

The Fall of Eros  
- a Journal

Gary Marks

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# Part I

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 at her, stops writing, puts her hand on my leg and sighs. "I'm really excited. I've dreamt 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 an international 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 joining a bunch of seniors getting on and off a bus all days. Even though everything from the culture, to the language, even the alphabet, would be unrecognizable, we wanted to experience this truly ancient place on our own.

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 that only she considered it a serious relationship. 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, he packed his bags and moved on.

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.

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 to become great." I said, "Define great." She said, "Until I feel complete." I thought to myself, when does that ever happen, for anybody.

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 to re-engage at the worst possible time. 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, a pretty sweet-faced attendee named

Miranda, and 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 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 had 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 loose things 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-story 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 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. People fill the many cafés -- finishing their dinners, nursing the last of their red wine, singing along with the musicians -- the human hum drum.

Upon 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 backlit by perfectly placed spotlights. The lighting was 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 grandchildren sing and dance drunkenly on the streets of La Plaka until the stars fade.

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 small street that is 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 scream by. Empty buses zoom past leaving a trail of black smoke. Pollution is strangling the air here. But there is 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 holy place, ordained untouchable by the city fathers. Newspaper and food wrappers hug its base making it look 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 were everywhere. Everything sat 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 our eyes 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 intrinsic 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 us? 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. 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 again 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, modern America -- maybe these are the lost civilizations. Maybe we lost our way thousands of years ago.

Miranda and I have arrived at the boat for the beginning of our island hopping journey. The ferry breathes black smoke upon the smoggy gray Athens harbor, powering up, like a modern track star bent and ready, shaking out his leg before the gun goes off.

First stop, the island of Paros. No words of worry are spoken between Miranda and me, although our fellow travelers are quite a motley group. We are in a quiet, happy mood regardless. We are good travelers together. We insulate ourselves from the insanity by holding onto each other in so many ways.

These young men with shaved heads, cigarette stubs dangling from their pierced lips, and bottles of wine in their hands at 8am are a wonder to us. 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. Toxified by Rome, the Dark Ages, the lures of the Industrial age, and the Computer 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.

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 be pleased to 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 paths up the hill 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. There were no shops to even consider buying anything. So we plopped down under the shade of a tree near a white brick fence and slept for what seemed like 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 slowly leaving. We crept down a dark stairwell following signs to the rest rooms. We were hot and sweaty. Covered in sand. 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 hot blinding sunlight.

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 or life of any kind. We had walked and walked, doubts growing with every step. How could there possibly be any kind of man-made thing this far up a dirt 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 rip-off 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 white stucco 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 house wine served before a word was spoken, 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. Across from them were 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 house made stuffed grape leaves with a subtle buttery sauce melted on top. Then came 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 with sugar. They were laid on a bed of thinly sliced sweet onion and freshly picked cucumber, thinly sliced. Sprinkled atop this simple dish was the thin lemon-tinged olive oil the Greeks are famous for. The waiter then pinched and sprinkled thyme and rosemary from a bowl. 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.

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

pepper, but the flavoring was subtle, which allowed the buttery tender taste of the steak to steal the show.

For desert we assumed 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-clear 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. And walking anywhere would be death-defying in the pitch blackness.

"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 all the other patrons who had used a secret back-road. He drove us twenty minutes back to our hotel, refusing money as a show of

our appreciation. After hugging us both goodnight Nicholas honked and waved goodbye as we climbed the hotel's chalk-white steps. The simplest acts of kindness are sometimes the most unforgettable.

Morning arose without running water at what we called “Hotel Nowhere.” The pipes moaned and hissed. The owner kept saying, “five more minutes” -- perhaps he was heating water for us in big pots in the basement. 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 as true? Could we ever 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 land nearby this beach made of small stones, littered with every imaginable can and bottle. Cars and mopeds go roaring by, old creaky buses spew black fumes right onto the beach, competing with the thick cigarette smoke -- a gift from the oblivious European sun bathers. I never thought I could care this little about topless women.

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 knife-proof vest). Or perhaps a knife was not the proper tool to try -- possibly a drill . . . . And 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 were 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 porch reflecting on our trip thus far, that either we were being 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 of the Travel Agents. It would be the quickest way to put me out of my misery. 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 being 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 had docked at Ios 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 been speeding like madmen in the opposite direction, waving our arms in glee as we entered the golden gates of modernity.

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. Just leave a few sane places in the world for OLD MR. PICKY.

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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, 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, sways the foundation, threatens to topple 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.

These searchings, these questions, that maybe no one can ever find an answer to, may themselves be the core cause of the discontentment I feel. Ironic, perilous, and pitiful as that may be.

Something strong within me says -- just learn to hold these questions in your mind, 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 someday and say you were blessed during this whole time without even knowing it. So stop looking. Move on now, get to your deeper internal issues and stop running and running! Sit still, and look inside long enough until you find freedom, true freedom -- inside that freedom is the only place wisdom and contentment can be found.

But ill winds still blow. The sun is rising, and the inner currents are bubbling, relentless. The Wind says: Inside of you is a vacuum, NOTHINGNESS. You'll never find meaningful answers. Look at you! You meditate and fall asleep. You solidify conclusions only to have them crumble at the first curve in the road. Wisdom is hogwash, *for you!* "Surrender to the void." That's all wisdom can ever be for you.

Or, follow ME, The Wind says, to a more incredible death -- wandering, loneliness, pain, gut-wrenching regrets, which comes with the wild passion that only the wind can offer. 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 true effort on your part to create anything of value. 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 treasure map."

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 always ends up here. A hurricane is always close at hand in the Land of fools!

## Part II

On a hunch, on a whim that was 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 tie-dye colored van to The Far Out Hotel. It was "far out," they claimed, because it was a long walk up 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 real 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. Happy that I could take her to this place. Let her experience what a truly beautiful Greek island could be like. This was her dream, and it's why we came to Greece. Now, finally, we had found the place she was searching for.

Unfortunately, many others had found the place they were searching for. Hundreds of college kids were getting as drunk outside the hotel, and being as loud as humanly possible.

But somehow it was all okay. Everyone we'd spoken to was very kind. I don't know about all those 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 that peace? Or is that being put back to sleep? Why should I care if there's a difference? It just feels better this way.

Eros arose like a fire-dragon, devouring the dark horizon with its blazing light. We made love for hours in our hotel, first hungrily, then lazily. Miranda's beauty, her perfectly shaped legs, her blonde hair curling at the edges, her curvy waist, 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 to her. There was pureness of heart that delivered me. Eros came roaring into the newborn light, with a message. There can be no peace without love. The mind will never find peace in its chaotic search for perfection. It has to let go of the mind, and feel, sense, be, 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. But 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 only thing we seem to struggle with over and over again -- she tends to assume to know my thoughts. However I might 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 obviously very attractive. The girl was wearing a G-string bikini at the time. He was handsome and muscular -- even his smile was muscular. You know the type. She was also dressed gorgeously at dinner, in a sheer yellow dress, with diamonds dangling, and gold sandals. She had long fingernails and delicate hands that would occasionally sweep her long hair back into perfect place. Anyone with eyes would realize 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. None of that mattered. I was flirting and heartless.

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 own demons, her worst fears reincarnating.

So today, feeling trapped and sullen after a big fight with her 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 the place she pushes me into. So each of our fears fit snugly into the other's.

I want Miranda to help free me, not misinterpret me and pull me down. I want our relationship to grow into a trusting lifelong passionate friendship. The sexual passion is the easy part. I want the type of passion that embraces a deeper level – 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 and with 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 once. I play other roles for fun with her as well. She enjoys that. She, on the other hand, takes my fantasies and attractions and makes them something I intend to actualize.

If I snuck off alone for hours at a time, or went out at night by myself to a pick-up bar a few times a week, I could understand all this paranoia. But if I just say hello to someone who is friendly to both of 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 all fancy and primping yourself tonight." All of this is said at first with a humorous, sarcastic tone while I shave.

But then it grows into worse things, until I'm accused of plotting and planning things, or "setting things up." She doesn't believe my denials. It's shocking to me, and alienating, and downright embarrassing to see her so out of sync with reality.

It brings up some of my deepest fears about being in a committed relationship -- that commitment brings about a deadening, 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 wildness. The aliveness in us.

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

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. Eros will fall, crumble like an ancient statue, and leave only smog-filled 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? She knew! Yet she ignored the messages she was receiving -- she didn't hear from Eros clearly enough that sensuality was multi-layered. Not all of it was aimed at seducing someone. 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 all back together, well that's a question for the ages. Because I want so much to overcome all this, and to make our relationship as exciting as the fantasies she thinks I'm having.

The unpitiable Greek merchants gladly sell dilapidated Mopeds, old rented cars with bald tires, and plenty of alcohol-rich sacrament for their daily Fleece-the-Tourists ceremony -- Greed marrying Hades. They supply the outdated kick-drum heavy disco CDs that blast through the clubs at night, which the young seem to love so much, until mesmerized and drunk, they stumble like lemmings off unexpected cliffs.

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 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 notices. And so it goes.

The Goddess of Wisdom has spoken. Sadly, she's being beaten with a stick by the mob.

Socrates warned us all at his own trial. We shouldn't be shocked.

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 -- sleepwear that she had secretly bought in town. She wore a white frilly top, with soft white matching shorts with a small pink rose embroidered on one side. 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. 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, but that tonight we needed to grow, and grow up; be 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 held out her hand to take me there.

## 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 all now 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 at anything it senses.

Miranda and I are murderously hot, lying as still as we can on our bed in 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 can't find the dial tone.

Life has stopped for us. We're stuck 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." Life has left us behind. I no longer have anything I wish to see or experience here. I am over-stuffed, senses overloaded. I breathe and I am a pig. This is all I know.

The curtain just moved -- perhaps a moment's wind that escaped from the mountains, pouring down to us like cool wine across the sky. No, no, it's just the air conditioner, with its ozone having been depleted long ago, blowing hot air, heavy as Blackstrap molasses, over our trays of food and bags of unpacked clothes. It tickles the fabric of the curtain in a monotonous mechanical motion. Like the breathing out of someone fast asleep. One might be able to calculate exactly how far the curtain will move forward, before pushing back against the blower. Over and over again we see the curtain hitting its limit and falling back. Hitting its limit and falling back.

No one is really going anywhere. All the real history-making is over. The buildings of today's world, both here in Athens and elsewhere, are built like disposable diapers -- made to withstand civilization's tantrums and excretions for a mere hundred years at most. 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? 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 away from their days and nights. That 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 this thin cement-hard 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 just 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 all this just be considered a very long waste of time -- a life lived by cowards, afraid of loneliness, afraid of facing themselves alone?

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 in the back of the hotel. One can always dive in to avoid getting singed. Look up in awe before you put your fingers in your ears from the reverberant noise 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 surprisingly out the 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 unused 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 rises and searches eternally for its breakfast."

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

A relationship is like a city -- the historic tragedies of war, passionate glorious days of victory, the play of shadow and light in every alleyway. Right now Miranda seems to be sleeping out in the countryside, a place without words or time. Fires burn to warm cold evenings. Flames can be used to melt things away, or to mold great things. As is true with love.

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 (since it was created from chemicals gathered from truck exhaust while said truck was driving through the Holland tunnel)."

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

A time trampoline leap beyond landing at JFK -- I am now back home, sitting in meditation class.

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. 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. It creates longing. Longing is the wine Eros drinks.

If we can't see Gods living and breathing all around us; taste the brine of the sea in our mouths; feel the silky softness of a flower as if it's the silky softness of your lover's skin; watch the work of the stream as it climbs across rocks and tree roots, 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, or anywhere?

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.