

*Greek Shadows*

IGOUMENITSA

August 1969

“Can I come into your tent?”

Sitting cross-legged in front of my canvas, I slowly looked up from my book to discover shabby tennis shoes, faded blue jeans, a flowing shirt that must have been white: a surprisingly thin young man, with pallid, dark skin. His hair was cropped and of a color difficult to define, between black and chestnut, like the hair of his beard of several days. It had copper highlights, perhaps from the sunset rays that filtered through the pine needles. The voice seemed almost cavernous to me, and the accent was light, probably Greek. There was something strange in his eyes.

As I was slow to answer, he added:

“It’s going to rain.”

I looked at the sky behind him and realized that clouds had suddenly gathered, announcing one of those violent showers that often surprise you in the Mediterranean, after August 15th.

“Yes, take shelter, but we’ll be a bit tight, my girlfriend is at the cove, she’ll surely come running back.”

“The cove?”

“The beach, if you like. Between the pines, at the bottom, there are places with sand where you can swim.”

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Wild camping a few kilometers from Igoumenitsa. We had one day to wait to get on the boat that would take us to Brindisi and from there, back to France. After two of the saddest months in Greece. Okay, taking the road to Athens, through Germany (“next stop Dachau!”) - Austria (too clean to be honest), Northern Italy (where even water is not free, bandits!) and Yugoslavia (where we could only afford cabbage and... cabbage), we were not expecting anything cheerful. The coup of the colonels had taken place two years and a few months earlier and our group of Amnesty International activists had received enough testimonies from recent exiles fleeing the dictatorship to know that the *joie de vivre* of the movie, *Never On Sunday*, was no longer appropriate. We had nevertheless dreamed of being able to have discussions with the inhabitants, if only to inform our group on our return to Paris of what we learned, and if in passing we emptied a few glasses of ouzo while listening to bouzouki, or even learned a few dance steps, our activist goodwill would not be tainted by this. None of this. If it is certain that the living conditions were not as sinister as we had tried to imagine - and had perhaps secretly hoped to find something serious to tell our friends - Greece had seemed to us as sad as Yugoslavia, and perhaps even more so. As if it was all wrapped up in this *nephos* that suffocates the capital, despite the bright light of the islands and the sea. Skyros could well have enchanted us, we knew that Oropos, the sinister concentration camp was very close, and that Yaros, true penitentiary? Penal colony? of the political opponents of the Colonels was not far either. What remained was the elegance of the cypresses and pines, the meandering alleys where the lime of the houses made us forget the heat, the natural sculptures of the limestone, and the sea, the sea everywhere, at every turn, behind every low dry-stone wall, and more stars than I had seen in twenty years of life... Every night, lying on the sand, soothed by the rising humidity, we both

made a wish to each shooting star, and I was sure that, like me, Claire asked for the freedom of Greece.

In Athens, the atmosphere was heavy, the glances furtive, and the silence astonishing. It was like a black and white movie. We passed policemen and soldiers at every corner, the landscape was spiked with signs, hastily made monuments and colorful posters in praise of the 21st of April 1967 or of an orthodox Greece returned to its Christian culture and values. In the port of Kymi, where we had stopped to take the ferry to Skyros, a huge metal eagle with a particularly cruel look was opening its nationalistic beak, clutching with its talons the message it seemed to be shouting: LONG LIVE THE JUNTA! In the streets of Athens, the crowd, feverish and gray at the same time, completely ignored these two young people, poorly dressed in brightly colored clothes, who were looking for their way.

And then suddenly, the Acropolis! A shock! At the bend of a perpendicular alley, while we were going down Ermou Street from Syntagma Square, the spectacle had justified the trip, and we had immediately forgotten the awful palace of Otto, its evzones a little ridiculous, and the military present everywhere. Heads turned to see it better. If the heat had not dried my tears in advance and if I had not feared the ridiculousness, I believe that I would have cried. Lost in the maze of Plaka and Monastiraki, we felt almost protected by this benevolent marble vision, overhanging the city like a promise of serenity and freshness found in this overwhelming furnace. I remember feeling a little ashamed of the pleasure I took in eating one of those grilled meat skewers sprinkled with lemon, after weeks of salads and spaghetti that our small budget only allowed us, even if, in the first days of our arrival six weeks earlier, I had the impression of discovering what a tomato or a cucumber tasted like...

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I squeezed in a little to the left and the stranger crawled inside with difficulty. His body looked sore. Curiously, instead of sitting next to me as I had expected, he went to the end of the tent, behind me.

“Do you want something to eat or drink?”

“Some water, if you have it.”

I turned around to hand him the bottle, and in the darkness, I watched him eagerly drink more than half of it.

“You looked like you were thirsty!”

No response. The first of those silences that would continue throughout this conversation and many others that would follow.

“Where are you coming from?”

“From Athens.”

“By hitchhiking?”

No answer.

“And where are you going?”

“To Italy.”

“The boat from Brindisi, right?”

“Camping is forbidden, what are you going to do if the police arrive?”

Without pointing out to him that he hadn't answered my question, I added with a laugh:

“The cops came by this morning. They acted tough, but weren't too bad. We told them we were taking the boat tomorrow, they accepted a coffee that we prepared for them in our friends' Volkswagen hippie bus. They made us promise to take down the tent at dawn and they left.”

“Would your friends have a place for me?”

“What do you mean? No, I don't think so. There are six of them in their hippie bus, but there are only two of us in an Ami 6 break. We'll be a bit tight, we have three tents in all, we carry the others' because they don't have enough space, but it shouldn't be impossible.”

“I can travel in the trunk.”

“Are you crazy! Why in the trunk?”

Silence. Then:

“I have no papers.”

“And you intend to cross the border hidden in my trunk? But that's completely illegal. We could get in trouble.”

...

Without thinking, I added:

“Tell me why you want to run away.”

...

“Look, we'll talk to my girlfriend about it. If she agrees, it's fine with me. But we'll have to give her a good reason.”

“I have to leave Greece.”

“Are you wanted? You know, we are Amnesty activists from Paris. We came to get information about the dictatorship and to bring news to France. Claire - my girlfriend - will be ecstatic. Sorry... I mean she will surely be interested in your situation and accept to help you. In fact, here she is, at the end of the road.”

While wondering why he trusted me so much, and immediately deciding to ignore the question because I was afraid to guess the answer, I got up to meet Claire, who was walking towards the tent.

“I met a young Greek man who wants to be taken across the sea, hidden in the trunk.”

“Probably a political opponent. Did you ask him why?”

“He never answers, or at least not directly. He only says that he has to leave the country and that he has no papers. It's going to rain, hurry up.”

And she ran off towards our camp. When I knelt down to enter the tent, Claire was already inside.

“Yiorghos, Lucas. Lucas, Yiorghos.”

Smiles - Yiorghos's first - exchanged in the darkness.

Claire turns to me:

“I told Yiorghos that you had convinced me.”

“I know it's dangerous for you,” our surprise guest intervened.

“Not at all, if we get caught, we'll say that you had a knife between your teeth and that you threatened us.”

And she started with a big laugh before suddenly becoming serious again:

“We don't have a choice because you don't have a choice. And don't thank us, you would do the same for us.”

“In Greece, we never thank our friends. If you ask a friend for a cigarette instead of taking it from his pack, he gets angry with you because you created a distance. When you say thank you, you are distancing yourself.”

I looked at each of them in turn, with the strange impression that they had known each other all their lives, or at least that they were meant to get along. How could he not have been sensitive to Claire's charm, so graceful, so sparkling? So beautiful too, with her blonde tan and green eyes. And how could she have resisted this dark Greek, who was asking us to take the romantic risk we had always dreamed of in secret? Had I even thought for a second of preventing him from entering the tent? Or to say no to him?

The rain had started, and the drops were pounding on the canvas, making conversation impossible. The darkness was blue and no words were exchanged. When the racket subsided, I

offered to go get something to eat. I had spotted a kiosk and a small grocery store on the road before the path that led down to our improvised camp.

When I returned, loaded with three sandwiches, some tomatoes, a bottle of water, sesame pasteli, and a pack of unfiltered Karelia - which Claire preferred to all other cigarettes because of their flattened shape, which she considered "oriental" - I found her outside, leaning against the closed tent. I assumed that Yiorghos was on the other side of the canvas and that they had had plenty of time to talk. She now knew more than I did, and I was eager to ask her some questions.

"Come on, let's take a little walk before we eat?"

Claire got up to follow me and a few yards further down the path, I asked her if she had learned anything important.

"No, he didn't tell me anything. We didn't speak. It was very good like that. You saw, he has eyes like an appaloosa."

"Like what?"

"An appaloosa. You know, those wild horses that are often two colors in cowboy movies. Eyes that are a little crazy and full of light."

"Black?"

"No, more like a chocolate toffee color. Like honey that has been left to burn. But you never notice anything!"

"Me, the eyes of the boys..."

"You're so stupid!"

I thought that the eyes I loved were mostly hers. Green, pricked with small golden points. And so often laughing. Well, so often laughing before the accident.

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On the journey from Yugoslavia to Greece, I missed the junction that would have taken us on to a major three-lane road. Completely lost, and of course without a map, we continued along narrow mountain roads, skirting Albania as closely as possible. A few miles from a village whose name I've forgotten, a thunderstorm broke out. We couldn't see five yards ahead of us, and I tried to follow the taillights of the car in front of us - the only one we'd seen for dozens of miles. Suddenly, I felt like I was losing control of the steering wheel, as if a tire had gone flat. In fact, this road had just been tarmacked, and under the downpour, the surface hadn't held up. It formed a kind of sticky mud that trapped the wheels and made any movement of the steering wheel ineffective, or at least very uncertain. Claire shouted:

"Stay straight, stay straight, we're going to end up in a ditch."

In fact, we were driving along a steep precipice. The fall would be over sixty feet, as far as I could tell from the curtain of water crashing against the windows. I felt as if I'd been plunged into an aquarium for scientific experimentation, where a crazy biologist had run the motor of an oxygen pump into a frenzy to test the resistance of two goldfish. The windscreen wipers, broken by the force of the runoff, worked only intermittently. With terror, I realized that the brakes were no longer responding. It's said that in such cases, you see all the images of your life flash before your eyes. Me, none. All I could hear was a muffled thumping rising from my chest and Claire's screams. Suddenly I saw the taillights I'd been following disappear. Had the car gone off the road? My thoughts were racing, I couldn't, I just couldn't put into words what must have happened. And then, a powerful jolt that threw me back against my seat, before hurling me forward in a deafening clatter of sheet metal.

We'd hit a tree. One of trees spared by the rains that lined this side of the road above the rocky abyss. I turned my head towards Claire. Staring, chin trembling, hands clutching her seat, she was livid, but breathing. Gasping, in fact. It wasn't the time, but I thought this girl

really did have the most beautiful eyes I'd ever seen. She then slowly turned her head toward me.

“I'll never forgive you.

“But it wasn't my fault, it was the tar that melted. I had no control over anything. What would you have done in my place, for God's sake!”

“No response. Not that day, nor the following ones when we waited for a mechanic from the nearest town to come and weld a metal plate to the gaping hole in the radiator of my Ami 6, sleeping on straw in a farm where we'd been generously welcomed and fed. Bread, cabbage, and cheese. Never a penny accepted. Very few words exchanged. We didn't speak a word of Serbian. Or was it Macedonian? But each of our hosts' measured gestures was just right, soothing. And to this day, I've kept the image I saw in the rearview mirror of that peasant woman in the green and red kerchief, wrinkled and almost toothless, and her husband with his abundant black moustache, even though his hair had already turned white. Their hands waving in the grey-blue of dawn. Farewell, sometimes, means something.

After hundreds of miles, exhausted by the monotony of national roads, I decided to take a look at the sea. So far, Greece hadn't seemed different enough from Macedonia, and I turned off towards Volos. Claire answered my questions in monosyllables and never spoke to me first. So I decided on my own. I had tried several times to explain to her again what had happened, but in the face of her silence, I had given up. At times, I was furious with her, at others, tender and distraught in the face of what looked like a trauma - a vague, rather boring memory of the clinical psychology textbooks I'd been required to read during the physiotherapy studies I was soon to finish. After all, I was fine, so why not her? And why blame me? Of course, not everyone has the same memories, not everyone has the same story...

After the villages of Damouchari and Makinitsa, we reached Mylopotamos beach. In the middle, a rock divides the stretch of white sand. A little ridiculous, with its mass of limestone topped by a tuft of thorny bushes. But a gap allowed us to cross it. I wanted to see it as an omen of reunion. I was wrong. The only people there at that hour of the morning were a gang of six merry chums frolicking by the water. These Frenchmen we soon learned were Sephardic Jews, who formed a kind of libertarian community on vacation, inspired by the Sixties. Their tanned bodies and the curly brown hair of most of them matched the scenery so much better than our pale Parisian skin - especially mine, a frankly white russet skin when it wasn't turning bright red in a few minutes under the sun. They mingled naked and uninhibited in the waves and on the sand, and I found it hard to guess which of the three girls and boys were couples. In fact, each boy was more or less in love with the three girls and vice-versa, which gave rise to scenes of intimacy within the first few minutes that made me blush and lower my eyes. After the customary greetings, I was already thinking of going my separate way and leaving them there, but to my great surprise, Claire undressed completely and approached the edge to join them. I inwardly pretexted my fear of sunburn, which made little sense at this time of day, and went to sit down in the shade of a rock.

A few hours later, we were pooling our provisions for lunch on the sand. All six had introduced themselves. Jean-Pierre, the tall, friendly, muscular man, was a bit of a blow-hard. I found Bruno, the smallest of them all, a lot nicer, laughing all the time. As for Samuel, he seemed discreet but warm at the same time. As for the girls, it took me a while not to confuse their first names. Annie was obviously a spontaneous happy person who loved life and talked non-stop, Nicole, the youngest, marveled at everything - the sand was so white! the sea so turquoise! the waves so high! - and Clothilde, a little further back, looked radiant to me, with

her golden skin and big dark-blue eyes. To my great relief, they had all dressed up to eat - "nudism is no laughing matter under the Colonels after a certain hour", Bruno had joked - and between mouthfuls of food, Claire, suddenly roused from her prolonged torpor, asked everyone questions and told them about our journey. No mention of the accident, however. As we sat in a circle, she managed to avoid my gaze. Other than that, I was feeling better and better, joining in their fits of laughter that broke out at every turn, and if I wasn't sure we shared the same political concerns, I was delighted to hear them talk about the Greeks with respect and a genuine desire to understand them. Clothilde and Samuel had bought themselves a copy of the Assimil method and a conversation manual, and over coffee - they'd even thought of thermoses - they offered to teach us a few, basic phrases that they'd recently learned. When I explained to them that I was already doing quite well, having taken courses with Greek exiles in Paris, they immediately decided that we couldn't leave each other, that at the very least, we had to travel a little way together...

And indeed, we had traveled the same path, across the Pelion, Athens, the Sporades, before embarking on a quick tour of the Peloponnese, then Delphi, and on to Igoumenitsa where we had by chance booked the same crossing. Everywhere the same dazzling natural beauty, everywhere the same suppressed sadness as we sensed the prevailing gloom. Everywhere the same hordes of blissful tourists who were moved only by the old stones, sometimes without even admiring the scenery. And yet, as conventional as it sounds, I don't think I'd ever seen a more grandiose landscape than Delphi. The majesty of the mountains stretching as far as the eye can see down to the sea, the silence of the amphitheater amid the deafening song of the cicadas, the scent of thyme and lentisque, and above all the fragility of the three columns of the temple of Apollo's oracle. The following night, I had dreamt of the Pythia enshrouded in a cloud of sacred smoke: hieratic in her long white robe, her eyes rolled back, her voice hoarse, she promised me love. But soon changed into Cassandra, "a cock hanging from her black throat," as the poet says, she announced that I would remain blind to it. Half-awake, I shouted to her, "I don't believe you, no one has ever believed you." All day long, my head had been buzzing with an inexplicable sadness. *Kaymos*, an untranslatable Greek word. Between desire and sorrow. Nostalgia for what never was, and the pain of loss.

I had mixed feelings about our company. I was happy to know them, I'd even say we'd made friends: everything seemed easy with them, and I'd gradually seen Claire relax and start talking to me again. And yet, a worry gnawed at me: what if she was unfaithful to me? What if she succumbed to the Mediterranean charm of our new friends? I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but she was particularly close to Clothilde. They spent hours together, a little apart from the others, holding hands or shoulders. Our little gang was amused by the pleasure they took in lathering each other with amber suntan lotion, exaggerating the sensuality of their gestures for the gallery. I wasn't amused. We never talked about what had happened to our couple, even at night when each group was alone in their respective tents. We hadn't made love since the accident. No doubt we needed to let some time pass. There were moments, rather painful ones, when we were close together in our sleeping bags, when I wanted her... well, I wanted to get back to normal relations. But at other, even more painful times, I realized that I was already used to our distance, and even that I wasn't suffering from it as much as I would have liked.

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The sun was waning, and once we had finished our meal, Claire suggested,

“Why don't we go for a swim? The others must still be at the beach. You have to meet them.”

“I only swim at night,” replied Yiorghos.

“Only at night? Why would you want to do that? You don't look to me like you've got the type of skin to fear sunburn. Even if you are a little pale... As you wish, in any case, we're going. Are you coming, Lucas?”

I followed her down the path.

“He's really hot, don't you think?”

Afraid I'd look too uptight to recognize a boy's good looks, I answered evasively:

“I think his nose is too big. He does have a nice smile, but apparently, he hides it. I did notice the size of his canines, though. He looks like a wolf. And he looks so fucking sad!”

“I like that! And it's understandable in his situation. He's about to leave his country, and obviously he has no choice. Do you think we should tell our friends?”

“Listen, the six of them are great. The kind who'd give you the shirt off their backs. I really like them, but it's better not to tell them everything. We'll tell them we met a Greek hitchhiker, that he's going back to France with us because he doesn't have any money for the trip, but we won't say anything about the papers and the crossing in the trunk, OK?”

A few hours later, as we were all sitting on the sand by a branch fire, Yiorghos joined us. Seeing him approach from the beach, I got the impression he was limping. We made introductions. Everyone greeted him kindly and he looked relieved at their welcome. Like every evening, a joint was passed around, offered by the mates, and Yiorghos didn't refuse, although I thought I noticed that he hardly drew on it and later, that he willingly passed his turn. The first time he handed it to me, I took it and sucked down a big drag. Claire laughed at me nicely.

“If Lucas coughs, don't be surprised. It's his first joint all summer. He's always said no to the others.”

I didn't cough, but after two rounds, my head was already spinning and I started laughing a little too hard and talking nonsense.

“You know, Cassandra is a Trojan. She had no business in Apollo's temple.”

The others exchanged surprised glances, and Bruno's laugh broke out, soon to be joined by several others.

“You're wrong, intervened Yiorghos. The Trojans had the same gods as the Greeks. In fact, Apollo had fallen in love with her. It was he who gave her the gift of... how do you say it in French?”

I'd never heard him utter such a long sentence before.

“Clairvoyance” replied Samuel, who'd obviously been studying more than just Assimil.

“Yes. And since she refused his love, and he couldn't take away his gift, he decided that no one would believe her prophecies. At Delphi, I dreamt about it and...”

“Hence the story of the Trojan horse,” Nicole interrupted me with a look of amazement, as if she were making a great discovery. “Cassandra had guessed that this horse would ruin the city, but she wasn't believed, so the Trojans let him in, and...”

“Well, that's that. We all know the rest,” interrupted Jean-Pierre. “Shall we take a dip?”

It was pitch black, the moon hidden behind the clouds. Everyone got naked and jumped into the water. Even me. I wasn't sure, but I thought I noticed that Yiorghos had done exactly the same. He'd moved away from the light of the flames to undress. Perhaps I wasn't the only prudish idiot in the group.

As we splashed about in the exuberant joy of hashish fumes, the clouds had dispersed, and the spectacle of the moon left us in awe. All round. All white. So clear, with the blue contours of its craters perfectly visible. And the trail of its reflection on the sea coming right up to me. To each of us, I imagine. All victims of the same optical illusion. I turned to Yiorghos, who a few seconds earlier had been swimming beside me. He had disappeared.

A moment of panic. What if he'd drowned? I alerted the others, who laughed at my fears, except for Claire who, with a powerful crawl, swam back to shore.

A few minutes later - I swim like a block of iron - I arrived near the fire where the last embers were dying down.

"He's back," Claire told me. I passed him with his clothes in his hands. He said he'd meet us in the tent. "Don't worry, it was dark out. I really wish I had seen him naked, though! Hey, I'm just messing with you, you big dummy... don't get mad!"

"It's not really dark in this moonlight."

"All right, then. I admit it. But I only saw his back..."

Our friends had joined us. Jean-Pierre and Bruno with their guitars, and in front of the tent, as they did every evening, they started singing. A bit of Brassens, some old French songs, and others in Hebrew, which I found particularly beautiful. At some point, without anyone noticing - except me, no doubt - the tent zipper had come down and Yiorghos had come out on his knees before going to sit soundlessly between Claire and Samuel. Our friends' performance was on point, their six voices crossing, blending, and creating thirds. Nicole in particular had an enchanting tone. When she sang, the slightly naive child disappeared and was replaced by an inspired young woman.

As they all searched for the next song, a joyful gleam passed through her eyes, and she began to hum. It was only a few notes, but the two guitarists recognized the tune at once, and gently began, Bruno plucking a few chords, Jean-Pierre accompanying her in the melody. "*Devant la pierre abandonnée, fleurie de quelques fleurs fanées...*"<sup>1</sup>. Moustaki. An old song with music by Hadjidakis. "*« Mais rien ne peut plus ranimer, les cendres mortes enfermées...*"<sup>2</sup>

"But surely this song exists in Greek?" I asked as Nicole finished the three verses, the two boys took up the melody one last time and everyone hummed softly.

As if in a dream, I slowly became aware that one of the chants had turned into words. In a voice that was both husky and soft, Yiorghos had begun to sing. No one seemed surprised. "Η πέτρα είναι ο θάνατος, η πέτρα είναι η ζωή μου"... I knew enough Greek to understand. "The stone is death, the stone is my life." I wanted to translate for the others, but Claire waved me off, which offended me. And then I let myself be carried away by this voice, by the sounds of this strange language, its rhythm where the tonic accents never fall where you expect them to, which makes it so different from Italian or Spanish.

In the tent, without a second thought, I lay down between them. Natural to separate them, right? We were a little tight, but we fit in. Claire was in her comforter, I was in mine, and Yiorghos was all wrapped up in a thin blanket lent to us by our friends. In the dark, I told myself I was probably the only one not asleep. I could feel their heat through the fabric, and I told myself that he should have slept in the middle, because he didn't have a sleeping bag and wouldn't have been so cold. Strangely, I suddenly had the impression of being alone. Like a little boy who has pretended to have a nightmare in order to crawl into his parents' bed and,

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<sup>1</sup> In front of the abandoned stone, decorated with a few faded flowers

<sup>2</sup> But nothing can revive, the dead ashes locked away



after feeling warm for a while, can't sleep and feels out of place. Mom's fragrance is too good, he's too old to snuggle up to her chest, and Dad puts him off a bit with his musky smell. Suddenly, they both wake up with a start and throw him out of bed. Curled up on the floor, his stomach feeling hollow, the child hears the last verse of "La Pierre"... Tender with love, heavier than remorse..."

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Jean-Pierre's voice ripped me out of sleep.

"If you don't want to miss the boat... I've made you some coffee. Tell Yiorghos that we've gone through our stuff and he can have a shirt of mine and a pair of Samuel's blue jeans, if he wants to change. Also tell him that the local farmer showed us his hose yesterday and mimed explaining that you could use it to shower by hanging it on a branch. Your Yiorghos especially, it won't hurt him, and he'll look better getting into the boat."

I crawled out of the tent, and taking a few steps away, against all the resolutions Claire and I had made, I explained:

"He's going to hide in the trunk. I'll explain later. I don't know if he'll want to shower or take your clothes, but that's nice of you to offer."

"Hide in the trunk? Why would he do that? Okay, I won't ask. I suspected the big-hearted lefties were up to something. Ah May '68! We demonstrated too, you know. If there's anything we can do to help..."

"Thanks, Jean-Pierre. And thanks for the coffee. Now that I've told you about it, you can tell the others. We'll think about the best way to proceed..."

After the three of us had drunk our coffee, we saw Samuel arrive. He was bringing the promised clothes, and offered to show Yiorghos the makeshift shower. I was sure he'd say no, but he took the clothes out of his hand and followed without a word.

Claire and I folded up our tent. Between the trees we could see the others dismantling their canvases. When Samuel and Yiorghos returned, our new friend had indeed changed his appearance. Once again, I noticed that he was dragging his leg a little. His new white shirt suited him well, and the blue jeans fit him fine, a little long perhaps, but at least they hid his ridiculous tennis shoes with holes in them. He looked refreshed, happier than the day before, his eyes sparkling. Around the black, amber circles – *amber*, that was the word Claire was looking for. Samuel, on the other hand, seemed strangely mute, as if something had happened. As he turned to head back to his little gang, I caught up with him, leaving Claire and Yiorghos to finish packing.

"Can you show me where the hose is?"

"Okay, come on."

"What's the matter with you? You look pale, like you've seen a snake. Tell me there aren't any."

"Not that I know of."

On the way here, I insisted:

"Don't you want to tell me?"

"I can't tell you, I promised Yiorghos."

"Promised not to tell what?"

“Stop it, please. I can only tell you, after what I saw, that we must do everything we can to help this guy.”