

The Fall of Eros

Gary Marks

C 2008 Arewea Co

Part I

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 just looked over to see what Miranda was 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 going to Greece 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 like cattle by a tour agency. Even though everything there, from the culture, to the language, to the alphabet was going to be unrecognizable, we wanted to experience such a truly ancient place from a fresh perspective.

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; 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 when 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.

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, as all modern intellectual couples who aren't at all sure about committing tend to be.

Then fate arose like Neptune from the chaotic ocean, powerfully 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. So we did. 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 in her arms. I was by her side, mourning the birth, watching dawn reverse its trajectory.

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 insure 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 a 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 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, and rely on the Gods to be merciful, and fail again. That would have been the end of her. So she dove into her piano, and even during the divorce she never surfaced long enough to say a proper goodbye to me.

Back to the writing seminar where Miranda and I first crossed each other's path. I was teaching the seminar, which focused on a writing style called spontaneous transmission, a phrase first termed by Alan Ginsberg. Everything she wrote and said to me during those three days, every look she gave me when I spoke to her, was like an elixir offered up by Psyche.

Until that time, since the divorce, the world had felt fairly dead to me. I had stopped writing, which I do for long periods of time. But here she was before me, beautiful in flesh and spirit. Clearly she was 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 at all trying to impress when she wrote. She was a natural, and a very laid back fun loving person, it seemed. Things came effortlessly while she smiled her way through life. She could feel, she could fall, but she took it all in with deep perspective. Part of the talent in her writing is 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 devoured any remnants of a free wheeling tumble-weed rolling stone state of mind long ago.

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.

Something about me moved her. I believe she was attracted to my overly-intellectual vulnerabilities – 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. 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 also enjoyed my witty way of picking apart the world. It didn't tire her. 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 and rip-offs lurking in every corner.

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 more of my tendency to want 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.

ii

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 near to permanent as a moth flying towards a flame. Yet it stands proudly, wing-torn against the ancient red Mediterranean sky. Enemies tried to destroy it. Wind and time have tried to erode it into dust. Yet its life force is still in tact.

At midnight the church bells ring out in the Arabian sky; lights dotting the hills and valleys, sparse and dim across the city. People fill the many cafés – singing along with the musicians, finishing their dinners, nursing the last of their red wine – 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.

Down here in the alleyways, as Miranda and I walk hand in hand entranced by the air itself, the building walls, with layers of different colored paint showing through in varying degrees from decades and centuries past, are back-lit by spotlights and lamp lights created with the master's touch of an art gallery director staging a work of art. Every alley is a shrine.

The evening church bells mark the seminal moments, 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.

Dawn. I sneak out of the hotel leaving Miranda to her accustomed late morning rising, 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, can't remember the zig-zag way back to her. All the writing is in a language that looks dyslexic. Feeling lost in this huge city is freeing in a strange way. I am fully myself. Connected to nothing.

I come to a place 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, and a robin's egg blue injected with the openness of the sky's atmosphere. But that description does them no justice at all.

These were the colors used by the Minoans, whose frescos now stood inside these museum walls. The colors and 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. 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 fused wisdom and art on a level that we may never know again.

The myth of "Atlantis" is corrupted by our limited sense of what perfection and wisdom are by the definitions of today. All you have to do is look at the colors the Minoans used to know that we don't 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.

v

Miranda and I board 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 was spoken between us although our fellow travelers were 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 web of the industrial age. Volcanoes and earthquakes are at least things the human species can't blame itself for.

We're sailing now on a clear blue-green sea. The skies are clear above us. It's 8:30 in the morning. Time for the skinheads up front to chug another bottle of wine.

vi

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

There was no beach front, *surprise*, false advertising – unheard of in Greece! Only dusty rocks adjoined us, with a hint of ocean teasing us from a distant horizon.

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.

It was mid-afternoon by the time we hopped in a taxi and were driven to the nearest beach five miles away, sans towels.

Back in Athens we heard of a very special restaurant in Paros called, "The Balcony," which was apparently a long walk uphill from this beach. We planned to stay until sunset then walk up to the restaurant, though the hill and the path looked desolate, entirely void of life.

The ocean water was icy, the town of Alyki was totally dead. 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. 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 starved.

We went back to the outdoor bar. The game had ended in a scoreless tie 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.

vii

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

It is located a mile up an empty dirt path with no previous 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 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 for a very bad and dangerous joke, being that we couldn't descend this path in the dark. But there it was, finally, with white aproned waiters awaiting our arrival -- an outdoor restaurant overlooking the entire eastern coastline of the island.

Looking out over our white linen table, with two glasses of fine white wine served without a word spoken, thousands of feet below us lay an endless stretch of the Aegean, spilling 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 pure 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 one hundred items. But they only served what they had prepared that night!

Grape leaves with a buttery melted cheese drizzled on top. A bowl of tart black olives. Then sun warmed tomatoes picked in front of our eyes that tasted like someone had infused honey in them, accompanied with thinly sliced sweet onion, and freshly picked strips of green pepper, glazed with the thin lemon-tinged olive oil the Greeks are famous for, sprinkled with feta with thyme and rosemary.

I wanted lamb or fish, but the brought me steak – Paros cows obviously – with an almost eggshell white inner meat. It was spiced pungently with what tasted like rosemary and a hint of cayenne, but the spicing was subtle, allowing 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 of the baklava they brought us a flan-like cake topped with thinly spiced fresh peaches with a whipped cream topping that was flavored with banana!

Instead of "ice cream" they brought a chocolate parfait with fresh fruit swirled in it.

By this time the lights were on in the harbor and an apricot fingernail moon stood beacon-like over the water. We had spent three hours eating, talking, breathing in the sweet mountain air.

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

"No problem," waved the chef-owner, waving his hand like he was used to shoo-ing problems away like flies. "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 and drive us twenty minutes back to our hotel. He refused money as a show of my appreciation and honked and waved goodbye as we climbed the hotel's chalk white steps. The kindest things are sometimes the most unforgettable

viii

Morning came without running water at 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 borrow. (Miranda refused to hide the hotel towels in her knapsack, fearing a swift arrest and spending a month in a Paros jail.) So we headed to the harbor, scanned the ferry schedule and took off for Santorini.

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 US.

After the island of Paros faded into the blue behind us I stood at the starboard nose 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? 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 for that. It's the next day 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, beach made of old stones littered with every imaginable can and bottle; cars and mopeds roaring by, old creaky buses spewing 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 mean you 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, possibly a drill . . . And the fish was all bone, tail, and head.

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.

Weaving around narrow mountain roads in a wide smoky 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 another American sucker – or worse, we were living in an insane society with equally insane ideas of what beauty and romance are. Or both.

Miranda wanted to make love – in 110 degree heat. I was in a foul mood and waved her off. So she decided to take off into the night on her own to check out the strip. I don't blame her. I'm being a total ass right now. 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. . . Still nice! Why? How?

Tomorrow we'll travel up into the mountains to see the Minoan archeological site, and then instead of staying here another few days, we'll ferry to Ios. We docked there 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 directions.

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 on one level, but I know the signs, when those complexes are activated. They're not! This place is horseshit, 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. 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 airless, with the way I'm living – life as I know it. The restless mind, unsatisfied, not quite fulfilled – despite Miranda, a nice house back home, finances in relative order. Something in the pit of my stomach is telling me something is not right about all this. And I have no idea how to make it right. Or if I should try. Because my spiritual knowledge says, this is the way it is, this is life, this is you, this is life reacting with the way you think.

A part of my mind says – you have everything set up the way you wanted it, you are very lucky - - charmed even. Find contentment, meditate. Make your peace, even here, now, and everywhere you go. Understand how blessed your life 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 hungry realization: NOT LIVING IN THE RIGHT PLACE. NOT LIVING THE RIGHT LIFE.

I've gone through this so many times before – searching for the better place, the better mate, the higher path to wisdom; some deeper knowing, some profound spiritual contentment that would show me – I am where I should be, doing what I should be doing in the lifetime. These are the searchings, the questions, that maybe no one can ever find an answer for. Maybe the questions themselves are the core cause of the discontentment! These are eternal questions and restless feelings that maybe every man and woman since leaving Eden lives with (if their life affords them such luxurious musings at all).

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 go 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, move on. Stop looking for a mere place to be, or someone better to become, or 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! 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, NOTHING, you'll never find meaningful answers there. You meditate and

simply fall asleep. You solidify conclusions only to have them crumble at the first sign of resistance. Wisdom is hogwash! It's a surrender to the void within you, that's all wisdom can ever come to. It's a fancy way to rationalize that life exists to just churn you, we churn the crank of time then die. . . or, follow ME, The Wind, to a more incredible death – more wandering, loneliness, pain, gut wrenching regrets, that come with the wild passion that only the wind can bring. Your search for the perfect blonde, perfect friends, a volcano of musical ideas exploding out of you like lava, with no effort on your part. All this can be yours, for a price.

“Follow me,” the wind calls. “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

i

On a hunch, on a whim born of 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 the oddly herbal smoke wafting around the lobby.

The beach was huge, creamy colored, clean, and car-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 – a watermelon sunset over the mountains by the sea – I felt 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. And she reveled in her wonder.

There are thousands of college kids here getting as drunk and loud as humanly possible. But somehow it's all okay. The island can afford to keep itself relatively clean, and everyone we've spoken to has been very kind. I don't know about all the things I was writing, thinking, in Santorini. I'm being calmed by the sun and the peace here. Is it peace? Or is it being put back to sleep? That's always the difficult thing to know.

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 sculpted legs, her blonde hair curling at the edges, called me, sang to me, pulled me back. Not a Siren call in the least part, because most of all, her pureness of heart shined through. Desire was hatched like a God into the newborn light, lighting up even the darkest parts of me.

When I am free, free of the mind's judgments, love finds an opening. Born from the ashes it flies. There can be no peace without love. The mind will never find peace in its chaotic search for perfection.

Plato would vehemently disagree (with a river of words brilliantly ordered to be sure) but 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 Miranda has no idea how I think and what I think. When we fight about our core issue -- the thing we seem to struggle with over and over since almost the day we met -- she tends to pull my thoughts to its basest level, accusing me of "looking at other women."

This came up last night after we spontaneously were 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 and had a strapping smile. She was also dressed gorgeously at dinner. It only took someone with eyes in their head to see that with or without clothes on she was a knock out.

But if I dared admitted that -- and believe me the question would be put to me -- that in Miranda's mind is "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 just the night before.

I was not a tall Frenchman running off on the spot with a Cuban dancer. I was not that kind of person. But Miranda could not see through her past and see me as myself. She only saw her demons.

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

I look for Miranda to free me, not misinterpret me and pull me down. I keep wanting our relationship to grow into one of trust and a confiding friendship. And of passion, both sensual and sexual. The sexual passion is the easy part. But I mistake that "love" for trust -- a mature love, a secure loving of me, seeing who I am, trusting of my intentions.

Out of that deep sense of trust I sometimes expose my fleeting fantasies to her, as she does with me. I love to take her fantasies and push her closer to them, I pretend I'm a young Italian boy she saw in a magazine when we make love, or encourage her to open up more to people that we meet -- all people -- instead of shying away from conversation. She, on the other hand, takes my fantasies and attractions literally and becomes paranoid.

If I snuck off alone, or went out at night by myself to some bar, I could understand all this. But just to relate to someone who said hello to us at a beach, or Lord forbid accept a dinner invitation from some attractive looking couple, well soon I'm accused of "dressing up," primping, thinking about things I'm not thinking about, plotting, planning. It's shocking and alienating and downright embarrassing.

It brings up some of my deepest fears about being in a committed relationship -- that commitment brings about a deadening, oppressing the sensual experiences in life, as one must, as if by decree, turn away from any erotic sense of the world -- ironic since Eros was birthed here in Greece.

But the God Eros symbolized far more than just sex and desire. Eros also embodied the creative and sensual aspects of nature, like

– a breeze playing tag with tree limbs, the side to side tumbling of the leaves as they fall.

The warmth of the sun as it breaks through
a cloud and cradles your face in light on a winter day.

The smell of warm bread in the oven as we pace with hunger.

The feel of a guitar locked in your arms just before you strum the first chord and hear the beginning

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 onto your face as you rise up,
tasting it on your tongue.

These are the parts of Eros that are purely sensual, based on our willingness to be open to the entire world of the Gods, not just what they stir up in our unconscious.

That 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? Or write at all. She knew! Yet she ignored the message. Sensuality was multi-layered. Not all of it was aimed at seducing someone into bed.

To explore these kinds of nuances, and grow and change together -- aren't those the key goals in any relationship? So here we are in the midst of good people (at last) and amidst beautiful sunsets, with pristine beaches, here, now, together, andbang! I'm accused of dancing too close to the fire with some girl in the lobby. And this indeed is how relationships can die. Ruining moments like this.

One needs little imagination to see how things can unravel. But how to put it back together once it lays dying in a pool of darkness in Hades, 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! And extinguish her doubts about both

iv

Our last night in Ios finally brought an end to the suffering. We had some laughs over dinner and when we arrived back at our room at the "Far Out Hotel," Miranda undressed, sat fully naked on the bed, and beckoned me. She pulled a bar of chocolate out of her purse and began feeding pieces of it to me while I was lying in bed. She told me she trusted me, and that she had her own childhood issues to work through, and the tall womanizing Frenchman to exorcise, but all that could be discussed another time. Right at this moment she was trying to grow, willing to trust.

Her eyes were like the bright Aegean; she was dreaming from another shore; she had landed there with me.

Her skin was tanned from the sun, but having naturally pale skin there were still porcelain fine white patches in private places. We made love in the warmth of a radiant silent night, with a glorious island breeze licking at us from the windows.

v

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. There is no airplane today. There is no air today. It's 100 degrees and about as much wind as there is air in someone who is dead. Smog, like jaundice, covers the skin of the sky. Athens, lying flat, motionless, eyes barely opened, seeing nothing, not breathing. Only the flies twisting in crazy circles around the dead body – in their taxis and behind their store counters – like little vultures ready to suck the marrow from this poor animal.

Miranda and I are lying as still as we can on our bed at the airport hotel room, 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 numbers easily or do not respond at all. No matter. New flight tomorrow. Chomp, chomp . . . blurp. No need move til then 'cept mouth & teeth. . . time for snack.

Life has stopped. I forget how it was. My hands no longer remember if they remember all the scales and chords on my piano; I no longer remember how to work. I travel and I am a pig. This is all I know.

The curtain just moved -- maybe wind pouring down like cool wine over the mountains. No, just the air conditioner with its ozone depleted long ago blowing hot air heavy as molasses over trays of food and bags of unpacked clothes, tickling the fabric of the curtains in a monotonous mechanical swaying. Like a John Madden football replay on TV, superimposing the white x's &

o's showing exactly how far the curtain will move forward, and no further, until the weight of the curtain pushes back against the weakening air. Over and over again we see the play on the monitor, once again the curtain hitting its limit and falling back – like a fly, its limits, like all the fat living dead feasting on the body of Athens.

No one is really going anywhere. The real history is over. Even history is not moving. The buildings of today's world are built like disposable diapers – made to stand civilization's fat oily excrement 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, a living, almost breathing, monument to beauty. Why bother? Where's the profit in that? You want history and monuments? Go to the Acropolis. Meantime, just follow the blue print and don't ask questions. And don't forget to pack some nice fatty meat for lunch. People without history get very very hungry. They are very busy circling, running against time, to nowhere, for no one, for no reason, hovering around the great lifeless giant that was Athenia – Goddess of Wisdom.

vi

Our time in Ios was a social study combined with a psychodrama in a beach setting. White sand, blue sea and sky; white houses, blue trim; white kids, blue life; white wine till blue in face. Miranda and I keep seeking to resolve our relationship “once and for all,” collect \$200, Monogamous Monopoly. White love. But all of these little blue veins of fear appear on love's long bikini legs – not very becoming. Little blue veins that won't go away. Then Miranda apologizes for her paranoia. The hunter, the hero, has once again come through the psycho-wars and has emerged from the psycho-ward unscathed, holding a rose as a sacrifice to the Gods, innocence in tact.

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 US or Drachma or Visa, they gladly help create the human sacrifice – sell dilapidated Mopeds, autos with bald tires, funeral attire, and plenty of alcohol rich sacrament. They supply the kick drum heavy hard rock music they love so much at home, cranking it louder until dawn, so they can, mesmerized and drunk and out of money, dance and stumble off the cliffs of their lives like lemmings – oh those Greek islanders who would sell the island and their peace of mind for a longer tourist season, who look at their homeland layered with litter and liquor bottles, crushed beer cans and plastic cups licked dry of the last drop of Tom Collins with a watermelon wedge, with even the seeds consumed, the unconsumable non-biodegradable rest of it scattered over every meter of beach and boulder, lining every street corner. Many Greeks come from Athens to sell during the tourist season. They stand at the ferry at the edge of the vacation season smiling through the garbage, yelling to the dazed children who survived – “Come again, and next time bring more money.”

Back in Athens the war weary, smog 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, “Communism, Socialism, Bush, Reagan, it's all the same.”

The tourists and taxis and ticket takers swirl around on another windless summer evening. Earth turns unnoticed to another windless summer dawn. And so it goes.

vii

Instead of landing in New York at this hour, I look over at Miranda who has fallen asleep in the thin hotel bed, looking forward to a day tomorrow that will include a ten hour plane ride and an eight hour car ride to Troy (in Upstate New York) to make it in time for her sister's wedding. She is asleep for these few moments, aglow in her natural beauty. Her sweet, optimistic, creative, gentle land of dreams in peak REM cycle. I can see her mind is hard at work, and there is a relaxed little smile on her face. I doubt nothing tonight. Not her love for me or my ability to love her. All this I say while some older couple is arguing and crying in the room next to ours. How many arguments, and nights of peace and laughter, how many nights of surety and doubt have they gone through? Will they think it all worthwhile in the end? Or will it all be a waste of time – a life lived by a coward, afraid of loneliness, afraid of facing the self alone?

It's like a city, a relationship, 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. Or a clear eternal flame.

Right now Miranda seems to be sleeping inside this simple beauty, a place without words or time. She bears it well. I hope we can capture the elements of this in our waking time together. Flames can be used to melt or to mold. So with love.

viii

We finally flew out of Athens headed for New York once again entranced in love: dark blue late evening sky melted like syrup into our porthole, its long curved horizon filled to the brim with a rose colored sunset. Then it fell, the hand that held it there now gone, all quickly forgotten as we flame into the jet black night.

There's a way to know when you can't trust the orange juice – when you look down after having swigged it down and see the name of an airline at the bottom of your plastic glass.

Halfway into our ten hour flight home, Miranda and I agreed that the only good thing about the last five hours is that we were not still stranded back at the Hotel Fenix.

Fenix 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.

If you look up from the pool at the precise moment that you experience a sonic boom (which feels just like a miniature bomb going off just over your head) you can read the name of the manufacturer of the tires on the plane's landing gear. The wind from the plane is refreshing but you don't want the fumes to singe your eyebrows. I guess that's why there's a pool. Look up, put your fingers in your ears, and jump in.

The Fenix serves a free buffet breakfast – your choice of bread, or toast. At least the line is never too long. By the time the guests were done looking over the rest of the buffet they were back out the other side of the lobby. Most conveniently, you could then circle back around to put back the white china plate and fork and knife and restack your napkin. At least no one stained their morning attire.

Someone from New York who had also been scratched from yesterday's flight was asking me, while biting noisily into his piece of dry toast, if I knew what "Fenix" (the bird "Phoenix" in English) symbolized?

I said, "Yes, the Phoenix was a bird known in mythology for never needing to eat breakfast."

The food here on the plane symbolized in synopsis form our entire civilization since Ancient Greece: More, but worse.

The dinner was called, "Beef Bourguignon," which 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 aspirins after my typical airplane headache that crippled my mind for the last few hours. Now I am finding myself calm and still.

Miranda is Upstate, at her sister's wedding in Troy by now. So far away from this over-amped, over-lit New York City night. I can feel her presence near me; I miss her.

The teacher tells us, "The Dharma voice within you has the answer. Each morning ask: Who am I? What am I doing here?"

The Greeks asked the same questions thousands of years ago.

So far, nobody knows.

The End.

GM