couldn't have won fair and square, but had to evict us first, the cheats!'

'Ha! Mama's right, the Spartans cheated, but don't worry, we've found him.'

'Found who?' demanded Daria.

'Aristomenes. He's like Elvis, Artemis. Sightings all over Kalamata, but the real Aristomenes hangs out where the tourists don't go, not even Mama knows …'

Po, po, po.

But Daria was laughing with Manolis now.

'I'll take you where they smoke the narghile in the arcade behind the Alpha Bank,' he was saying. 'You can meet him!'

Daria slapped her son across both shoulders. '*Pou pas? Tsk, tsk, tsk.* Don't listen to him, Artemis.'

They picked up Petroula from the chapel on their way home. She had

done her job. George was ready; his bones were dry. Now all that was needed was the priest to bless them. It was one thing to have a headless corpse, and another to have illicit ashes, but unblessed bones in the ossuary was one step too far.

Petroula wanted to talk to them all. She'd had time to think overnight up at the cemetery and it was time, she said, to talk. 'Artemi mou, you must wonder about your family and your history, and what have I got to do with anything? And it's true, what have I got to do with your family? It was a black hour.'

A sigh from Eleni, a soft exhalation, and she reached across and touched Petroula on the shoulder.

'Wait, Petroula, wait until we get home.'

And Petroula reached up and covered Eleni's hand with hers. This was how they drove home, the feisty old lover in the front seat beside Manolis, and her rival, the ageing Eleni, leaning forward, to comfort her.

At home, Daria lit the lamp and Manolis poured the wine. Someone opened the shutters to the sound of the sea. The oil lamp sputtered briefly. Daria coughed. Artemis took a sip of wine.

Petroula was ready – they all were.

'People say it was politics, but it was personal too. My brother Yiannis loved your grandmother the way I loved your Uncle George. Back then we were all fighting for a better Greece. We'd defeated the Ottomans and the Germans had gone, but there were family feuds, Artemis, and people dressed them up as politics.'

Petroula stopped, and they all waited. Daria looked as if she would say something and thought better of it. Eleni murmured encouragement.

'You were a brave woman, Petroula. A freedom fighter,' said Eleni to encourage her.

'No one knows the whole story. In Greece there are three sides to every story, but I know what happened to your grandmother. She used her beautiful singing as a cover so that we could have meetings in public

places, right under the noses of the Germans and the Italians. But she made a mistake when she took the money from the New Zealand pilot. People said she was in love with him. They talk rubbish, she wasn't in love with him. She wanted the money for the communists.'

Artemis thought about what her mother had remembered and knew now wasn't the time to mention the kiss. It was true: there were three sides to every story. She would listen to Petroula.

'Maria loved your grandfather, Artemis. Daria, she loved your father. But Yiannis didn't believe this, because he wanted to believe she was a bad girl, *po* … because …'

Eleni finished the sentence for Petroula.

'Because Yiannis loved her too and he was jealous.'

Petroula sighed.

'I have kept this secret all my life, but I'm an old woman now, and I've sat all night with George and now is the time to tell the truth. Even George would want you all to know, I'm certain. Yiannis was one of the men … my own brother … he was one of the men responsible for the hanging of collaborators in the square in Kalamata.' Petroula stopped as if unable to go any further.

Eleni continued. 'But when those men found the money at your house, Daria … people thought Maria had hidden money meant for the communists, well … this was all Yiannis needed to know, Petroula. He was looking for trouble, wanting to find fault with her, that's how it was. Your grandfather was implicated too, Artemis. They thought he helped Maria hide the money.'

'I'm sorry, Daria, I should have told you years ago, but George told me not to say anything. People blame George, you know; they say George told the men where the money was because he was trying to save his own skin.'

'*Ochi, ochi*, let's wait, Petroula, wait until tomorrow when the goat has been eaten and the wine drunk. Shall we wait?' Eleni, having urged Petroula to tell all, was now begging her to stop.

'*Nai*, Eleni's right,' said Manolis. 'Bad news is worse on an empty

stomach. You all need a good night's sleep.'

'*Small the bad*,' he said to Artemis discreetly. And even with her limited Greek, Artemis knew was entirely untrue.

Manolis coaxed Daria off to bed telling her he was *going out to find Aristomenes down a back street*. He invited Artemis to join him, but she sensed he needed time out with his own friends – perhaps even a girlfriend? Having stayed overnight in the chapel with Petroula, perhaps enough was enough and he needed a break from them all.

But more than that, she couldn't wait to get time alone to listen to her mama.

LIGHT LANTERN

In the bedroom, Artemis rushed to her iPod, aware she was nearing the end of the recordings. Beside it was the velvet pouch containing her mother's necklace – she'd meant to wear it today but had forgotten. Artemis lifted the necklace out and placed it around her neck. It was cold against her skin, but it was no longer creepy – a tangible link to her mama, and she wanted to know about it. She would ask Eleni about the tooth. Eleni would know.

> Artemis, I hope you've remembered to give Mrs Cataldo last week's *Listener*.

An instruction to begin, and this time it made Artemis smile, thinking of Mrs Cataldo clearing the mailbox and reading the *Listener*. Briefly she thought about Horse, and saw fish and pasta in his food bowl, imagined a fatter cat, a Mrs Cataldo cat. Horse would be a Cataldo convert by now.

> This is going to sound silly, Artemis.

And instead of agreeing, Artemis tipped her head back, imitating her Aunt Daria, an act of assent and encouragement, the Greek nod that looked like no but meant yes. Now, it felt like nothing her mother could say would be silly …

> I haven't told the boys.

This was her mother's old ploy to win Artemis over, a secret that her brothers weren't in on.

Since your father died, I've been having chest pains. I think it could be angina. It's not serious, I'm sure of that, and when I get back from Greece, I'm going to see the doctor. It's mostly when I eat late at night, and I've had to cut back on my pastries, but otherwise it's only mild, just a sort of squeezing …

There is a shuffle as if her mother is moving around and rearranging something, then she resumes.

I don't want to worry you.

Of course you do. Of course you do. You're worried, I can tell. Why didn't you talk to me, phone me – I'd have made you visit the doctor, Mama!

Well, in case something happens, and of course it won't, it won't, I know that, Artemi mou, but in case something happens while I'm in Greece, I want you to know that I'm happy to be buried there. I know I've always insisted that I want to be with your father on the beach in Kaikoura and I do, and if I can be, that's where I'll be. But if something should happen while I'm in Greece, but of course nothing will happen, I'm not trying to worry you, but if something did happen … I want you to tell your brothers to leave me there.

Oh Mama, I've brought you here. You're here. Oh, why didn't you go and see the doctor?

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Anyway, that's not what I really want to talk to you about. There's an old Greek saying, *one's life a bicycle*, and that's how I see it with you and me, Artemis, when you needed me most. And I just want to apologise. I was finding myself when you arrived, *koritsaki mou*, and there you were, this intruder in my womb, just when I thought

I had finished with all of that … and I felt resentful at first, and then you reminded me of Mama the moment you arrived, the way babies present themselves in the image of an older person. George arrived looking just like your father's father, and that had me worried, can you imagine? I saw troubles ahead with alcohol, and I was wrong. And then Dimitris and Antony – both, well, either one of them, could have been Uncle George, but I'd already named George George, so there it was, I chose names for them that had nothing to do with my family so I could start afresh, no influence from the past. But you, Artemi mou, there you were, in your muslin swaddle, the very image of my lost mama, the …

Her mother's voice trails off and then returns without finishing her sentence, another of her irritating habits that no longer irritates.

I've mentioned this before, but you know me, Artemis, I'm likely to repeat myself. I loved you.

The past tense. Artemis pushed pause and replay, and there it was: the past tense. Not, I love you, but I loved you.

I loved you, Artemis, the same way I loved your brothers, but when you are a mother, you are so busy mothering that you forget to say, I love you. And I would have said it to you on the phone the last time we spoke, but you know how it is with phone calls …

You're such a stress merchant …

… The last words she ever said to her mother.

And then …

I love you, Artemis. *S'agapo*.

Loud, clear and incontrovertible, her mother's voice, and Artemis pushed

pause, and replay, pause, and replay, ensuring that her mama repeated herself over and over again.

WITH THE SOUL IN THE MOUTH

The goat was tender, and Manolis was praised for his culinary skills by the old women who all agreed it was the wine, Uncle George's wine; and Petroula took the credit for the grapes, and they all agreed with her, her grapes were good but the wine was even better. And then Daria took credit for the goat because she knew the owner of the goat, and they all agreed that Daria's friend grew a good goat. They were warming up for a bigger conversation and this was the preamble. Artemis knew that getting to the heart of the matter was not a straight route when you were Greek, and she was also beginning to see that the heart of the matter was about many hearts and not just one.

It was Eleni's turn to talk first. 'People talk, Artemis. The Greeks who love secrets also love to talk. It's a terrible story, but it isn't unique. It was common back then for people to take revenge in the name of war because of personal grudges. Some say that your grandmother shamed the Maniots with her dance in the rain, and others that she shamed Kalamata, but whatever the shame, it was her beauty and ambition that were her downfall. In a time of war, people need gossip and your grandmother was the perfect piece of gossip. She was out singing; she wasn't at home looking after her babies the way a good Greek woman ought to be. They blamed her when her first baby died – the first Nysa. People see what they want to see, what suits their eyes.'

The story of Maria's murder unravelled in all its variations.

'They beat her feet, her dancing feet. You can beat someone's feet and leave no visible sign, no evidence.' Eleni stopped, caught her breath. '*Po*, it was common back then, people having their feet beaten. It's a terrible thing but it was common. Your feet are the most sensitive part of your body, and so that's what they did, they beat them until the feet were swollen, the people couldn't walk.' Eleni spoke of the terrible pain, and though no one asked her, they knew that she too had felt this, that

her feet had been beaten … her lovely old feet, tucked neatly into gold sandals this evening, just the bruising of blue veins, a knot here and there.

'It was punishment, you see, for her scandalous dancing. People had long memories during the war and after it. Their memories went on forever, because in a civil war nobody trusts anybody any more.'

'Maria thought the money would save her, but she didn't realise they'd already found the money. She accepted having her feet beaten, because that was understandable, but she didn't realise they would kill her. She told them about the money from the New Zealand pilot, where it was hidden, and they laughed at her. They already had the money. And then they pulled her gold tooth from her mouth.'

Artemis gasped. She placed her hand flat against her heart and touched the tooth that was lying there against her skin. Hands shaking, she tried to undo the clasp on the necklace.

'Help me,' she whispered to Manolis, tipping her head forward to expose the chain around her neck. Her cousin stood behind her, his warm hands touching her briefly on her bare neck, sensing her distress. He undid the clasp and she reached for the chain as it slid forward, catching the necklace as it fell. They waited, no one spoke, curious but unaware of this holy relic, its provenance now starkly real. Artemis opened her cupped and shaking hands.

'*Panagia mou!*' Petroula moaned and blessed herself as if she'd seen a ghost.

Eleni lifted up the necklace and passed it to Daria. But Daria wouldn't look. She raised her fists and shook them, and then with open palms she smacked her face, over and over, until Eleni took her hands and held them.

'He knew, he knew,' she wept. 'George knew. After Yiayia died, I hunted for the tooth. I thought it was lost in the ruins in the earthquake. But he knew, he must have known.'

Eleni tried to console Daria, but yes, it seemed likely that Uncle George had given the tooth to Nysa.

Artemis knew that too from her mother's recordings, but she didn't want to say, because Daria was so distraught. But Petroula agreed that Uncle George must have known. It was she who had brought the tooth to him, proof that his sister was dead, and asked him to give it to Yiayia. But Daria was inconsolable, the way Nysa had been when she couldn't return for Yiayia's funeral. The same strange grief that had so puzzled Artemis as a young girl, she was now witnessing in her distressed aunt, but now she understood.

'Why didn't your mama tell me, Artemis? Why, why, why?' And then, as it dawned on Daria: 'Yiayia knew – she must have known! She must have given it to Uncle George to give to Nysa.'

They all understood at this moment that of course Yiayia had known. How could Uncle George have stolen Maria's tooth from Yiayia? Yiayia had gifted the tooth, sent it off with Nysa to New Zealand, her parting gift – and even Nysa hadn't known this.

Daria was weeping now, great soundless sobs, and then she fell to coughing, and Petroula got up to brew hyssop tea for her.

Later, when she had calmed down, it was Daria who insisted, 'Tell Artemis what happened, Petroula, you tell her! Tell her how!'

Petroula began again, and she spoke so fast that Manolis had to interpret for Artemis.

'She sang up until the moment of her death *with the soul in the mouth*, her voice echoing throughout the Taygetus to haunt her captors, her sweet voice spilling into the canyons and echoing for days afterwards.'

Petroula gathered the edges of her cardigan close to her neck and stood as tall as her crippled spine would allow.

She sang, her old voice cracked but strong …

Farewell, my life, my sweet, sweet life, I thank my
mother for it
Farewell, my babies, I do not choose to go, I love you so
My feet they beat, these men my blood may spill, but I
love you still

They cannot stop my heart from love nor my spirit kill
I sing to him, I sing to you, my song it will continue
And when you walk these mountains be sure to think of
me, my dears
I am not dead, I will not die, my blood may spill, but
I'm alive
In these rocks and in this ground my blood, my body
will be found
But I'm not here or there or anywhere, I am in this song

Petroula sat down, let go of her cardigan and continued.

'Up there where the Spartans threw their puny babies, Artemis, your grandmother's voice filled the ravines. They say that your grandfather Manolis covered his ears and fled to Crete in shame and fear for his children, distancing himself from his family so that his politics would no longer pollute their lives.'

'But what happened to her head?' Artemis wanted to know, and they all shook their own.

'I don't know,' said Petroula. 'Before they took her head, they stuck a broom from her backside to her brain to show their contempt. And then they took her head. I wasn't there, but people talk, and then Yiannis told me, years later, before he died – he confessed to me. I told George. I had to tell him. But Yiannis did tell me where her grave was immediately afterwards, because he'd loved your grandmother and there is only so far you can go, and he knew her family would need to know. So I marked the grave and I waited, and after five years I dug up the bones and cleaned them. But there was no head, Artemis.'

'Was our grandfather involved in her killing?' Artemis asked, because she knew about the kiss and they didn't, and perhaps it was even more personal than they realised.

'*Ochi, ochi, ochi*,' said Eleni and Petroula as one, almost as if they had done this before, or wished to confirm it to themselves.

'They were going to kill Baba too,' Daria interrupted them. 'That's

what Uncle George said. It was Baba who tried to get Mama to give the money to the communists, and they argued about it, *po*, just like any married couple. Money, *po, po, po*. People say Mama wanted to keep the money for her singing career … well, that's what they say, but you can never be sure about anything now.'

'He heard her singing,' said Petroula. 'That's what they say. He heard Maria singing, her voice filling the ravines where he was hiding, not knowing she was to be killed. Maybe she sang so he could hear … but no one who heard her ever forgot her courage.'

Perhaps, thought Artemis, Uncle George had known about the kiss – everyone had their own version of events. But telling these women about it now wouldn't alter anything. It was too late. Artemis was now the keeper of another secret, one that belonged to her mother and her grandmother, Maria.

They spoke of how Uncle George had gone every year to the Mani to help with the olive picking, but now they all knew it was more than just the olives and Petroula that took him back each year. There was a yellow rose planted by Uncle George at the site where Maria had been murdered. High up in the mountains, among the bleached rocks of the Taygetus, a rose bloomed for her.

Petroula had brought him the gold tooth, proof of his sister's death, even though it implicated her brother. The tooth, they said, a sign of her vanity, the price of her hubris.

They all looked at the tooth – this relic that had travelled with Nysa to the other side of the world. Daria had calmed down.

'*Efharisto, efharisto poli*. Thank you, Artemi mou, for bringing the tooth back home with you.'

Manolis fetched shot glasses and tsipouro. They toasted Maria and George, refilling their glasses until they were all slightly tipsy, bound together by secrets and the sharing of them, their tongues loosened, their hearts moving to reconciliation, but it was unlikely they would ever truly reconcile to this hideous murder.

DAUGHTERS OF MESSENE

It was Manolis who encouraged Eleni to tell her story the following evening, gently probing, the way an archaeologist might remove debris from a precious relic.

'Oh, it's hard for you to imagine the excitement that the war brought to our lives,' said Eleni, and she looked at Petroula for confirmation. 'Excitement is the wrong word, but I don't have the right word …' She shook her head, her hands cupped in supplication.

'You would not understand, it's impossible for you to understand how it was to be a young Greek woman. Oh, the traditions we were locked into, the poverty too – impossible to imagine when you see Kalamata now. Young girls like us: Petroula and me and your grandmother, Artemis, we were supposed to be good girls. Not *play-laugh* the way it is nowadays. We were supposed to marry men that our families knew. Even your own mama was running away from that when she went to New Zealand. It was a good reason, a very good reason.'

Petroula joined in. 'It was a man's world and the war brought us equality. Something you wouldn't understand, but it was a mighty thing. When you are a Greek woman and there is an occupier, there is no difference between you and a man. In fact, it was an advantage to be a woman. *Kane tin papia* – you know – *do the duck*. Keep quiet and not let on. Being a woman meant nobody knew what you were doing, and we were hiding guns under our skirts and passing information and it felt like nothing I've ever felt before or since. To be treated as an equal, to be useful like a man, to be getting one over the Germans and the Italians. What were the Italians doing fighting us, I ask you? They had no stomach for the war; they wanted women and wine, and they missed their wives. Some people thought we were lucky to have the Italians in Kalamata, but did they lose their wheat farms the way George did? Some people preferred the Italians to the Germans, but there were good

Germans and bad Italians and rotten Greeks. The rotten Greeks were the ones you had to watch.'

'Petroula is famous for her part in the war, Artemis,' said Eleni.

Petroula clicked her tongue, but her head was tipping backwards in agreement.

According to Eleni, Petroula had been at the heart of the battle on the waterfront when six Germans were killed. She was a war hero. Petroula with guns under her skirt, this gnarly old woman in a black headscarf, a most unlikely looking hero, had risked her life to fight the Germans.

'It was after the occupation that things changed. During the occupation, no one minded if you were a woman with a gun – it was your duty. Who would have thought it? Women were capable of anything and everything. None of the old rules applied, and we could fight side by side with the resistance, *make love* even, and we believed it was forever. We thought the world had changed, and that we were equal.' Eleni had become impassioned and she stopped, covered her mouth as if remembering, and then continued. It was the 'make love' that hung in the air, to the delight of Artemis and the consternation of Petroula.

'The occupation was our emancipation. It was a time of equality between Greek men and women, something we hadn't experienced before. Ah, but we were wrong – *at the bottom-bottom of the writing*, Artemi mou, at the end – it wasn't true. When the occupation ended, women like us, we were just scandals. We had shamed our own mothers' names, shown them up like whores, so they shaved our heads and they sent us to prison. We were traitors to the way of life in Greece where women knew their place.

'I was fortunate to be pregnant when I was arrested and imprisoned. Some of my friends were raped. Even a Greek knows not to rape a pregnant woman. They shot the baby's father instead. That's how I met your Uncle George. George knew the father of my baby. He visited lots of people in the prison, bringing food and trying to convince people to recant. He was on a mission – some say because he should have been in prison himself for working for the Italians, but he made up for it,

Artemis.'

'If you recanted, you could get a Certificate of Political Reliability. Uncle George was a pragmatist and he felt that no matter what your beliefs, you should recant if it meant getting your freedom. He came every week to the prison, and we became friends, but he couldn't understand why I wouldn't recant. My baby was born in prison. God's wrath, they said, but I know it had nothing to do with God.'

Eleni's voice faltered.

'Back then, people thought anything from a harelip to a widow's peak was a sign from God. One way or the other, a birthmark was a sign from God … and a hairy baby … *like a hole in the water* … I couldn't tell them otherwise. But of course it had nothing to do with God. It was too late even for spitting.'

Spitting, Artemis knew about … people *yakkity-yakked* back home too and when a new baby arrived, it was supposed to be good to pretend to spit to ward off the evil eye. Nobody ever admitted to spitting, but Nysa used to say, in private, *po, po, po*.

Eleni continued.

'Yiayia sent a lace dress with him once. Can you imagine, my little girl in a lace dress?'

And with that Eleni's composure crumpled and they all looked away, picturing this strange hairy baby in a lace dress that Yiayia had made – maybe a dress that Nysa or Daria had once worn, maybe a special gift just for Eleni's baby. Lace, it seemed such a luxury in this tale of prison and politics. Nothing is ever quite as you think it should be, thought Artemis. This sad story, so hard to fully imagine and yet filled with a strange beauty. A chill ran through her.

'What made you recant?'

Eleni sighed. 'I was stubborn. It's hard to explain. I had given everything for my country during the occupation, fighting like a man. We knew that things wouldn't change unless Greece changed. We wanted change. Communism and the resistance became one and the same. I had lost my lover, the father of my baby. To recant would have

meant dishonouring him and all that he stood for, as well as the proof of our love, our child. How could I disown the father of my child?"

The question hung there in the still night air.

Nobody spoke.

'When my baby died, I was too tired to keep fighting for something that had cost so much. It was George who came to see me, told me that my only chance of a new life was to recant. He was probably the only person who could have convinced me. He was a practical man who understood that holding on to an ideal too tight, whether Christian or communist, could be a kind of death even while you were trying to live.

'So, when my little angel died, I signed the *Dilosi*.'

'What's the *Dilosi?*' Artemis hesitated to interrupt, but wanted to know.

'A declaration of repentance. I did it for George.' And then, after a pause, 'I loved George …'

Petroula leaned forward, the two old women locked eyes and everyone held their breath. Silence, except for the jangle of Eleni's gold bracelets.

Then, after a long slow sigh, 'The same way Petroula loved him,' said Eleni.

'He loved both of you,' said Daria.

'It took me a long while to agree with him, but Uncle George finally convinced me to accept an offer to be transferred to a prison in Athens where, if I worked with the authorities to persuade others to recant, I would have my sentence reduced.'

It was hard to imagine this old woman, the glamorous Eleni that Nysa so loved, in a prison in Athens.

Eleni told them that it was there, among all the little orphans and children whose parents wouldn't recant, in the squalor and sadness of an Athens jail, that she made a vow to celebrate all that was glamorous and life-affirming when she was free. In the prison she met women whose husbands and sons had been murdered by the Germans because of their part in the resistance, and then their families were doubly punished when the backlash came against the communists at the end of the war.

No longer heroes, they were dobbed in by the right wing and expected to recant, when in some cases they had no reason to. Some quickly did, eager to earn their Certificate of Political Reliability in whatever way they could; others became politicised, and were prepared to die rather than to recant.

Eleni spent four years in the prison in Athens, witnessing families torn apart by politics. She helped the nuns to convince some of the women to recant so they could be with their children. This, she said, was what kept her going, knowing that politics didn't matter but that the orphans did. It was George, she told Artemis, who sent her money from the sale of his own land, the wheat farm at Belika, so that she could set up a business in Athens. And something else that she was ashamed of but that was inevitable – she made contacts with businessmen in Athens, and traded information from inside the prison, and when she was released she was able to set up in the Plaka as part of the establishment while all the time working for the communist underground.

Playing it two doors.

'Tell me about Mama in Athens,' said Artemis. 'She was always going on about Athens and you, as if nothing could ever measure up to it.'

'Your mama was a good girl, Artemis, a good daughter, and I'm sure a good mother. Ah, but she wasn't perfect,' said Eleni, as if to alleviate the guilt. 'Nysa was just like any teenager who arrives in a big city alone without a chaperone, except for her Aunt Eleni of course – *po*, a scandalous woman like her Aunt Eleni! And I wasn't her real aunt, and you know how it is with Greeks, the way it is, *yakkity-yak*. Your mama went to a private school with good girls and she might have had the free run of Monastiraki and the Plaka living with me, but that was only because everyone knew me and they all kept an eye out for her. She was top of her class in English.'

It was the second time Eleni had told her this. How was it possible that her Greek mother had actually topped the class in English? She recalled the passion with which her mother had taken up night classes to learn English and how this had put an even bigger wedge between them.

Artemis had been irritated by her mother's ambitions – they had seemed inappropriate, pretentious even – and she was mortified to remember that she'd felt like this. The tapes her mother had left were testimony to her studies, her achievements in speaking English. She should have been proud of her.

'Your mama wanted to know about everything, and she was well known in the Plaka, looked after by everyone, and she couldn't have stepped out of line even if she'd wanted to. Not a chance, no chance at all.'

It was Manolis who found Azime's narghile (ah, so Daria was a hoarder, too) and brought it out on the terrace. He packed it with his own stash of tobacco and insisted they all smoke in memory of Azime who, if she had lived, may well have travelled to America to escape the gossip. Petroula went off to bed but the illicit tobacco urged the rest of them forwards and backwards through wraiths of smoke-enhanced memories, and the night grew light into morning, and soon Eleni was gently snoring, her bracelets silent.

Artemis revelled in this unravelling and reweaving of a Kalamata silk that was forming in front of her tired eyes, the truth, or versions of it, crystallising and falling like starlight to illuminate the fabric. She toyed with the idea of sharing her newfound secret with Manolis – after all, Maria was his grandmother too, the giver of the secret kiss. But as the night merged with the morning she realised that some secrets are best kept, that a secret kiss once revealed might lose its significance.

The secret warmed her, it was a matrilineal link, begun right here in Kalamata and stretched across two hemispheres, binding her to her mother and to Maria, her grandmother, her very own yiayia.

And as the dawn gently penetrated the balmy morning, and the ocean lit up with sunlight, she pondered the origins of the word 'exhume', the meaning of 'disinter', and agreed with Manolis, who knew the precise etymology, that it meant shining a light on something that had hitherto

been obscure.

An owl sounded, taking Artemis back to New Zealand and her father in the moonlight, weeding the artichokes, listening to the morepork.

THE MOIRAE

The others slept late. the shutters remained closed until almost noon. Artemis crept through the house, trying not to wake anyone. She was bursting now with her family history and eager to email her brothers to tell them about their grandmother, uncertain where she would start, but certain they would want to know. Manolis had left for work, and there was a note for her on the kitchen bench, next to a pot of still-warm coffee.

She poured herself a cup and smiled at the gleaming filter coffee machine. Not a *briki* in sight in her aunt's kitchen – how disappointed Nysa would have been.

Up on the terrace, Artemis checked her emails.

Declan had written to her and attached photos of the conference, photos of people she knew from the university, including his wife. He told her how successful the conference had been and joked yet again about the bergamot bath. She was ashamed of him, that he could be there in Daylesford with his wife and write to her like this. His disloyalty undermined his attempts to romance her with their shared memories of Daylesford.

How odd it was, expecting loyalty from a married man.

She tried to compose an email to her three brothers, but deleted it because there was simply too much to say. It was impossible to write about all these newly uncovered secrets, the bones, the missing skull, the returned tooth – it would seem ghoulish. She could phone them, but that prospect was even more difficult … to actually *speak* of these things …

She wasn't ready. She would wait until she found the right words.

Artemis found another email from Laura, who had written a poem and was asking Artemis to critique it. It was all about the Moirae, the Fates and the fatal shears, the cutting of the life-thread. Of course Laura

meant well, she had no idea what was going on here, and though the poem was slightly pretentious and overblown, it hit the mark. Artemis recognised a particular thread: his name was Declan, and she and he were unravelling. She needed to cut it.

The sound of Artemis crying brought Eleni into the kitchen. Once again, Artemis sought solace in her arms. It felt as if all the sorrows that she had witnessed and listened to over the last few days were now one big emotion.

As fresh coffee dripped through the filter, Artemis confided in Eleni.

The flood was released in words, tears and laughter, muddled, incoherent, but such a relief. Eleni gathered the pieces of the puzzle as they spilled, barely commenting, just waiting and gently moving each strange shape until it reformed and made sense.

'Declan. Who is he? He has a wife?'

It was here that Artemis was able to be clear. As if for some time the jigsaw had been re-forming silently in her own head and now, with words, she placed Declan onto the table, fully formed, all the parts interlocking except for the one part, the biggest part, her heart, no longer the right shape.

'He's my escape from an arranged marriage,' she said, laughing now, realising it was partly true.

'Ah, Vasilis's son,' said Eleni, smiling. 'He's married now and living in Canada – a lovely girl, they came back to Kalamata last year. But she's fat, like me, Artemis! You wouldn't do at all.'

Artemis laughed with Eleni, thinking of Vasilis and his toothless mama, and this now legendary Canadian girl who was married to Vasilis's son – thank goodness – instead of her.

'But fat is good,' said Artemis, quoting her mother. 'No doubt there'll be lots of babies.'

She told Eleni how Sandy had sided with her when Nysa had suggested a romance with Vasilis's son all those years ago … ten or more. How the very thought of it had propelled her across the Tasman, away from her mother's fanciful ideas.

In Melbourne, without a mother and three brothers to chaperone her, Artemis had spread her wings – later than most, she knew – but intense and unforgettable in a way made all the more vivid for the waiting.

Eleni understood. The Civil War, she told Artemis, had been her own emancipation, no matter how brutal. Eleni was empathetic, it was easy to confide.

Artemis went on. Telling Eleni was a way of explaining it all to herself. Declan had been inevitable, sort of. She'd grown bored with her short-lived promiscuity, and there he was, married, deeply humorous, bordering on cynical, needy (which surprised her) and a 'catch' (according to the rules of hierarchy and status within the university). Plus, his being married, she realised now, was probably just another taboo she had needed to interrogate – especially after her father died – there was nothing to stop her. Shocking Nysa was so satisfying.

'You're just like your mama was.'

Eleni was there and encouraging, and Artemis let the tears roll. *Your face needs water, Artemi mou, rinse it often, let it drink.* This old woman knew more about Artemis and her desires than even she herself knew just yet.

'It's time *to put your two feet in one shoe* and decide what you want to do. What do you want, Artemi mou?'

Eleni passed her a cigarette.

OUT-HEART
EXO KARDIA

Manolis insisted artemis needed a break from grief. They waited until Petroula had caught the bus back home to the Mani; and late one evening, when they were sure that Daria and Eleni were asleep, her cousin gave her a lift into town on his motorbike.

It seemed like an age since her arrival in this city and her first ride on his motorbike from the bus station. So much had happened. Manolis was still riding as recklessly as the first time, and no helmet, although he insisted she wear one, and turned to yell things at her, even lifting his hand from the bike on several occasions to point out various landmarks – mostly unlit and therefore unseen, but that didn't deter him.

It was midnight and, according to her cousin, the real life began after midnight in Kalamata. He drove to a taverna by the sea and Artemis had no idea exactly where they were, but there was music and laughter all along the waterfront. Even families with small children were still out dining.

As if they'd been expecting him – and maybe they had – the Turkish conservationists joined their table, and Artemis found herself sitting across from Bagtash. Manolis ordered ouzo for the table. The young Turkish men were full of high spirits and Artemis realised just how intense her life had become in the past days, caught between the revelations of Petroula and Eleni, the uncovering of Uncle George and all that entailed.

She slipped easily into the conversation, light-hearted and at times flirtatious, enjoying being the only woman at the table, and a species 'downunder' – a word they all thought hilarious and toasted several times in her honour.

It didn't seem personal, all this attention, but she was aware of the

atmosphere between herself and Bagtash, a growing something that maybe Manolis and the others noticed. Maybe not.

'When do you go back downunder?' Bagtash leaned forward attentively, his breath warm against her cheek.

Manolis was quick to tell them he hoped she'd be staying on until summer, and there was another round of toasting with ouzo.

'When do you return to Istanbul?' Artemis asked Bagtash.

'Another week. We're heading up to the mountains before we go for the tree planting, you must come. Remember, I invited you.'

'Not everyone agrees with this scheme, you know, Bagtash,' said Manolis, 'some people think it will bring bad luck planting trees from Turkey, even if they are free.'

'We give you trees, my friend, because Greece is our baby brother,' said Bagtash.

'Ha, you Ottomans, you think you can conquer us with trees now,' said Manolis laughing. 'Just like the German tourists on Crete with their big tips.'

'Where would you be, my friend, without those German tourists and their euro on Crete? And you, with a German girlfriend, too.'

Artemis saw Manolis's face at the same time as Bagtash did. Bagtash realised his mistake immediately.

'I couldn't tell Mama,' Manolis said to Artemis. 'Not yet, maybe in summer, when she's better. It's a long story that can wait for another day.'

Bagtash lifted his glass. 'Okay, blame it all on the Ottomans, the Germans … and don't forget the Italians.'

'We fought the Ottomans too,' said Artemis. 'Us Kiwis.' And it was the first time she'd realised how odd this was. Why *had* New Zealanders gone to Gallipoli? She'd grown up with Anzac Day, the local commemoration of that terrible battle, and her father's father had fought on Crete … and that was odd too, but Turkey, as she sat here and now, that seemed inexplicable.

Bagtash knew all about the New Zealand soldiers on Gallipoli, but the other young men had never heard of such a thing and they laughed

as if it was impossible, idiotic even. Bagtash had swapped seats with Manolis and was now sitting beside her. His hand touched hers as he reached for the drinks menu, then their shoulders rubbed together, and briefly neither of them moved.

'A wine?'

Bagtash insisted on a Turkish pinot noir and Manolis laughed at him.

'Say hello to the plane tree, my friend, this is not a wine bar, you won't find any Turkish or Australian wines.'

'I didn't know Turkey was a wine country,' said Artemis.

'Not like Australia or New Zealand,' said Bagtash, 'but yes, we have good wines, and why not some raki from Izmir?'

Manolis was dubious, but the waiter had raki from Izmir to everyone's delight.

'Lion's milk,' said Bagtash as he dropped ice cubes into the clear, tall glasses and they watched the raki turn milky.

'Lion's milk!' they all toasted, and by now Artemis was leaning on Bagtash's shoulder. A musician arrived and Bagtash requested a *tsifteteli*, the Greek version of a Turkish belly dance. He insisted Artemis dance with him and briefly she resisted. But Bagtash was laughing and Manolis was urging her on. Artemis yielded to the sensual rhythm of the music, flaunting her hips and belly. The dance was both erotic and symbolic, a flirtation with Bagtash, a release of emotion and a private homage to her scandalous grandmother.

Tonight her body was wanting more than she was prepared to acknowledge. It would have been so easy just to slip in with the rhythms of this striking man, to abandon her polite cousin-niece-prodigal-daughter mantle, and to inhabit Artemis, the runaway Kiwi who had spread her wings in Melbourne, thinking she'd *disturb the universe* by sleeping with a married man.

But Bagtash wasn't in a hurry. He remained her courteous and admiring dancing partner. Manolis raised a toast and there was laughter, affirming laughter, and those watching the dancers passed around the narghile, puffing on the apple tobacco, applauding them.

Later, Artemis went outside with Bagtash, down to the water's edge. They found a quiet unlit spot away from the taverna. He spoke about the beaches in Izmir where he came from, the turquoise sea and the increasing tourism that was both a blessing and a curse. His sister was a tour guide like Manolis. He said she did the loop from Istanbul to Gallipoli, to Troy, Ephesus, Cappadocia, Ankara and back again – sometimes over only ten days – crazy tourists in thirteen-seater vans thinking they could see Turkey this way. Last year she'd been in a hot-air balloon that had collided with another over the honeycomb hills. Thankfully – as both balloons were on the downward – his sister's balloon had landed safely, albeit sideways.

'What about the other balloon?'

'A passenger was killed because they panicked and jumped out as the balloon was landing.'

She'd had enough of death in the last weeks, and Artemis wasn't sure why, but she slipped out of her strapless sundress, and dived into the sea. Bagtash followed her and they swam together, talking, treading water, playful and increasingly sensual – possibly the most romantic thing she'd ever done. Unless you counted staying up to watch her first dawn over Melbourne with Declan from his friend's flash apartment overlooking the river …

She wanted Bagtash to kiss her in the water that night, but he didn't.

Even in Melbourne, bedraggled swimmers did not return undried and unkempt to eat and order wine, but at this beach, on this evening, nothing was out of place. It wasn't until she was riding pillion homeward with Manolis that she realised she'd left her stupid, crazy shoes on the sand.

IT'S BEING PLAYED

Declan had started phoning her again. The night she'd swum with Bagtash, she'd returned home to a long email from Declan. Already aroused, she'd confused the two emotions, slipping from the sea to a memory, imagining Declan free to say all the things he was writing, when she knew he wasn't. She'd phoned him that night from her bedroom, under the mosquito net, whispering in case she woke Daria, the guilty pleasure adding another erotic layer. Grief had eaten at her core, leaving all her emotions raw.

It was only in the morning, sober, when she replayed their conversation over and over that she realised how stupid she'd been. He'd snapped his fingers, seen his chance and now he wanted her help with some background on Byron – if she'd just find time to visit Naupactus, well actually Epacto, but Declan had tried to persuade her with his knowledge of Ancient Greece. Epacto, where Byron had ended his days and where Declan was wanting her to go on a research trip for him.

Artemis was in the garden with Daria. Since the unburial of Uncle George, her aunt's health had rapidly deteriorated. Once the bones had been exhumed and placed in the ossuary, once Petroula and Eleni had returned to the Mani, it was as if someone had blown out the oil lamp that was Daria's spirit. She was spending most of her time in a chair in the garden. She no longer harangued Manolis, and he confided to Artemis one morning how much he missed this.

He'd hatched a plan. He would take Artemis to the Mani to visit Eleni and Petroula, but they wouldn't tell Daria or she'd want to come, and it would all be too much for her.

He had already loaned Artemis a book on the area by Patrick Leigh Fermor, a British travel writer about whom even Declan hadn't heard much. Daria was sleeping, and Artemis was lost in the lyrical language

of a writer whose heart was on his sleeve when it came to the Mani – she was infatuated. And soon she knew that this was the famous writer who had rolled up his trousers and waded into the water on the Kalamata waterfront. A local legend. His sentences wound on and on in a way that she'd never encountered before – history reimagined in a roller coaster ride of poetic lyricism. This was the sort of book that she and Declan would have talked about for hours.

The Mani. This was where her grandmother's headless body had lain all these years. It was to the Mani that Uncle George had sailed on his *kaiki*, bringing fish for his family under the noses of the Germans (selling it to them, some said), but what's a man to do when his family needs food?

Daria slept on as Artemis calmed her inner voice, the one that was telling her to call Declan and to share her joy about her literary find; and the other voice – the one she was nurturing – the new inner voice, that said, *let him go, move on*.

She imagined the voices of the women warriors of Messene urging her forward, telling her to get a backbone like upright Artemis, Mistress of Wild Things.

'*Ama pia*. I've had enough of this.' Unintentionally, she'd spoken aloud and Daria woke beside her. Fortunately, her aunt hadn't heard the words, just the sound of them.

'I forgot to tell you, Artemi mou.'

Daria rose too quickly from her chair and was now struggling to find breath.

It was tricky to offer help to such a proud woman, so Artemis waited, and once Daria was composed, she continued.

'Your beautiful shoes.'

It took a minute for Artemis to place the conversation. In her head was a voice urging her to be upright. Artemis on sandalled feet.

'The Turk, that Turk, Manolis's friend, you remember, he came for you yesterday but you were …' and the coughing continued, so that Daria was forced to sit again.

But by now Artemis had collected enough information to know that Daria knew about her lost shoes, as it seemed that Bagtash had come to the house looking for her. She wanted to know more, but Daria wasn't fit to talk any more and waved her away, patting her chest and calling for her oxygen, because this was what it had come to now.

When Manolis returned later that evening Artemis told him how unwell Daria had been, and mentioned that Bagtash had called at the house, she thought, but she wasn't certain, as she hadn't wanted to press Daria further. Manolis laughed. He had the shoes, given to him by Bagtash, who had come calling, yes, but been given a frosty reception by Daria who had answered the door. He said he was sorry – he'd forgotten all about them.

Artemis briefly envisaged Daria, scarcely able to breathe and scandalised by the returning shoes. If only Eleni had been there to open the door, she would have at least invited Bagtash in.

'Did he say anything?'

'Who?'

'Bagtash.'

'We talked about the tree planting, and I said we would probably go … *Nai? Ochi?*'

'No, no, yes.'

'You Kiwis are as crazy as the Greeks. You say yes when you mean no, and no when you mean yes – crazy. *Nai-ochi-nai!*'

When Artemis finally phoned Declan, she was resolute, and instead of offering excuses or apologising, she told him she couldn't go to Epacto for him. He must have sensed her resolve and didn't cajole her like he might have. To his credit, he even asked after Daria.

'You've had a rough spin,' he said.

A rough spin.

Her head spun.

Declan didn't have any idea what she'd been through in the past few

weeks and he never would. But now she knew it didn't matter. She didn't owe him an explanation, but even more than that, she didn't mind him not knowing. He knew a different Artemis. She was upright now, intent, Mistress of Wild Things. She'd imagined herself wild when she met Declan, but from this other hemisphere she knew how fanciful that was. A married man who would never leave his wife … she'd been foolish.

'I've committed to helping with a restoration project … tree planting … you know, the recent fires.' Up until this moment, she hadn't actually committed to anything. 'There's a group of Turkish conservationists here in Kalamata – friends of my cousin Manolis.'

'I thought the Ottomans were the enemy,' Declan teased. 'When are you coming back to Melbourne?'

Here it was. The question she'd been asking herself ever since she left that city with his golden peach in her bag.

'I'm not.'

There was silence at the other end. She waited. The women warriors were in her head now. They had fingers to their lips requesting silence, a silence she would normally have rushed to fill.

'So, that's it? That's it for us?'

Ama pia – it is, I've had enough.

But this time she didn't startle herself or Declan by saying the words aloud.

'Goodbye, Declan.'

'Look, hon, you've been through –'

But she didn't wait for him to finish.

'I've got to go,' she said, and it was genuine, she did. She had a whole new life to begin.

After the phone call, Artemis sat on the bed looking at her crazy, stupid, cream Cinderella shoes and had an imaginary conversation with Nysa, her mama, about her love life with Declan.

Mama, I made it a sea – something Nysa was always saying when

she'd made a mess of something. As a young child it had often puzzled Artemis. It seemed such an odd thing to say and then, as she got older, it simply irritated her, but now it was perfect, it was exactly what she wanted to say.

I made it a sea.

AT THE BOTTOM-BOTTOM OF THE WRITING

Daria had finally stopped smoking. Manolis had asked Artemis to stay on in Kalamata, to see the winter through with them. He wanted to take her to Crete in summer.

They had repatriated all of the bones of Yiayia, Maria and Uncle George, and the ashes of Nysa. Petroula and Eleni were travelling back and forth to look after Daria, taking turns, sometimes together in the taxi and sometimes separately. They squabbled over who loved Daria the most, the way they had squabbled for so long over Uncle George. But Artemis could see that fighting was how they managed their grief, the memories that both united and separated them.

Manolis had taken time off work to show Artemis more of the Peloponnese, at the urging of Daria, who needed to rest. First, they had taken a trip to the infamous waterfall – *a trickle, barely a trickle* – so Artemis could see where her mother had picnicked all those years ago. Manolis had driven the Mercedes down the rutted path and skidded in the loose gravel on the steep road. They'd had to take a thermos from the car to fill with water from the spring because the engine had overheated – so much for *the birds' milk!*

Artemis had stood on the mattress of pine needles, trying to imagine her mother as a little girl – wanting to console her somehow. But it felt wrong to try to inhabit her mother's sad history, and she suddenly knew it was time to let go. Instead Artemis was happy for the scandalous Maria, her grandmother – *that kiss*, the tenderness of love, or the notion of it, amid war and poverty, no matter the consequence.

She hadn't told Manolis about the secret kiss, because he might tell Daria – and Daria, they all knew now, was dying. No one else need ever know what Nysa had seen, because it no longer mattered.

She and Manolis travelled further, like tourists, to Pylos (formerly

Navarino, she was told) and most famous as sandy Pylos in Homer's *Iliad*. It was a picturesque port with a sparkling harbour. But beneath the tranquillity was a bloody history.

'One of the great naval battles for Greek independence was fought here,' said Manolis. 'Sailing ships, for God's sake. It must have looked amazing. The Ottomans were sunk, and the ships are probably lying there still.' Artemis was reminded of the stories she'd heard from her grandfather in New Zealand about a different war not so far from where they were standing now: the battle of Crete. He'd spoken of the beauty of the airborne landings, the sky clotted with men and their parachutes.

She told her cousin the story, and he looked thoughtful.

'Asta's great-uncle was one of those paratroopers,' he said.

'Who's Asta?'

'Come and have a coffee, and I'll tell you.'

They crossed the cobbles to a café, dodging a small but precariously overloaded truck stacked high with crates of fish, and found an outdoor table overlooking the benign harbour. Burial plot for the Ottoman armada, if Manolis was right. Artemis ordered in Greek, flirting just a little with the waiter for the benefit of her admiring cousin, and they sat for a while watching the fishing boats and the promenade of tourists.

It looked peaceful enough.

'Where the Ottomans failed,' Manolis said, stirring sugar into his already sweet iced coffee, 'the tourists won – Pylos was conquered finally by the euro.'

Artemis waited, not wanting to push him but eager to hear who Asta was. He sipped his frappé, checked his phone, swung his *komboloi* – the beads clicking softly – and then laid it on the table and cracked his knuckles.

'It's quite a long story.'

'We've got all day.' Artemis leaned forward eagerly. She knew so little about Manolis.

'Well, such a lot has been going down, I wasn't sure I should burden you. You have to promise not to tell Mama.'

More secrets. Artemis was used to them now. She promised.

'I've been doing some investigations of my own about our grandfather. When Uncle George died, a friend of his told me that Papou had fled to Crete and worked on the restoration of Knossos. I didn't take it seriously back then, it was just something someone told me. I was in the final year of my degree and studying archaeology, and I guess this person thought I ought to know. And then I became curious, and the only way I could travel to Crete without telling Mama was to say I was a tour guide. And that's where I met Asta. She's a German botanist who works on Crete … my girlfriend.'

Artemis let out a low whistle, imitating what Manolis did when he was surprised by the antics of the women in his family. 'Your *girlfriend*. That's a very big secret, Manolis, that you're keeping from your mama.' She was teasing him, but surprised, too, that he had managed to keep this news from Daria.

'It's not just about Asta. It's about our papou. There's so much sadness around losing Maria, and now having found her … and also about your mama … you see, Artemis, it's been all about the women in this family, and I needed to know about our grandfather. My own father left us years ago and went to live in Sweden. He's dead, I think, but no one speaks of him. Uncle George filled up all the spaces where all the men in my life were meant to be.'

'Have you found him, our papou?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Is he alive?'

'Sadly, no. He died many years ago, before Uncle George. The locals say he died of a broken heart, always talking about Maria and his children, and how he couldn't return home, the shame of having abandoned them.'

'When did he die?'

'In 1989, and he asked to be buried in the Samariá Gorge where no one would find him.'

Through his contacts at Knossos, Manolis had found the exact

location. It was an unmarked grave, tended by locals who'd been waiting all these years for someone to claim the stranger in their gorge. It was closed off now for the winter. This was where he would take Artemis in the summer.

'The gorge,' Manolis told her, 'is a long walk over bleached river boulders, and at one point, called the Iron Gates, it's barely three metres wide.'

Through there and nearer to the coast, where the grass grew, that was where their grandfather was buried.

Where the kri-kri still roam, Artemis, from the time of Homer.

'What did he do on Crete for all those years?'

'He was an artisan, and he worked as a labourer on Knossos helping with the restoration. Everyone there knew him.'

And so they'd come full circle, the young Manolis from Kalamata, an archaeologist, and the older, deceased Manolis, an artisan who had worked on the bronze restorations at Knossos.

'Does Asta know anything about him?'

'Yes. He was a bit of a legend around those parts and when I arrived enquiring after him, she was able to help me.'

'Have you got a photo?'

'No, Yiayia destroyed all the photographs of him, according to Daria.'

'I meant Asta?'

Manolis opened his phone and scrolled through to find a photograph of his girlfriend.

Artemis took the phone from him and looked at the photo of her cousin and Asta, his dark head against her fair head, his designer stubble against her smooth cheek, both their mouths wide with smiles.

'She's very beautiful.'

'She is.'

'Asta, that's a lovely name.'

'In Greek it means star, and I think it is originally Norse, meaning tree, and who knows what it means in German … but for me it is love.'

It was startling to hear Manolis make this declaration. Up until now,

Artemis had seen him as devoted only to Daria. Yet here he was leading a double life – managing to straddle the responsibilities of being the only son, but not resentful the way Artemis had been about Nysa.

'Wow, you dark horse you!' said Artemis, and cuffed her cousin lightly across the shoulder. 'Daria would love her.'

'Probably, but I'm not certain she's ready for anymore surprises. You realise she's dying.'

'I do. I do, and I'm so glad that I'm here with you all. I missed being home when Mama died, and I want to be here for Daria. It probably sounds wrong to want this, but I want to be here for your mama. I know it's what Nysa would have wanted.'

'We'll make a Greek goddess out of you yet,' said Manolis. He'd barely touched his drink, and gulped the cool coffee quickly.

'Let's go, I've got to buy something for you.'

The waterfront shops were purely for tourists. Postcards littered their windows and flapped in the afternoon sea breeze on stands in doorways.

'Over here, Artemis,' Manolis beckoned. 'Have you read *The Iliad?*'

Her cousin was holding up two beautifully bound hardback copies of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* that he'd found amid the T-shirts and tourist bric-a-brac.

Manolis drove on to the wetlands beyond Pylos, home to the migratory birds that flew from Africa on their return journeys. They talked about migration, the ancient history of the Greeks. Artemis relished the chance to look back further even than her mother's sad history, into the safe and ancient glory of Greece, and Manolis encouraged her. They visited the castles of Methoni and Koroni, and then stopped at a small beach where the water was deep blue and bath-warm, and swam, racing each other, splashing and diving and ducking like school kids. It was years since Artemis had frolicked and felt so free like this in the sea. She could feel the affection between her and her cousin was growing, free from the constraints of the past few weeks. He was like another brother. It was

simple. Fun. On the way home, they stopped at a seaside taverna, draped in a flush of magenta bougainvillea. Over a beer and a plate of small fried fish, Manolis asked Artemis about her plans.

'Will you stay with us and come to the Samariá Gorge in summer?'

'I'd like to but I need to sort out my study.'

Artemis knew now that she needed to make some big decisions. The first had been saying goodbye to Declan. Now she had to decide about her PhD, and so many ideas about this were vying for her attention. Manolis had sparked her passion for Greek history, something she'd been dodging for years. Even Declan had wondered why she hadn't tackled it. Now there were no more excuses, and here she was in the heart of it all, surrounded by so many opportunities. But mostly, it was her mama's tapes that had sown the seed for her new direction. She wanted to know more about all the young Greek women who had migrated in the sixties to New Zealand. And to know that, she also needed to understand the Greek Civil War.

'You could study here in Kalamata,' said Manolis, 'Or Athens. Stay over until summer and then decide.'

Artemis reached over and held her cousin's hand. He covered her hand with his other hand. And she realised that she was going to stay on until summer. There was nothing to stop her now.

A local sporting an impressive *moustaki* puttered by on his shiny scooter, a rake and shovel over his shoulder, singing loudly. Artemis waved to him. Still singing, he lifted the rake and shovel to salute her.

Artemis of the Wild Things.

LIKE THE SNOWS

Today she was wearing her new shoes – returned in soft tissue and free of sand – and the white peaked sunhat, and carrying track shoes in a rucksack with her packed lunch. Daria had insisted on spanakopita for the journey, staying up late to make it, the effort all too much, and now she was back in bed, not well enough to go with them.

Artemis waited in the park where the New Zealand soldiers were honoured for their bravery in defending the Kalamata waterfront, but now she knew about Petroula's part in this, and perhaps, too, her own grandmother's. People's histories, she realised, were never entirely their own, and each version, rather than clouding the issue, added clarity. She'd not seen that before – she'd been searching all along for the one truth, determined to uncover it, thinking that being a historian gave her the right to decide. Petroula and Eleni had proved her wrong.

The bus pulled up beside her, a dramatic tinted front window offering panoramic views, and Bagtash stepped out to greet her. He took her rucksack and ushered her up the steps. On board were other familiar faces, the people she'd met downtown in Kalamata the day she'd found her mama's ashes. Everyone was smiling at her; they knew her name. Bagtash had saved her a seat beside him at the front of the bus. She sat down and their legs briefly touched. Artemis shifted closer to the window and pressed her great-grandmother's nose against the glass.

Bagtash stood up with a microphone and began to tell the passengers the history of the area as the bus wound its way up into the mountains. He was speaking English – articulate, humorous and passionate – about the trees, when he sat back down, their arms touched and she didn't move. It was comforting to have him here to lean on, for today was the last part of her pilgrimage.

At last she'd been given the final piece of the puzzle.

It was Daria who told her. Manolis had mentioned the invitation

from Bagtash, a trip to the mountains to celebrate the tree planting and to observe first-hand the ravages of the fires. He'd got the map out to show Artemis where the bus was going, up into the hills towards Sparta. Daria heard them talking and insisted they show her. That's when she had begun to recall the time she hid in the caves with Nysa and Yiayia all those years ago: the pine trees, the chestnuts, running water, and Uncle George arriving as the snow began falling.

'Artemisia. That's where we were, your mama and I, in the caves …'

Daria was pointing at a small mountain village on the map in front of her.

'… that's why she called you Artemis.'

At the top of the saddle the bus stopped, and everyone got out; trestles were erected and food miraculously appeared. It impressed Artemis to see how much these Turkish volunteers cared. And yet, there was still a subtext, long memories, the centuries of Turkish occupation. Daria was of two minds about the planting of Turkish trees. In contrast, the young volunteers were deeply concerned, at times seeming more distressed than many of the locals, about the burned forests. They'd donated both trees and money to restore this countryside, a gesture of true friendship.

Manolis had planned to come with her on this trip, but he'd ended up staying home to be with Daria who hadn't slept well the previous night – bad dreams, he told Artemis, about the caves. He hadn't wanted to leave her on her own. And they both knew the spanakopita had been too much for her. Even though Artemis had offered to help, Daria had wanted to make it.

Artemis was glad to be on her own. She wanted to pay respect to her mama, aware that it wouldn't be easy. She wasn't sure she could have coped with Daria's grief as well as her own. Somewhere across that mountain range in the depths of the Mani, Maria, her grandmother, had been murdered.

One day Artemis would come back with Manolis but she was here

now, close to the caves where Nysa and Daria had hidden all those years ago.

Bagtash was explaining that sometimes, rather than replanting, it was better to wait, give the ground time to heal itself; the seedlings would re-emerge, you couldn't force such things. Although people wanted their forests back, nature knew best, and perhaps it was better not to interfere.

Artemis put her hand to her neck, and touched the gold chain that was the link to her lost grandmother. She imagined she heard Maria's voice calling her, and for a moment thought she glimpsed her – staunch and defiant, dark and beautiful – before they ripped her tooth from her singing mouth.

She heard her voice travelling from the darkest corner to brighten the caves where her children hid, to lighten the sky now filtered with sunlight, music to her own previously closed ears …

Zoë mou, sas agapo.

My life, I love you.

She imagined her grandmother's head somewhere over the Taygetus, maybe thrown into a ravine where the Spartans threw their babies, her beautiful skull forever defiant.

Artemis felt strangely peaceful. Snow began to fall in small drifts in the sunlight, unexpected, and unusual for the time of year. But as her mother would often say, and finally Artemis understood: *Mountains are used to the snow.*

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BOOKS I HAVE READ:

Eleni by Nicholas Cage, Vintage; *After the War Was Over* by Mark Mazower, Princeton University Press; *Your Eyes Fourteen: The Mad Greek Dictionary* by John Carr and Paul Anastasi, Athens News; *Messene. A Dream Come True* by Eva Maria Lang and Waltraud Sperlich, Lyso Publishing Company; *The Courtyard* by Andreas Franghias, Kedros Publishers.