

The Fall of Eros

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Marksland Entertainment

Part I

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We're in a limo heading towards JFK, squiggling like a black shiny eel through a tunnel of green foliage common to Long Island highways.

My writing feels stiff. It's been too long. The timing is off. I used to think when I was writing sentence after sentence that felt just right -- "Gee, that was lucky." Now I know, "luck" is when you're writing so often you start editing on the fly. You're in rhythm with the art. You feel what's going to work or fail just before you put the words on paper.

I looked over to see what Miranda is writing in her journal: "Ah, rose, your petals seem to betray. . . ." She's writing to a rose, for God's sake.

Who am I writing to? I can't even decide on something as elementary as that. But it's not to a rose, of that I'm sure.

Miranda senses me looking towards her, stops writing, puts her hand on my leg and sighs. "I'm really excited. I've dreamed of this since I was a child. Being with you makes it perfect."

This makes me feel downright heroic: I had carefully set up the itinerary through a travel agent. We wanted no part of a group tour. We were more adventurous than that. Exploring Greece, just the two of us, seemed like a far better idea than being led around by a tour agency. Even though everything from the culture, to the

language, even the alphabet, would be unrecognizable, we wanted to experience this truly ancient place in our own way.

Miranda was two years old -- from a relationship perspective. We were celebrating the second anniversary of the writing seminar where we met.

Both of us were coming out of serious relationships. Her serious relationship ended in a logical and clear-cut way. Because it seemed only she considered it "serious." Her tall French boyfriend fell in love with a short Spanish girl in the middle of an all-night dance party. The Spanish girl was half Cuban and she danced like nobody's business; she danced him around her little finger, in fact. He left Miranda, a shy blonde, sitting at the bar most of the night. They got into a fight about it once they got home. The fight lasted into the wee hours, and using the fight as the main reason for his decision, the tall Frenchman, engaged no longer to a beautiful American blonde writer who couldn't dance, packed his bags and moved on. He had a long month's dance with the Cuban girl until she danced away without him.

My last relationship was a tad more serious, in my opinion. I became involved with a pianist from San Francisco. A moonfaced waif of Irish descent, ten years younger than me, who became pregnant even though we were being quite careful.

Then fate arose like Neptune from his turbulent ocean, claiming us as its latest victim: We decided that since we were such great friends and we enjoyed each other sexually that we should get married. But we lost the child at five months (our marriage was only a month old at the time). There was nothing we could do to save him -- a boy, still-born. He passed back into the other world, which he had never fully left, while still being held in the arms of

his weeping mother. I was by her side, mourning the birth, watching dawn reverse.

She came out of the experience feeling like a failure, vowing to dedicate the rest of her life solely to her music, where she felt she could ensure some level of success. There wasn't much time or energy left for me after that. When she looked at me, or when I touched her, she was reminded only of the terrible failure of her body. It had let her down. She was unforgiving. She said, "I've spent so much of my life in a state of incompleteness. No more. I'm going to practice piano for as long as it takes, until I feel complete."

I wanted to try to have a child again. I consented to marrying her in the first place because I felt ready to experience being a father. But she was too angry at fate -- and frightened of its power. She was not about to attempt such a horrifyingly physical thing again. She didn't want to have to rely on the Gods to be merciful, and then fail again. That would have been the end of her. So she dove into her piano, and even during the divorce she never re-surfaced long enough to say a proper goodbye.

The next scene would be the writing seminar where Miranda and I first crossed each other's path. I was teaching an all-day class which focused on a writing style called "spontaneous transmission," a phrase first coined by Alan Ginsberg. This relies on the student simply putting pen to paper and writing uncensored, without judgment, for one full page, or five full minutes without pausing.

Since my divorce, the world felt fairly dead to me. I had stopped writing altogether, which I tend to do for long periods of time. But here she was before me, clearly very talented. Her prose

moved me. Her process was not perverted by a desperate need to be “a writer,” or a literary Goddess.

She was not trying to impress anyone when she wrote. Just as she never tried to impress anyone when she spoke, or dressed. There was a humility and softness about her. She was a natural, laid-back, fun-loving person.

Part of the talent she had was that she never over-dramatized. This is rare. In my profession -- the creative arts -- dramatic, neurotic, self-absorbed, overly-critical, myopic types are the rule. The free-wheeling artist persona is a rouse. Ego has usually devoured any remnants of free-wheeling tumble-weed rolling-stone states of mind long ago.

Everything she wrote and many of the things she said to me during those three days touched me deeply. And every look she gave me when I spoke to her was like an elixir offered up by Psyche. I became a little nervous around her.

It took me a number of friendly “just checking in” phone calls over the next few weeks before I finally found the courage to ask Miranda to join me for lunch. It was our first time meeting outside the student-teacher role. Of course, the lunch turned out to be quite good. Because something about me attracted her as well. I believe it was my overly-intellectual, physically vulnerable sides -- as I tend to struggle with conversations regarding sports, or the building of houses, nor do I do well lifting heavy objects, or changing flat tires, or saving kittens from trees. Instead she enjoyed my discussions of different authors, and the overriding tendency I have of over-analyzing everything under the sun, much like I’m doing now.

During the first year we lived together, as we got to know each other without the writer's masks on, she eventually took on the kinds of "man around the house" chores that every couple is faced with as a matter of course. She liked fixing a DVD player with her mighty Phillips screw driver, and standing on a ladder to whisk away a wasp's nest.

She never seemed to tire of my witty way of picking the world apart. She never asked me to tone down my sarcasm -- she saw it was part of my creative flow, part of my literary life-blood. And she enjoyed developing that side of her writer's voice by enjoining me. There is something very grounding about the cynical worldly voice, all too aware of politics and money, rip-offs, and odd people (in the eyes and ears of the cynic) saying odd things.

At this present juncture, where the travelogue begins, we are celebrating the second anniversary of our first lunch together (which we decided was our anniversary date) with a trip neither of us can afford.

I have taken on some of her spontaneity over these last two years. She has taken on some of my tendency to see the world for what it is, and not what it could be. I'll let you decide which one of us was getting the better deal.

The infinitely long plane ride, the eternal checkpoints before we could escape the airport, none of that matters now. We are here! We're standing breathlessly atop a pink marble hillside

overlooking the huge valley of Athens. Ghosts are in the air. Time can be sensed. History can be inhaled.

To the west, a small white church gleaming. To the east, one-storey homes of white and brown stone, clustered together chaotically like the remnants of a massive avalanche.

Directly below us stands the Parthenon, multi-columned like a giant pan pipe.

Behind us, the crumbling Acropolis, as permanent as warring humans and modern pollution could allow it to be. Ransacked by enemies. Plundered by Emperors. Eaten by wind and acid chemicals in the air. Yet it still stands proudly, wing-torn, against the backdrop of an ancient red Mediterranean sunset. An historic silhouette, with only the wind as background music.

At midnight the church bells ring out; lights dot the hills and valleys, sparse and dim across the city. People fill the many cafés -- finishing their dinners, nursing the last of their red wine, singing along with the musicians -- the human hum drum.

Up on the sacred hill the Acropolis is silent at this hour -- the Gods and spirits of Athenia play in its ruins by moonlight. The velvet Arabian sky vibrates.

Down here in the alleyways, as Miranda and I walk hand-in-hand entranced, the ancient walls are layered with different colored paint from various decades and centuries. Everything is accentuated and back-lit by spotlights. The lighting seemed to be created with a master's touch, like that of an art gallery director staging an immortal work of art. Every alley is a shrine.

The evening church bells mark the seminal moments with somber gongs, as the serious forefathers had intended. Their great great great grand children sing and dance drunkenly on the streets of La Plaka until the stars fade.

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Dawn. I sneak out of the hotel leaving Miranda to her accustomed late awakening, her long bath, her morning writing. I'm restless and want to see everything I can. I wander block after block until feel a bit lost; I can't remember the zig-zag path back to her. All the words on walls and billboards are in a language that makes me feel dyslexic. Being lost in this huge city is freeing in a strange way. I am fully myself. Connected to nothing.

I come to a street slowly stirring to life. Unshaven men sleeping under cardboard blankets, using their bag of clothes as pillows. A middle-aged man walks across the street, crossing himself. Fast little square cars. Smoky empty buses zooming. Pollution strangling the air. Occasional silence -- a still moment to sense something ancient -- an old brick church fifteen feet high built a thousand years ago, left on the street corner as a shrine by the city, newspaper and food wrappers laying around its base like an abandoned magazine stand.

Cool breezeless sunrise, early Sunday morning. The flea market merchants are setting up amongst the sleeping ones dreaming on their makeshift mattresses: modern Athens at its most humble.

To escape the dirt and tangibly toxic Athens air, Miranda and I visited the National Museum. I was expecting something very official and orderly and stuffy, which in many ways it was. Guards everywhere. Everything under layers of glass attached to alarm wires. But there was a section of the museum that made us forget there was anyone else there. We were struck by colors we had never seen before. Colors unseen on earth before or since; created thousands of years ago and then forgotten, or ignored, by modern civilization -- for reasons only a modern world could explain.

Hues resembling washed-out pink, that seemed almost sweet, if one were to taste it, and a robin's egg blue injected with the openness of the sky, as if you were pulled into it, able to fly into it. And yet these words fail to capture the energy and beauty.

These were the colors used by the Minoans, whose frescos now stood inside these museum walls. Their reverent images of nature said so much. Did the Minoans know -- something -- something more than all of us do now? So much culture, knowledge, history, washed away by volcanoes and shaken into sand by earthquakes. Their religion was based on the rebirth they observed in nature. They never imagined themselves as anything but part of the natural cycles of nature. Nothing less, but nothing more. Their minds and spirits were short-circuited at their evolutionary ascent. And 2500 B.C. lit up the earth with something far more powerful than electricity. They had fused wisdom and art on a level that we may never understand.

The myth of "Atlantis" is corrupted by our limited sense of what perfection and wisdom are. All you have to do is look at the

colors the Minoans used on those walls to know that we may not even see colors fully any more. We talk about Atlantis as “the lost civilization?” Athens today, Rome today, the Age of Napoleon, America -- maybe these are the lost civilizations. Maybe we lost our way long ago.

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Miranda and I have arrived at the boat for the beginning of our island hopping journey. The ferry breathes black smoke upon a smoggy gray Athens harbor. First stop, the island of Paros. No words of sadness or worry are spoken between us although our fellow travelers are quite a motley group. Miranda and I are in a quiet, happy mood. We are good travelers together. We insulate ourselves from the insanity by holding on to each other in so many ways.

Since the days of ancient Athenia the human race seems to have evolved like a spider with a poisoned web. I’m sure we meant to capture wonder as well as wealth and power within our little net. I’m sure we too, like the Minoans, have tried not to let fear and the sheer effort to survive overwhelm the beauty and freedom we seek. But something went wrong. Toxicified by Rome, the Dark Ages, the lures of the Industrial age, something horrifyingly important got lost. Volcanoes and earthquakes are at least things the human species can’t blame itself for. Everything else though is our bad.

We’re sailing now on a clear blue-green sea. The sky is cerulean. The boat rocks gently on the wide water. It’s 8:30 in the morning. Time for the skinheads up front to chug another bottle of wine. It’s been non-stop.

Our Paros hotel was in the middle of nowhere, on an island already in the middle of nowhere; I'm afraid it was one nowhere too many.

There was no beach front, *surprise!* False advertising -- unheard of in Greece! Only dusty rocks surrounded our hotel, with a hint of ocean teasing us from a billboard across the street -- an ad for a taxi service which would no doubt drive us there.

No town existed nearby, no shops, no cafés, no markets. Just rocks and open plain, embracing this little white hotel, with its frowning Greek owner resolute, unsmiling, behind the reception desk. He warned us in broken English not to take room towels to the beach. And did we want to call a cab?

It was mid-afternoon by the time we negotiated a price with a driver and were taken to the nearest beach five miles away, sans towels.

Back in Athens we had heard of a very special restaurant in Paros called, "The Balcony," which was apparently a long walk uphill from the beach where we were dropped off. We planned to camp out until sunset then walk up to the restaurant, though the hills and the paths around the beach looked desolate, entirely void of life.

The ocean water was icy; the town of Alyki was not exactly a tourist haven. Everyone was either sitting lifelessly at an outdoor bar watching a soccer match tied for all eternity at 0-0, or hiding in their houses napping in their shady rooms.

We walked up and down the small town in a matter of minutes. Then we plopped down under the shade of a tree near a white brick fence and slept for about three days until finally it was 5:30.

Only two more hours until the restaurant opened. Being Americans, we were already starving.

We went back to the outdoor bar. The soccer game had ended in a scoreless tie (surprise again) and everyone was leaving. We crept down a dark stairwell following signs to the rest rooms. We were hot and sweaty. No one else was around. I leaned Miranda up against the cool thousand year old cement wall and kissed her. She put her hands all over me and we pushed against each other like animals until the world caved in. Then we washed off in some very old stone basins with no soap or towels and came back into the blinding sunlight.

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Yes, there is a Balcony at the top of the world.

It is located a mile up an empty dirt path with no signs of civilization in any direction. We had walked and walked, getting more doubtful with every step that there could possibly be any kind of man-made thing up this path, no less a great restaurant. The sun began to set under an orange cloud over the sea with Mars twinkling on the horizon. We wondered if we had been set-up by the drunken Greek soccer fans. They pointed to this path when we mentioned the restaurant to them. Maybe they were all laughing now at this very bad and dangerous joke. Because it became apparent that we wouldn't be able to descend this path in the dark. We longed for our dusty hotel. We longed to see its

thick cheap towels hanging safely in the bathroom. We were lost, trapped, with no choice but to continue to climb into the night sky.

But then, out of nowhere, there it was-- a small house with outdoor tables. White aproned waiters were awaiting our arrival-- the restaurant overlooked the entire eastern coastline of the island.

Luxuriating at our white linen table, with two glasses of fine white wine served before a word was spoken to our waiter, we gazed out: thousands of feet below us lay an endless stretch of the Aegean, spilling dreamily over the arch of the horizon.

To the south we could see the little harbor where we had first arrived, with red and blue sailboats rocking against a backdrop of marble white buildings -- white as the cleanest bed sheets. Awnings of marine, apricot, and deep blue dotted the houses of the harbor town like candy drops.

The Balcony menu consisted of a vast array of items -- over one hundred dishes on the menu. But they only served what they had prepared that night! We were happily at their mercy.

First came stuffed grape leaves with a buttery melted cheese drizzled on top. Then a bowl of cool tart black olives. Then lipstick-red tomatoes, picked and cut in front of our eyes, still warm from the sun, tasting as if they had been infused honey. They were laid on a bed of thinly sliced sweet onion and freshly cut cucumber, over which was poured the thin lemon-tinged olive oil the Greeks are famous for. The waiter then sprinkled the top of the dish with feta, thyme and rosemary. This "salad" tasted like sun and cool fresh mountain air. They had managed to create

a dish that had the flavor of where we were -- a sunset high atop a mountain.

I decided on fish, but they brought me steak -- Paros cows obviously -- with an almost eggshell white inner meat. It was spiced pungently with what tasted like tarragon and a hint of cayenne, but the flavoring was subtle, which allowed the butter tender taste of the steak to steal the show.

For desert we decided on baklava and ice cream, but they didn't.

Instead they brought us a flan-like concoction topped with very thinly cut fresh peaches, with a whipped cream topping that was somehow flavored with banana!

Instead of "ice cream" they brought a chocolate parfait with a potpourri of fresh fruit swirled inside.

By this time the town lights were reflecting in the harbor, and an apricot fingernail moon sat beacon-like above us. We had spent three joyful hours eating, talking, breathing in the sweet mountain air.

Trouble in paradise however -- no taxi would dare traverse the mountain road this time of night to take us back to our little white hotel many towns away.

"No problem," the chef-owner said, waving his hand as if shooing the problem away like a fly "Nicholas will drive you home."

In the middle of what turned out to be a crowded night at The Balcony, our waiter, Nicholas, escorted us to his gasoline-perfumed miniature army jeep, parked next to the cars of the

other patrons who had used a secret back-road, and drove us twenty minutes back to our hotel. He refused money as a show of our appreciation, and honked and waved goodbye as we climbed the hotel's chalk-white steps. The simplest acts of kindness are sometimes the most unforgettable.

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Morning came without running water at what we now called "Hotel Nowhere." The pipes moaned and hissed. The owner kept saying, "five more minutes." Debating our options, we decided not to spend an entire day trying to find a swimming beach and towels to borrow. (Miranda refused to hide the hotel towels in her knapsack, fearing a swift arrest resulting in a month in a Paros jail.) So we headed to the harbor, scanned the ferry schedule and took off for Santorini a few days earlier than planned.

The Santorini ferry had a very different atmosphere than the one from Athens to Paros. It was a much smaller boat, more the size of a very large yacht, with a young crowd of upper class backpackers from Europe and the U.S.

After the island of Paros faded into the blue behind us I stood at the bow of the ship and stared at the open sea without blinking. I imagined myself a 15th century explorer and looked at the horizon with a surety that the earth was flat. Suddenly the long curve of sky and sea took on the optical illusion of an enormous straight line. I thought, if my senses could so easily verify that illusion, how many other illusions were our senses verifying? Could we ever really come to know what was really going on? Then an ancient voice within me answered: of course not.

I am from this point on writing this journal only for myself, so don't expect good prose, don't expect anything. In fact, go the fuck away.

I'm sorry. I apologize. It's the next day now and I've had time to reflect.

The reason for my uncalled for, rather juvenile outburst, however, is that Santorini -- Kamari Beach to be specific -- sucks. Jet planes landing nearby, a beach made of stones littered with every imaginable can and bottle; cars and mopeds roaring by, old creaky buses spewing black fumes onto the beach competing with the thick cigarette smoke -- a gift from the oblivious European sun bathers.

We scampered away like dogs being kicked in the rear, and walked to a restaurant recommended by a local tour agency as the best purely authentic Greek restaurant on the island. "No hamburgers, no diet cokes, no fried chicken," they promised proudly. We were expecting the lunch version of "The Balcony," I suppose.

This restaurant was slightly south of our expectations -- the lamb *and* the fish were literally inedible. I couldn't get a knife to penetrate the lamb (perhaps it was wearing some kind of lamb-made armor). Perhaps a knife was not the proper tool to try -- possibly a drillAnd the fish was all bone, tail, and head. Lovely.

Miranda took both dishes back into the kitchen, my hero, and politely explained to the cook that their food should perhaps be shipped to Turkey, since they are political enemies. Of course, she said it much nicer than that, so nice in fact that the cook and waitress assumed the food was fine and charged us for both of the uneaten meals. Those Americans have such small appetites, they shrugged.

Weaving around narrow mountain roads in a rickety bus we finally made it back to home base and settled into our hotel for the night. Our room was about 110 degrees. It struck me, as I sat on the windless balcony reflecting on our trip thus far, that either we were being ripped off -- taken for just another American sucker -- or worse, we were living in an insane society with equally insane ideas of what beauty and romance were. Ever the optimist, I decided society was insane.

Miranda wanted to make love -- in 110 degree heat. I was in a foul mood and waved her off. A hero no more, I was ready to be put to death by the King. So she decided to take off into the night on her own to check out the strip. I don't blame her. She's been as patient as anyone could be, about everything, which is the only saving grace to this trip. She's a trouper. She said she'd be gone an hour, and sure enough, an hour later, here she comes up the stairs. . .still nice! Why? How?

Tomorrow we'll travel up into the mountains to see the Minoan archeological site -- the real one, not just one fresco trapped in an Athens museum. And then, instead of staying here another few days, we'll ferry to the island of Ios, where hopefully our luck will change. We docked there to pick up more passengers on the way to Santorini and something about the island struck me. Will I be awestruck, or just hit over the head again? -- as reality

hammers home the fact that when the Minoans died in their volcanoes and tidal waves and earthquakes, we lost touch with the thread of who we were supposed to become, and have ever since then been speeding like madmen in the opposite direction.

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Of course, I wonder how much of all this is in my head. Maybe this is who I am: constantly disappointed, picky to the point of being impossibly demanding of myself and others. No, no, no. I am all those things. But this place is a joke, and Miranda knows it too. Everyone else around here, however, seems to be having a great time. Everyone I've ever met raves about Santorini. Well, YOU go then. Have a great time. And leave a few sane places in the world for OLD MR. PICKY.

It's 4:30 a.m.

I can't sleep. It's not so much the room being deadly hot and airless, but the thought that something is very wrong, very suffocating, with the way I'm living. The restless mind, unsatisfied, not quite fulfilled -- despite Miranda, a nice apartment back home, finances in relative order. Something in the pit of my stomach is telling me something is not right. And I have no idea how to make it right. Or even if I should try.

A part of my mind says -- you have everything set up the way you want it, you are very lucky -- charmed even. Find contentment. Make your peace, even here, now, and every place you go. Understand how blessed this life of yours is.

But the wind rises up from the ancient ocean and blows through my soul tonight, clears the clouds away, sways the very structures of what's real, and I'm left with this almost shameful illusion: NOT LIVING IN THE RIGHT PLACE. NOT LIVING THE RIGHT LIFE.

I've gone through this so many times before -- searching for a better place, a better mate, a higher path to wisdom than the one I am on; some deeper knowing, some profound spiritual contentment that would show me the way. But I also knew "the way" would circle me back around to where I am, and who I am. The questions would never leave. Only my decision to no longer need answers would be new.

These searchings, these questions, that maybe no one can ever find an answer for, may themselves be the core cause of the discontentment!

Something strong in me says -- just learn to hold these questions in your heart, find a proper place for them, but DON'T ASK THEM ANY MORE. Your life is by no means bad enough to act out some crazy plan that will quite likely leave you worse off than you are and leave you with the same questions!

You will look back some day and say you were blessed during this whole time without even knowing it, Take what you have and use it. Stop looking for a mere place to be, or someone better to become, or to be with. Some static image of the eternal redeemer. That can only come from within. Move on now, get to the deeper internal issues and stop running and running! Sit still and look inside long enough until you find freedom, true

freedom from this angst -- inside that freedom is the only place wisdom and contentment can be found.

But the ill wind still blows. The sun is rising, and the wind is still blowing, and it says: Inside of you is a vacuum, NOTHINGNESS. You'll never find meaningful answers there. Look at you! You meditate and simply fall asleep. You solidify conclusions only to have them crumble at the first curve in the road. Wisdom is hogwash, for you! It's a surrender to the void within you, that's all wisdom can ever come to, for you. A fancy way to rationalize the fact that life exists to just churn you, we churn, we crank the pulley of time then die. . . .

Or, follow ME, The Wind says, to a more incredible death -- more wandering, loneliness, pain, gut wrenching regrets, which will all come with the wild passion that only the wind can bring. Your search for the perfect woman, the perfect friends, a volcano of ideas exploding out of you like lava, the stuff great novels are made of, with virtually no effort on your part. All this can be yours, for a price.

"Follow me," The Wind calls as it whirls away. "It's OUT HERE, not inside of you. You're just an empty shell. Life is out here, waiting for you, at place X. Follow the invisible map. And take your miserable chances. Again!

HA HA HA HA! You SUCKER! Your entire life has been, and always will be, RIPPED OFF, by ME! Ripped apart by the wind that blows from the heart of thoughtless passion. The young naïve heart of desire. A hurricane is always close at hand in the Land of FOOLS!"

Part II

On a hunch, on a whim born of surrender and frustration, Miranda and I ferried to Ios. At least if it turned out to be as bad as Santorini it would be our mistake and not the travel agent's. For better or worse we were getting off the grid, taking destiny into our own hands.

Yes, the island looked great, the port looked charming, but we were now naturally a bit skeptical. And I was still reeling from a night of sleeplessness and self-inflicted mental torture.

At the port we were swept into a van colored with a tie-dye design to "The Far Out Hotel." It was "far out," they claimed, because it was a long walk up a hill from the main beach at Mylopotas. But the double entendre was obvious when we smelled an infamous herb wafting around the lobby.

The beach was huge, creamy colored, clean, and traffic-free. We met nice people instantly. I've been a bear these last two days and Miranda has put up with me. Now, seeing her eyes light up in this gorgeous place -- watching a watermelon sunset over the mountains -- I felt happy again. And happy that I could take her here. Let her experience what a truly beautiful island could be like. This was her dream, and why we came to Greece. Now, finally, we had found the place she was searching for.

Unfortunately, many others have found the place they were searching for at the same time my Miranda has. There are hundreds of college kids getting as drunk outside, and being as loud as humanly possible. But somehow it's all okay. Everyone we've spoken to has been very kind. I don't know about all the

things I was writing, thinking, in Santorini. Was it whining or wisdom? How can we ever know? I'm being calmed by the sun and the peace here. My thoughts are slowing down. Is it peace? Or is it being put back to sleep? Why should I care if there's a difference? It just feels better this way.

ii

Eros arose like a fire-dragon devouring the dark horizon. We made love for hours back at the hotel, first hungrily, then lazily. Miranda's beauty, her perfectly shaped legs, her blonde hair curling at the edges, her curvy waist and small breasts called to me, sang to me, pulled me back into her and away from my hellish journey out in the deep. It was not at all a Siren call, not some distraction for the mind, because it was more than desire and temptation that lured me; a pureness of heart sang across the misty sea and delivered me. Eros came roaring into the newborn light, illuminating even the darkest parts of me. There can be no peace without love. The mind will never find peace in its chaotic search for perfection. It has to let go, and feel, or it can know nothing that's worth knowing.

Plato would vehemently disagree -- with a river of words brilliantly ordered to be sure -- but I can only conclude, when I'm in this state, that reason and the intellect are a sham.

I don't know how many times I have to re-remember this.

Until I do, the Olympian mind games I play will destroy me from within. And the wars will never end.

It's amazing to me that sometimes, at crucial moments, Miranda has no idea how I think, what I think, or who I really am. When we fight about our core issue -- the thing we seem to struggle with over and over again -- she tends to assume to know what I'm thinking. However I defend myself she insists I'm lying to her. Of all the nutty things imaginable, she accuses me of flirting with other women.

This came up last night after we were spontaneously invited to dinner by a couple we met at the beach. They were very obviously attractive. The girl was wearing a G-string bikini. He was extremely well-built -- even his smile was muscular. You know the type. She was also dressed gorgeously at dinner, in a sheer yellow dress, with diamonds dangling, gold sandals. Then there were her long fingernails, and delicate hands that would occasionally sweep her long hair back into perfect place. All those with eyes realized without much assessing that, with or without clothes, she was a knock-out.

But if I dared to admit that to Miranda -- and believe me, I knew the question would be put to me later -- then, in Miranda's mind, I would be "dancing too close to the fire." Even though the girl in question was nestled in her boyfriend's arms all night; even though Miranda and I were as in love as we had ever been. It didn't matter. I was flirting and heartless, even if these things were only thoughts in my mind.

I was not a tall Frenchman running off with a Cuban dancer. I was not that kind of person. Or that kind of dancer. Still, Miranda

could not see through her own past, or see me as myself. She only saw her demons, her worst fears once again reincarnating.

So today, feeling trapped and sullen after a big fight this morning about having danced too close to the fire, there is no dance or fire left in me at all.

The very place I keep trying to avoid in my life -- feeling imprisoned, oppressed, is what she seems to catalyze in me. So each of our fears fit snugly into the other's.

But I want Miranda to help free me of my fears, not misinterpret me and pull me down. I want our relationship to grow into a trusting lifelong friendship. And of course, I want it to have passion as well, but not just sexual passion. The sexual passion is the easy part. I want the type of passion that embraces that deeper level of love – which includes seeing who I really am, and trusting my intentions.

I would like to actually get to the point where I could share an occasional fleeting fantasy with her, and turn them into a fantasy about each other. I often take her fantasies and push her closer to them; sometimes when we're making love I pretend I'm a young Italian boy that she saw in a magazine. I play other roles for fun with her as well. She enjoys that. She, on the other hand, takes my fantasies and attractions and becomes paranoid of them.

If I snuck off alone for hours at a time, or went out at night by myself to a bar a few times a week, I could understand all this paranoia. But if I just say hello to someone who is friendly to us at a beach, and she happens to be gorgeous, and lord forbid I accept a dinner invitation from her and her boyfriend on behalf of us, well soon I'm accused. "Come on, you know you set this dinner

up. You're attracted to her." And "Well aren't you dressing up fancy and primping tonight." All of this is said at first with a humorous, sarcastic tone. But then it grows into worse things, until I'm accused of flirting, and thinking about things that I'm actually thinking about. So I deny it -- I don't deny the girl is pretty, I deny caring about it, and I deny I was flirting, and I deny that somehow I'm plotting and planning things, or "setting things up." But she doesn't believe me. It's shocking to me, and alienating, and downright embarrassing to see her so out of sync.

It brings up some of my deepest fears about being in a committed relationship -- that commitment brings about a deadening, an oppressing of one's own sense of freedom, and a turning away from the sensual. As if one must, by some decree, turn away from any erotic sense of the world beyond what happens in the bedroom, then what are we left with?

The Greek God of Eros symbolized far more than just sex and desire. Eros embodied the creative and sensual aspects of all of nature.

The sweet smell of warm bread in the oven as you pace with a joyous hunger.

The feel of a guitar locked under your arm, just before the first chord melts under your hands.

Watching a skylark singing its song as it ascends into an open sky.

Jumping into a cool ocean after a long run;
diving under a wave as it crests,

feeling the salt water cascading off of your face as you
rise up,
tasting the salt on your tongue.

But to experience these moments and see them as gifts we must have a willingness to be open to the entire world of the Gods -- use all of our senses, *stay awake*, and lead with our imagination. We cannot abdicate or sacrifice or abuse our sense of wonder and joy, because each time we do they become further and further out of reach. We become out of touch with our destiny. Here's where this will lead: Eros will fall, crumble like an ancient statue, and leave only smoggy windless cities embracing the walking dead.

Eros is what Miranda could not accept in me, though she understood it in herself. Why else would she feel moved to write a poem to a rose? How could she write so beautifully? Or write at all for that matter? She knew! Yet she ignored the messages she was receiving -- that sensuality was multi-layered. Not all of it was aimed at seducing someone into bed. All this was being suffocated by a nightmare from her past. And I couldn't wake her.

And this indeed is how relationships can die. These kinds of fears. These misunderstandings.

One needs very little imagination to see how things can unravel. But how to put it back together, well that's a question of the ages. Because I want so much to overcome all this and make our relationship as strong as the fantasies she thinks I'm having.

The Ios young seem to have been looking for ways to kill themselves, romantically, recklessly, right there on an authentic Greek island, while having the time of their lives.

And the unpitiable Greeks who gladly accept all the money, in USD, or Drachma, or Visa, gladly help create the human sacrifice. They sell dilapidated Mopeds, old rented cars with bald tires, and plenty of alcohol-rich sacrament for the ceremony -- Greed marrying Hades. They supply the kick-drum heavy hard rock music that blasts through the clubs at night which the young Germans especially seem to love so much, so they can, mesmerized and drunk and out of money, dance and stumble away from themselves like lemmings off of unexpected cliffs.

Oh, those Greek locals, who would sell the soul of the island itself, along with their own peace of mind, just for a longer tourist season; who look at their homeland layered with litter and liquor bottles, crushed beer cans, and translucent pink plastic cups licked dry of the last drop of Tom Collins with a watermelon wedge, and take it all in with the shrug of a shoulder.

Many Greeks come from Athens to sell their wares here. They stand at the ferry, at the end of the vacation season, smiling, waving, yelling at the dazed children who survived -- "Come again, and next time bring more money."

Back in Athens, the war weary, bleary-eyed young who shrug at national politics and ignore the goings on of their own government -- here in the birthplace of democracy -- they say this, "Communism, Socialism, Bush, Reagan, it's all the same."

The Goddess of Wisdom has spoken. Sadly, she was drowned out by the mob. Socrates warned us at his own trial. We shouldn't be shocked.

The tourists and taxis and ticket takers swirl around the city streets on another windless summer evening. The earth turns everything into a windless summer dawn. No one noticed. And so it goes.

v

Our last night in Ios finally brought an end to the suffering. When we arrived back at our room at the "Far Out Hotel" after dinner, Miranda changed into some beautiful -- night clothes that she had secretly bought in town. She wore a white frilly top, with soft white matching shorts with a pink rose embroidered in a perfectly chosen place. The outfit was sufficiently loose in all the right places, which allowed my hands to wander and become drunk, caught between the silk of the clothing and the silkiness of her warm skin. She took a bar of chocolate and began feeding pieces of it to me while I was hungrily touching and kissing her. Her skin was tanned from the sun, but having naturally fair skin, there were still porcelain fine cloud-white patches in private places.

She told me she trusted me, and knew that she had her own personal issues to work through, not the least of which was the tall womanizing Frenchman that still needed exorcising, but that tonight was shining with us, and the rest could be discussed another time. Right at this moment she was trying to grow, and grow up; willing to love, and willing to take that love to its purest place.

Her eyes were bright and very dark blue, like the sparkling Aegean; she was dreaming from another shore; she had landed there with me.

Part III

All motion has stopped. We are back in Athens. In fact, we are back in Athens a day after we were supposed to have left for New York. Our plane this afternoon was cancelled. We have now all been squeezed into the "Hotel Phoenix." It's 100 degrees and windless.; airless. The atmosphere is yellow. Smog, like jaundice, covers the skin of the sky. Athens is on life-support, lying flat, motionless, eyes barely opened, seeing nothing, hardly breathing.

The only movement left seems to be coming from buzzing flies twisting in crazy circles, diving and disappearing into the air like little vultures ready to suck the marrow from already sucked marrow.

Miranda and I are murderously hot, lying as still as we can on our bed at the airport hotel room, trying not to sweat. Trying not to move a muscle lest we lose precious calories from our fat wet bodies. Our thin frames have turned torpid. We eat & sleep & eat & make "&" signs to save energy, and make phone calls on lazy phone lines that forget the numbers or can't find us a dial tone.

Life has stopped for us. We're frozen in a time we're not supposed to be in. Every plane we see in the sky reminds us of this. We should be "there." We've been left behind. I no longer have anything I wish to see or experience here. I am over-stuffed, all senses overloaded. I travel and I am a pig. This is all I know.

The curtain just moved -- maybe a moment's wind escaped from the mountains, pouring down like cool wine across the sky. No, no, it's just the air conditioner, with its ozone depleted long ago, blowing hot air, heavy as Blackstrap molasses, over our trays of

food and bags of unpacked clothes, tickling the fabric of the curtains in a monotonous mechanical swaying. Like the breathing of someone fast asleep. One might be able to calculate exactly how far the curtain will move forward, and no further, until the weight of the curtain pushes back against the blower. Over and over again we see the curtain hitting its limit and falling back.

No one is really going anywhere. All the real history is over. The buildings of today's world, here in Athens and elsewhere, are built like disposable diapers -- made to withstand civilization's tantrums and excretions for a mere hundred years or so. Why bother building a house or a skyscraper for history, like Pericles, for all future generations to witness and marvel at? Why build a living, almost breathing, monument to beauty itself? Why bother? Where's the profit in that?

You want history and monuments? Go to the Acropolis. Meantime, just keep laying the steel beams, union workers, non-union workers; follow the blue print and don't ask questions. And don't forget to pack some nice fatty meat in your sandwich for lunch. This is man's work. You're bound to get hungry. People without history get very very hungry. They are busy running as fast as they can, for no one and no reason. That too takes a lot out of a man.

Instead of landing in New York at this hour, I look over at Miranda who has fallen asleep in the thin hotel bed. We're both looking forward to a day tomorrow that will include a ten hour plane ride, and another two hour car ride for her to the middle of

Long Island to make it in time for her sister's wedding. The one day delay has cut things closer than we would have wanted. She is asleep for these few moments, aglow in her natural beauty, in peak REM cycle. I can see her mind hard at work, but there is a relaxed little smile on her face. I doubt nothing tonight -- about us.

All this I say while some older couple is arguing and crying in the room next to ours. How many arguments, alternating with nights of peace and laughter, how many nights of surety and doubt have they gone through? Will they think it's all worthwhile in the end? Or will it all just be a very long waste of time -- a life lived by cowards, afraid of loneliness, afraid of facing the self alone?

A relationship is like a city -- the history of tragedies, wars, passionate glorious days, the play of shadow and light in the alleyways, villains and heroes fighting at the borders. But without the solid moral and spiritual supports of the culture, history just becomes a jumble of relatively meaningless events, rather than a living monument to the simple and beautiful truth. No wisdom sought, none gained. No clear eternal flame left burning.

Right now Miranda seems to be sleeping inside a simple beautiful countryside, a place without words or time. I hope we can capture the elements of this in our waking time together back home. Flames can be used to melt things away, or to mold great things. So with love.

The Hotel Phoenix was built for the deaf business traveler -- built at the end of the runway just outside the glorious silver and black barbed wire fence of Athens Airport.

Intermittently during all waking and sleeping hours it sounds like there's a bomb going off just over your head. In fact, if you are fortunate enough to be outside at the time the bomb goes off you can actually read the name of the manufacturer on the airplane's giant tires as the great machine lumbers steadily up into the sky. Wind is created from each plane taking off, but you don't want the hot fumes to singe your eyebrows. That's why there's a pool. One can always dive in to avoid getting singed. Look up in awe before you put your fingers in your ears and jump.

The Phoenix is also kind enough to serve a free buffet breakfast to one and all -- your choice of bread, or toast. At least the line is never too long. By the time guests are done looking over the buffet they find themselves out in the lobby again, as the serving room has a pleasant semi-circular design. This way every direction leads you away from the food.

Most conveniently, you then circle around to the back of the buffet line again, where you can put the clean white china plate and unused fork and knife back into its pile, and even restack your square gray paper napkin. At least there are never stains on your morning attire.

Someone from New York who had also been scratched from yesterday's fight asked me, while biting noisily into his piece of dry toast, if I happened to know what "Phoenix" symbolized?

I said, "Yes, the Phoenix is a mythological bird that searches eternally for its breakfast."

iv

We finally flew out of Athens in a rose colored sunset. Then the sun dropped away completely, the hand that held it there was now gone as well. All light was quickly forgotten as we bolted through the jet black. Then sleep.

We were awakened by the sound of food carts. The food on the plane was a metaphor for our entire civilization since the time of ancient Greece: More, but worse.

Midnight's dinner was titled, "Beef Bourguignon," which when translated here at the edge of outer space meant: "Meat we legally refuse to identify, with gravy somewhat like Hollandaise (but tasting more like chemicals gathered from a truck driving through the Holland tunnel)."

I am reduced to a man nursing a cup of artificial orange juice after downing a multi-vitamin.

A time trampoline leap beyond this last moment -- I am back home, sitting in meditation class the night of my arrival. Three aspirin were needed for my typical airplane headache, which crippled my mind for a few hours. But now I am finding myself calm and still.

Miranda is at her sister's house. Not here with me in this over-lit city that is so much like the mind -- never still, never satisfied, never complete. I can feel Miranda's presence near me though; I know her better now. I miss her.

Eros is the key. Eros is the missing link. That way, even missing her is sensual, beautiful.

If we can't see the Gods living and breathing all around us; taste the brine of the sea in our mouths; feel the silky softness of a flower petal on our fingertips, like the silky softness of your lover's skin; watch the work of the stream as it climbs over rocks and tree limbs, smell the moonlight, hear the stars gleam; if none of these things are experienced and remembered, then what exactly is the point of being here?

Is true sensuality dead? Has Eros been reduced to just a means to an end? And to what end?

The meditation teacher is speaking now. He tells us, "The Dharma voice within you has the answer. Each morning, ask yourself: 'Who am I? What am I doing here? What is the meaning of this moment?'"

The Greeks asked the same questions thousands of years ago.
We've been searching ever since.

So far, no one knows anything for sure.

-- GM