

THE BEST INTENTIONS
of
J.P GUTTI

SOPHIE VARIN

coll

Paris, October 2017

It is a cold and wet night. The kind that leaks into your coat through the spine to the fingers. On nights like these, people wandering the streets have a reason for it, and maybe not a good one.

J.P dials the code to the gate of a building. Half-way across the courtyard, he jumps.

A man has dared to poke his nose out for a smoke. He is sitting on the steps of the courtyard. The smoke of his cigarette is the same as the steam coming from his mouth. His silhouette appears against the light from the entrance hall of the

apartment building behind him. The light glances off his bald head and runs through a few tousled hairs. His thin body shivers inside a large blue fleece jumper pulled up to his chin.

‘ Shit you scared me! ’ says J.P.

‘ Hello! ’ Raymond waves his hand and the ashes of his cigarette fall in the same movement.

J.P drops his grocery bags on the floor and sits next to Raymond. He goes into the plastic bags and takes out two beers.

‘ See? You were expecting me, weren’t you? ’

Raymond’s eye twinkle like those of a man you’d like to trust.

‘ You’re always here anyway. ’ J.P hands a can to Raymond. They toast.

Raymond’s thumb runs around the rim of the can.

‘ I haven’t seen you in a while.’ He says and he takes a sip.

‘ I stopped smoking.’ J.P answers, shifting his weight on the cold stone of the steps.

He’s thinking that Raymond is the kind of guy

who is too comfortable in any situation. He can't really remember why they are friends.

‘ How was the holiday in Sicily? ’

‘ In Crete Raymond, Crete. ’

‘ Bah, islands.’ Raymond shrugs his shoulders

‘ It was great, but there was this crazy wind.’ J.P looks out into the darkness of the courtyard as he tries to remember.

‘ Yeah, the hot one.’ adds Raymond. He relights his cigarette which keeps going out.

‘ Yeah the hot one. And not so many people but they all had their own ways of being weird. It was so remote in Lykos Bay. Just a bunch of people always doing the same actions. It felt really slow and kind of rehearsed.’ J.P draws an empty circle with his hands as he speaks.

‘ Spooky.’ says Raymond, his tongue clicks after he finishes his sip.

‘ I think I enjoyed it. It was like being in the middle of a bad play about a crime, where the actors have forgotten who the killer is and who's sup-

posed to get killed. So they are just sort of waiting for someone to make a decision. Waiting by repeating the same actions all over again.' J.P draws the circle with his hands again.

' You and your stories... I mean, I like to listen to them you know, but fuck I wouldn't want to be in your head. And you, did you kill anyone? '

' Yeah I killed crabs. It was nice.'

' I don't like crabs. It's a very disappointing food, it's like you dig in this shit for an hour and you're left with a pinch of meat.'

' But they don't eat them, they use them as bait to catch fish.'

J.P is getting cold. He downs the last half of his beer in one long sip that says a lot about his habits.

'All right Raymond, have a good night.' J.P stands.

' Hell of a night I'm gonna have after your Greek stories... Bad actors and murdered crabs...'

J.P climbs the stairs up to his apartment. Always sitting in the same spot in the courtyard, Raymond reminds him of Nikos, the owner of the hotel where he was staying in Lykos Bay.

Nikos would sit on an old cane chair that had the exact shape of his large body. He was probably as old as the chair, and certainly as mute. He had long silver hair curling up against a strong tanned neck. He had an old dark face that looked exhausted, but his eyes were as shiny and slimy as a fish under a ray of sun, and probably moved as fast. Everyday he would sit there, on the terrace of the small hotel he owned, next to a large stone pillar. He was slightly in the way of potential customers, probably on purpose. One elbow polishing a wooden table, and next to it, a big plastic basin full of hard bread. At his bare feet there was another basin. He would put a loaf on his lap and start emptying the bread of its crumb and drop it into the basin at his feet. J.P enjoyed watching him from the balcony of his room. Nikos could sit

there for hours, you would think he was vaguely looking at the horizon, but from where he was he sure had an eye on everything that was going on in the bay. From time to time, he would stand. He would always leave a trail of breadcrumbs behind him, and stray cats would follow him everywhere, trying to catch some crumbs before they hit the dust. He probably did that on purpose as well.

His mind still wandering in Lykos Bay, J.P opens the door to his apartment and drops the groceries on the carpet. He opens the mini-fridge in his kitchen and realizes he still had beers in there. He grabs a cold one and cracks it open with a key between his index finger and the bottle cap. The apartment is dimly lit and empty. The kind of place that belongs to someone who hasn't been in a relationship for a while, and doesn't plan to be anytime soon. J.P walks toward a dark green leather armchair facing the window. He turns on a lamp that looms yellowly over a round table.

The cold moonlight hits the corner of his face as he sits. J.P thinks of Kostas and Pavlos, the two brothers working on the jetty in Lykos Bay. They had the same idea of how to be polite, both always speaking with a voice as soft as if they were talking to their sick grandmother. One that made you feel cared for and dumb at the same time. Kostas was the oldest, probably around his thirties. Tall and slim with an angular jawline and piercing hazelnut eyes. He was always gentle and quiet. His younger brother Pavlos was quite different. He must have been in his early twenties, with a round and smily face. Like a puppy, he was always cheery and easily persuaded.

The door bell rings. From across the room J.P glances at the door. Irritated by this interruption he is wondering if it's worth getting up from his armchair. The bell rings again. It has a horrible squealing tone. J.P stands up and goes to open the door. It is Raymond and he looks quite agitated.

‘ Where did you say you were on holiday again? ’

Raymond is shorter than J.P and looks up to face him as he shuffles frantically from one foot to the other.

‘ In Crete, a bay called Lykos.’ J.P leans lazily on the door frame.

‘ Oh man, I knew I’d heard that name! ’ Says Raymond so fast that he’s not really breathing.

‘ Ok, calm down Raymond, what is this about? ’ J.P straightens, he would like to have a cigarette now and he goes for his beer to keep his hands busy.

‘ You know the Greek woman that lives on the same floor as me? Well, I always accidentally get her mail. I also always accidentally look through it. And there’s this Cretan newspaper saying someone died in Lykos Bay, like when you were there, or right after, or something. ’

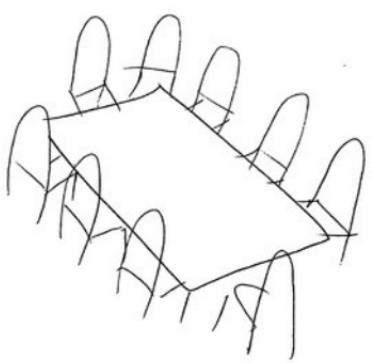
J.P chokes on his beer.

‘ Someone died? ’

‘ Yeah, like a body was found. I don’t know, I’m

using this app on my phone. I take pictures of the text and it translates it.' He shows his phone to J.P. ' So I'm not sure I got everything right, but yeah, sounds like one of your bad actors finally remembered his part! Maybe you saw something ! Don't you think? '

' Okay, okay, you sneaky old man. Relax.' J.P looks up at the weak blinking light from the hallway as he wonders what to do next.



Crete, June 2017

That last night in Lykos Bay, a desert wind was blowing on J.P's face. The warm and dusty kind that blows from one ear to the other and messes with whatever is in between. On nights like this every bartender has a job, and it is often to call the cops. Anything can happen. J.P and Pavlos had been walking on the rocks for half an hour in this wind, and all J.P wanted a bartender to do was to serve a very cold one.

They had walked together from the bay up to a

small outdoor restaurant on a hill. Pavlos' brother Kostas was not far behind them. Any other day, J.P would have gotten annoyed by this loud chatty kid, but he was actually starting to enjoy Pavlos' company a lot. When the two got there, the restaurant was empty. The hot wind was rushing from the sea through the furniture, hitting the only wall of this outdoor space. There was a small bar there, and between the bar and the hand-rail overlooking the sea, five or six wooden tables on which candles struggled to stay lit. A few colorful garlands loomed over this heavily varnished wooden furniture.

J.P and Pavlos took their seats at the shiny counter. J.P ordered two beers, thinking that with a face like that, it might as well be Pavlos' first. The bartender brought them small plates of tomatoes, olives, cheese and toasted bread. J.P had already wolfed down all the tiny black olives by the time his beer arrived, and he drank it almost as fast.

Kostas reached the restaurant and sat next to Pav-

los. He was not even sweating. J.P was pouring liters, and who knows if he should have thanked this mad wind for drying his neck.

‘ Not a busy night huh? ’ J.P asked the bartender. The man was short and stocky, and wearing a bright white shirt with sleeves rolled up to his elbows. His cigarette stayed sealed to his lips when he spoke. A guy you’d like to share a drink or two with, and maybe not more.

‘ Not a busy month”, the man answered. “First time here? ”

‘ Yes I’m staying at Nikos’s hotel on the bay. My name is J.P, J.P Gutti.’

‘ Huh? ’ The bartender raised his bushy eyebrows.

‘ JP, JiPé, let’s say it’s a short cut.’ Answered J.P.

‘ You know, the ones that are supposed to make things easier but don’t.’

‘ Okay, Mr. Shortcut.’ The bartender leaned close to J.P across the polished bar. ‘ If you’re staying at Nikos’place, I hope you didn’t count on conversation!’ Tanned wrinkles moved around his eyes as

he smiled. He seemed to be the kind of guy you went to see for some local gossip, but that night J.P was not interested.

‘ Doesn’t seem so talkative indeed.’ He answered. The bartender nodded and stepped back to get a towel so he could polish the large glass in his hand.

Suddenly, his neck froze and the polishing stopped. J.P turned around and saw a tall silhouette slowly entering the restaurant. The night was dark and the entrance was only lit by a garland of lights attached to vertical wooden poles. J.P could barely make out the man from where he was. The kind that moves fast and waits very little. Pavlos held onto his beer as if it was going to stop him from falling off his stool. Kostas stood up, looking at the guy straight in the eyes, and there was a sparkle J.P recognized as the barrel of a hunting shotgun.

‘ I’m looking for a teenage girl, blue cap and brown skirt.’ The guy said with a strong Italian

accent.

Suddenly, Pavlos' face had as much expression as a dead stingray and about the same color. Kostas told him there was no such girl in here, and he'd better get the hell out. They all stood still for a few more seconds, and the guy left. J.P put both his elbows on the counter to swing closer to the bartender.

‘ What was that? ’ He whispered, still looking at the guy walking away.

The knot at the back of the bartender’s neck melted and his shoulders relaxed.

‘ Baa, this wind...’ He kept polishing.

Kostas slowly sat back down on his stool.

‘ It’s the Italian guy from the hills.’ He said. ‘He’s been pitching his tent there many times and never asked for anything. Still, I don’t trust him, he’s the unpredictable type. People say all kinds of things about him, like he escaped from jail or he’s dealing drugs and all. And the tent is his hideout or something. People come up with all kinds of shit

in this heat, anything that could excite a bored melted brain. I don't care what he does but I don't like having his business around.'

' Some say he's fucking goats.' Said the bartender, looking down at the glass he was polishing with a smile.

Pavlos opened his mouth like he wanted to add something. Other people had started arriving to the restaurant, unaware of what had just happened, and he swallowed his words in a sip of beer. It was a small group who had come up from the hill. Nikos, J.P's hotel owner, came in first and leaned against the railing by the entrance to take his shoes off. He grunted as he bent his massive body towards his feet. He was followed by a Dutch couple in their sixties, the Van Der Oorlog, who seemed familiar with the place and dropped their walking sticks next to the counter where J.P was sitting. They were quite good-looking, in the energetic retiree way. They were fit and tanned, both wearing the kind of expensive technical

clothing retired hiking couples buy. The lady had grey curly hair and a soft round face that would have made a great primary school teacher. The husband was quite handsome in a narrow-faced, stiff-upper-lip kind of way.

A short while after, a family came in, two parents and their teenage daughter. They greeted the rest of the crowd with a short breath and a strong French accent. They probably argued about banalities all the way up. The girl took off a blue cap and dried her forehead with the insideside of her wrist. . There were now nine people in the restaurant, plus the bartender. They put some tables together to seat everyone. The bartender brought ice cold house wine and bread. J.P sat at one end of the table. Pavlos grabbed a chair and sat next to him. That kid seemed to need a new friend. His brother sat next to him, and the Dutch couple at J.P's right. At the other end there was Nikos and this guy speaking very loudly with a terrible French accent. J.P grinned like there was nothing

worse than hearing his own accent yelled around like that. The French dad's face was all red, don't know if it was from a sunburn, all the sweat from the walk, or a good amount of wine, but none of these were good reasons. He was trying to be friendly to the bartender who couldn't care less. What he wanted to know was what he'd like to eat. And that was what J.P was interested in. One to trust is one that puts his stomach first.

Pavlos poured J.P some white wine and threw ice cubes in it.

‘ You should come over to our place tomorrow before you leave. We make fresh goat casserole. I’m sure you’ll love it. I don’t know why you’re staying at this old fool’s hotel anyway. It’s not as if he needs the money.’ His head pointed at Nikos. J.P decided to ignore Pavlos’ last remark. He didn’t really care much for local rivalries and that goat casserole sounded like an interesting plan anyway. He finished his plate and started looking down the hill, where the sea hit the mountain.

There were two men walking on the rocks, water up to their knees. It was completely dark and you could only guess their silhouettes because they were wearing headlamps. Their bodies moved slowly and quietly, the light directed towards the underwater rocks. They were looking for crabs. At night, crabs freeze under the unexpected light source and at this precise moment the men needed to act quickly and crack the crab's head. They both had different techniques. One of them used a sharp metallic spike attached to a wooden stick, like an arrow. It pierced the crab's skull in one shot. The other one had more of a barbarian style. He carried around a pointy rock the size of his open palm, and when a crab froze in the light, he had to quietly bend his body to get closer to the surface of the water, then smashed the shell in a big splash. All this fuss seemed to annoy the more sophisticated fisherman.

This scene was hypnotizing J.P as much as those poor crabs. It's only when he noticed Kostas had

been absent from the table for a while that he realized Pavlos' brother was the man in the sea with the arrow-style.

‘ Not much of a talker are you? ’ Pavlos’s voice grabbed J.P from his thoughts and brought him back to the restaurant table.

‘ Well, the less you talk, the more people believe you think. Isn’t it great? ’

Pavlos handed J.P a tiny glass bottle filled with raki. J.P stood up not so straight and raised his glass.

‘ To not talking! ’

‘ To not thinking! ’ Replied Pavlos.

They toasted like strangers that became drunk, then became best friends.

From the other end of the table, J.P was observing the French dad. He was now definitely red from the drinking. The family was talking about a hike through the pine forest tomorrow. Pavlos couldn’t stop staring at the daughter with a kind of

desperate urgency in his eyes.

‘ You’re going to scare her away.’ J.P whispered in Pavlos’ ear.

Pavlos looked down at his drink.

‘ I’m too scared to just go talk to her. And thinking of approaching her, I already hear Kostas yelling at me.’

‘ He’s surely not the warmest person I’ve met, but you shouldn’t be so scared of your brother.’ J.P looked back at the sea and Kostas was not there.

‘ You can’t flirt with the tourists or what? ’

‘ Yeah kind of. ’Answered Pavlos, still staring at the bottom of his dried-out glass.

J.P looked at Pavlos as he was still staring down. He decided to avoid the friends and love stories type of conversation and turned around to pour some raki for the Van der Oorlog. He noticed the lady kept looking at Pavlos. He really would have liked to be polite and charming to them but he had forgotten how it’s done.

‘ First time here? ’

‘ Oh no! ’ Replied Marijke as if it was a joke. ‘

We’ve been coming here for twenty years now! ’

She glanced at Pavlos as she said that and kept on fiddling with her necklace between her index and her thumb. J.P looked at Pavlos too, thinking the Van Der Oorlog must have seen the boy grow up.

‘ Have kids yourself? ’ He asked, looking at the two with a forced smile that made him look like some sort of well behaved kid.

The husband opened his mouth for the first time.

‘ No, We don’t have kids.’ He pointed out quite abruptly and dropped his cutlery in his plate.

The knife and fork scraped against the ceramic and her wifes grey curls fell over her forehead as she looked down in embarrassment. Then she seemed to take in a long breath and looked up again, hailing the bartender in an exaggerated joyful voice.

‘ Can we have the check please? ’

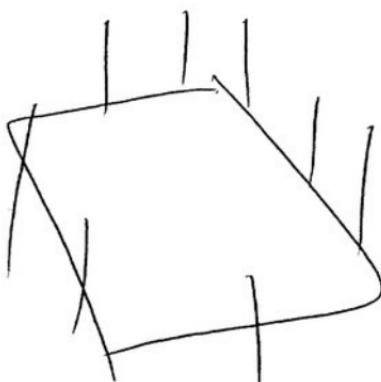
She went from one face to another with the desperate strength that some broken hearted women

have. It was admirable, but rather obvious. J.P leaned back in his chair and soon Pavlos left the table. J.P could see he was preoccupied. There had been something on his mind throughout the whole dinner and he seemed to have tried to drown it in wine. As Pavlos left the restaurant, J.P noticed he didn't turn right onto the path heading back to the bay.

They all started leaving the table in a joyful mess of spilled wine and plates licked clean. Cats were coming to eat the food that fell on the stone floor under the table, and J.P grabbed few olives in his hand as he passed by a forgotten side dish. Nikos was in front of him and he didn't head back to the bay either. By the time J.P spat an olive stone on the dust ground outside the restaurant, Nikos had already disappeared in the dark. J.P stared at the blank black space in front of him. There was surely no short cut that way, he thought. He turned right and joined the Dutch couple and the French family. Kostas was climbing up from the

beach and joined them. They were walking one behind the other, carrying torch lamps to light the way. The wind had calmed down and everything seemed very silent. Kostas stopped on the dust path. He said he forgot something at the restaurant and turned around.

He disappeared into the dark as well, with only the halo of his torch looming over the dust.



The next morning, J.P opened the sliding doors to the balcony of his hotel room. It was very early and everything was silent in the bay. He put his hands flat on the white concrete of the balcony and stared at the sea for a moment. The large curtains came floating from his room. It was the only time of day when the wind was cooling, and it was a reassuring thought. Barefoot, he went down the stairs to have breakfast on the terrace of the hotel. Yogurt with homemade honey and a cucumber salad, as he had been having every morning for the past few days. He sat down and stroke a cat that was napping on Nikos' cane chair, as Marijke Van Der Oorlog came up from the other side of the bay and stepped onto the terrace, carrying a heavy cotton bag. J.P stood up to greet her, feeling rather embarrassed in his pyjamas. She crossed the terrace as if she hadn't noticed J.P's presence and stood in front of the lobby, calling Nikos' name. J.P walked up to her.

‘ Can I help you? ’ he said, pointing at the heavy luggage.

She stepped away.

‘ I’m looking for Nikos.’ She seemed rather annoyed to have to interact with J.P. “We’re leaving this morning and I have to give this to Nikos, it’s important.’ She looked at the bag which she dropped on the floor.

‘ He’s not in his usual spot. Maybe he’s still asleep. Let’s leave it in the lobby.’

J.P grabbed the leather straps and her body stiffened up like a cat. When she realized J.P noticed, her eyes had already darkened in anger, but soon enough her face relaxed back to a round plumpy moon. J.P pretended not to notice.

‘ I’m also leaving this morning. Pavlos is taking us by boat right ? ’

She nodded silently, as if she couldn’t manage appearing nice and merry and speaking at the same time.

‘ Let me pack my things and I’ll meet you at the

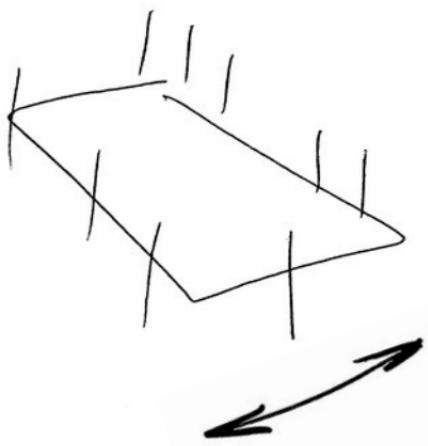
jetty.'

J.P came down a while after. The heat had already started melting the edges, and the early silence was gone. The French family was having breakfast outside. J.P passed by them fast enough so he only had to greet them with a nod. A very tall and very young guy in a cook outfit rushed to him. He seemed quite agitated. He made the kind of face a kid too dedicated to his first job would make.

'I'm really sorry sir, I can't find Pavlos anywhere.' He said in a single breathe. "But I wouldn't want you or the Van Der Oorlog to miss your flight, so I'll be taking you by boat myself. '

When J.P got to the jetty, Ms Van Der Oorlog seemed as agitated as the cook. She got into the boat and Mr Van der Oorlog helped the young man untie the knots. The young cook was making a lot of unnessecary movements to hide how uncomfortable he was. He started the engine and slowly lowered it down into the water. The boat was leaving the shore and Ms Van der Oorlog

looked at Lykos Bay one last time. Her eyes were not dark as before. They were blurred by tears that wouldn't fall on her cheeks, like hollow pearls that stood still, fixed on the shore that furthered away. Mr. Van Der Oorlog was moving the bags around so that the weight was well spread inside the boat. He noticed his wife's mournful look and dropped the luggage he was carrying with an irritated look. J.P lit a cigarette and offered his face to the morning sun. A bit of water came splashing on his sunglasses. The speed of the boat made the hot wind feel cooler. J.P thought of trying to understand what kind of marital drama was going on between these two and smiled to the flat, crushing blue sky.



Paris, October 2017

J.P pushes a glass door covered with steam and enters a small Korean restaurant. It's moist and noisy and the lighting is too strong. J.P sits at a marble-print plastic table by the entrance, next to the window. There's a warmth to the noises and kitschy style that makes you want to stay there all night. It's J.P's favorite place and he often stays there all night. It's as warm in this restaurant as his last night in Crete, and his beer is as refreshing, but things are different. The steam on the window stops J.P from seeing outside. All he

can see is red, blurry backlights disappearing one after the other.

He remembers the last dinner he had in Crete, at a restaurant up the hill, the night Pavlos turned left and disappeared. He keeps playing with a bit of plastic coming off his table, as if it's going to clarify his mind. He's not agitated. He's trying to focus on his memories. He thinks it matters.

Pavlos and Nikos both went missing after that night and now someone's dead and there's nothing reassuring about any of it.

Everything slips away from J.P's mind, and images dissolve in front of him. It feels like there's nothing left of it but a bit of dust running under his hand and few remains of this hot wind around it. Edges melt and weights shiver like the eyesight of some drunk at dawn.

The body in Lykos bay is getting deader and deader and J.P wonders who the girl with the blue cap was and why the Italian guy was looking for her, why Kostas went back to the restaurant that

night, and what was in that bag the Dutch lady left for Nikos.

The bell from the restaurant door rings and Raymond comes in. He sits in front of J.P, takes off his raincoat and puts it down on a chair next to him, alongside a package he was carrying. He glances around.

‘ I can’t believe you come here so often, it stinks! You come out of here deep-fried.’

‘ You have to surrender to it, bathe yourself in it.’
J.P laughs.

He empties the rest of his bottle of beer in a tall glass and hands it to Raymond.

‘ So, let’s see.’ He grabs the beer.

J.P puts both his elbows on the table and leans towards Raymond.

‘ It was a pitch-black night and there was very little light in the restaurant. Just this garland, lighting the outdoor area from beams directly above us. Few things were fully in the light and all the faces were in their own shadow, like big black

holes above each plate. Everyone looks suspicious when you think back to it. But the barrel of this guy's shotgun was lit up, like a cold and mocking sparkle.'

'Wait, who's the gun guy?'

'A lonely Italian staying in a tent. A mute face under a short forehead covered with thick black hair. He seemed to know the mountain as well as the goats and was climbing up there almost as fast.'

'It's one suspicious fuck we have here already.'

J.P could hear the noise of water splashing and the crab shells exploding on the rocks. It almost covered the noise from the restaurant.

J.P glances at a big table nearby where a Korean family is sitting. With his finger, he starts drawing a table on the steam of the window next to him.

'Look, the Dutch lady was sitting at my right and she ordered tzatziki. I kept dipping my bread in it. On the other end of the table, in front of me, there was this loud French guy with a red face with his wife and daughter. I got quite drunk of course and

things were moving with an almost comforting heaviness. Maybe the wind had calmed down and all that was left was this dark heat. Things seem more okay when your body's warm.'

J.P goes on.

' The Dutch lady was constantly playing with her necklace. Her husband was so silent that it's hard to be sure he was even there. Also in the silent type, Nikos was there...'

' Okay who's Nikos? '

' Come on, let me finish! He's the owner of the hotel where I was staying. I remember he was there because of the cats coming to the eat bread-crumbs stuck in his pants. '

On the steam drawing, J.P draws Nikos opposite the Dutch husband.

' And there were Pavlos and Kostas, I arrived with them. '

Raymond remains silent, he surrendered to following his friend's train of thought.

' With the bartender and the two Greeks, we all

had a good look at the Italian's entrance and it's as if we all silently agreed this incident had no need to be mentioned. '

J.P keeps playing with the plastic, it makes him think of the Dutch lady with her necklace, maybe she was also thinking of something she didn't pay enough attention to. He draws Pavlos next to him on the window. He can't quite remember where Kostas was sitting as he spent most of the evening killing crabs anyway. Drops are leaking from the drawing.

KOSTAS ?

' See, Raymond. ' Raymond leans closer to J.P as if he's expecting a secret.

J.P points to the drawing on the window but it's already covered in steam again.

' Listen, I think I'm getting somewhere. '

Raymond doesn't seem convinced.

' Come on listen.'

He orders a beer for Raymond and another one for himself. That's how you get someone's attention.

' Everything is in what happened that evening, it's

all in there. First there's that Italian weirdo that comes looking for a teenage girl. The only teenager in Lykos Bay was that French girl, and look", J.P takes out his phone, "these are pictures from that day. He was looking for a girl with a blue cap. That's her, that's the French girl. He only described what she was wearing, which means he probably didn't know her, probably even saw her from afar or something. Maybe that's why Pavlos was looking so weird that evening. He realized this girl he had a crush on might be in danger.'

J.P starts swiping on his phone.

' Look, then there's the Dutch lady. Here we can see her sitting in front of Pavlos. '

He rubs the steam off the window with the palm of his hand and redraws the table.

' She seemed nervous that night. Both the Dutch guy and Nikos must have been sitting in front of each other. They didn't say a word, mute as bricks, both of them. '

He draws them facing one another.

‘ I remember making this comment about how Pavlos is about twenty and they have been coming for twenty years, and thinking back now, it was like I dropped a bomb, they all looked away, trying to change the subject. ‘

J.P is looking down at the marble-print table again, pushing his thumb on the detached piece of plastic in the corner. His eyes are looking at the print but they are not seeing it. He’s picturing something else, something that is neither a print, nor a weak piece of plastic.

‘ Don’t you see? ’ He looks up to Raymond who has patiently been trying reach his friend’s imagination. He stares at J.P with a blank face.

‘ Pavlos must be the Dutch lady’s son! A summer love affair twenty years ago. They have been coming ever since! That’s it! It has to be! And something tells me Nikos could be the father. That’s why she was so desperate to leave this bag to him when she left, probably full of money for their boy. And that’s why she cried on the boat

and the husband was so upset.'

' Oh come on man, did I just turn on the TV here or what? '

J.P has a quick smile but keeps on going. He even forgets to drink his beer, but Raymond sure hadn't.

' It has to be it. My guess is, Pavlos left the restaurant to talk to the Italian, thinking he could protect the French girl, and with all the stuff I've heard about this nutcase I wouldn't be surprised it got out of control and the man killed Pavlos. That's why he was missing the next day. It's Pavlos who died that night. You know the thing that bothers me about it...'

' You mean apart from the fact that this kid you liked is probably dead? '

' Yeah, this Italian lunatic, even before he came in with a fucking rifle, everyone was already suspicious of him. Why would he do something so stupid, especially if the beach tent was his hideout for something else? '

J.P pauses to think. Something troubles him.

‘I forgot to tell you that Nikos – let’s say Pavlos’ dad, I’m sure of it – turned left too. Not right, back to the hotel with me, he went in the same direction as his son...’

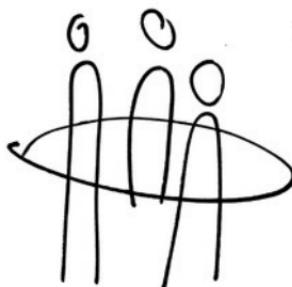
Raymond leans closer to J.P, his friend’s seriousness is getting to him.

‘ So what if the nutjob got excited? Nikos gets carried away trying to protect his son, beats the guy dead? ‘

‘ You know Raymond, that sounds very likely. ’

‘ So anyway that’s Pavlos and Nikos, with the Italian and a shotgun, goating around in the mountains.’

Next to the drawing of the table on the window, Raymond makes a circle and draws three sticks inside of it. They both stare at it blankly.



‘ Hey, actually I came to bring you this! You got a package this morning. You’re here telling me all these stories and I almost forgot about it.’

J.P grabs the big craft envelope Raymond had when he got in. It seems to be filled with something soft. The stamp is from Crete and both men exchange a meaningful look. J.P slowly opens the package. It’s cloth – a jacket. His shoulders fall.
‘I forgot a jacket at the hotel. I guess Nikos must have found it...’

‘ So it’s not Nikos’ body they found, eh.’

They let this information hang in the air between them. If Nikos is alive, that leaves Pavlos or the Italian as their dead man.

J.P flips the envelope to look at the return address. It’s Pavlos.

‘ Why would he send it? Why would he be in Nikos’ hotel? ’

‘ Well, maybe Nikos is the one who died then. ’
Raymond shifts from one dead body to the other like a monkey from branch to branch.

‘ But who would have killed Nikos? ’ ?

J.P stares at the window where the drawing disappeared. They are both growing quite anxious about trying to find something that sticks.

Raymond is getting irritated and drinks fast.

‘ Nikos was an old man you said, and a man who kept his mouth shut, living next door to a son who doesn’t realize who his father is. He grows into a quite angry type I bet. We have an old, quite angry man desperately trying to protect his son from the weirdo. I’d say our guy died trying to fish bigger than he could lift. My guess is that things got out of control and the Italian must have killed Nikos. ’

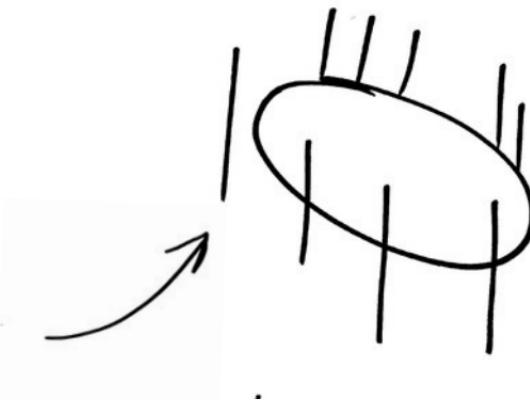
They both look at the steam on the window.

‘ You said he was missing the morning you left, right? ’

‘ He was. ’

‘ Well, there you go. ’

They both lean in the back of their chair with a slow and satisfied pace.



‘ Poor Nikos, looks like a pretty shitty life to me.’

‘ Shitty death too. ’

‘ You know what’s quite remarkable is how you care about people’s shit as long as you can’t smell it. I mean, what kind of fucked mastermind tries to solve a murder over dinner? ’

J.P starts piling up some bits of peanut left on the table. Raymond finishes his beer like he just turned off the TV after a good movie.

‘ Well, I have to go now J.P. I have to feed the bird. ’

Raymond grabs his raincoat in a slow movement

like he is leaving some time for his friend to say something. J.P doesn't react and Raymond silently leaves the restaurant. He doesn't raise his head as the blurry figure of his friend passes by on the other side of the restaurant's window.

J.P decides he's going to call Pavlos to thank him for the package. The jacket doesn't really matter. He barely knows him and in a way he has nothing to do with that boat jetty on Lykos Bay. He was just a guest from the place next door. Some random guy who discovered raki one summer. Pavlos and Kostas were so polite and affectionate it makes you feel special but this amount of dedicated care comes with a short memory. He looks up the number to the brothers' house.

The phone rings several times. J.P feels silly about calling but still wants to satisfy his excited curiosity. He looks around the restaurant as the phone keeps ringing. The Korean

family is still sitting at their table and J.P's mind wanders back to the drawing he's been trying to make to help him remember that evening. It has disappeared again. Did he forget somebody in there? Think back, J.P, think back. The phone keeps ringing. A waiter comes to collect the empty beer bottles from J.P's table, he wipes away the peanut nibs with a wet cloth and J.P can't stop looking at him. No one seems to want to pick up the phone in Crete.

‘ Fuck – the bartender ! I forgot about the bartender ! ’ J.P says out loud, slamming his fist on the table. Someone finally picks up.

‘Hi, how can I help you ?’ says an unknown and somehow trembling voice.

J.P is drawing the whole restaurant again, adding in the bar and a stick for the bartender.

‘ Hi, I would like to talk to Pavlos please. ’

‘ He is out at the moment I’m afraid. ’

‘ Kostas then? ’

There’s a pause at the end of the line.

‘ May I ask the reason for your call please ? ’

‘ I was in Lykos this summer, I’d like to thank them about something. ’

‘ Oh so you knew Mr Kostas... ’

‘ What do you mean, knew? ’

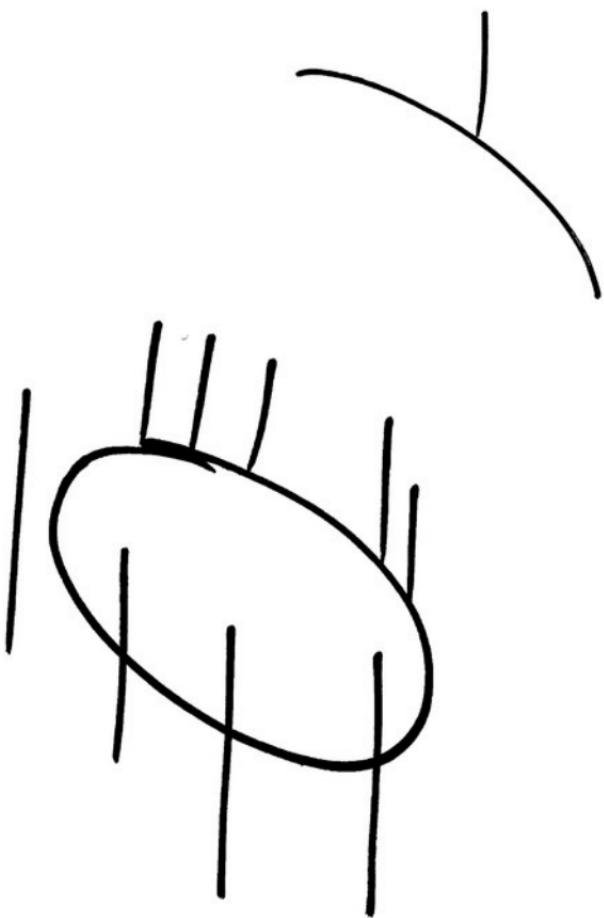
‘ I’m afraid you can’t talk to him. ’

‘ Is it that late already? ’

‘ No Sir you don’t understand, Mr Kostas died this summer, he was murdered. ’

J.P is sure he can hear the hot wind of Lykos Bay from the phone. The piece of plastic from the corner of the table cracks between his fingers. He puts it in the pocket of his coat and looks at the drawing already melting on the window.

Think back, come on, think back.



' That last night in Lykos Bay, a desert wind was blowing on J.P's face. The warm and dusty kind that blows from one ear to the other and messes with whatever is in between. On nights like this every bartender has a job, and it is often to call the cops. Anything can happen. J.P and Pavlos had been walking on the rocks for half an hour in this wind, and all J.P wanted a bartender to do was to serve a very cold one. '