

A RAINBOW IN THE DARK

CHAPTER 11

‘Bitter-sweet memories’

When they arrived at Chora, Marios and Antigone were the first to get out of the cab. This was the last time the two couples saw each other. Not that they intended to see each other again, but the events that followed did not turn out as they had planned.

"Please could you drop us off here," Sophia said to the taxi driver.

The taxi stopped in front of a narrow street that was designed only for pedestrians or two-wheelers.

With their luggage in hand – as it was impossible for them to pull their luggage on its wheels over the pebbled pavement - they walked a short distance.

Sophia had started to get really emotional. Thousands of messages rushed back like a tornado in her mind.

"Not now, not now!" she said to herself again.

She put the key into the keyhole of the blue wooden door and opened it. She searched for the light switch on her right. A pale light from the dusty glass lamp flooded the space. They walked in and placed their bags next to the walnut hanger.

Everything, or almost everything, was as she remembered: Grandma’s carved settee from Skyros¹ Island that she adored as a child, which Sophia was also going to inherit, the buffet with the mirror hanging off the beaks of two hand-carved seagulls on the upper edges of the wooden frame...

She entered the bedroom. An iron double bed with a snow-white mosquito net hanging from the ceiling like a crown, was the dominant feature of the room.

"Mrs Matina must have added the mosquito net. Grandma did not have these here before," Sophia said, making an inventory of memories.

But Mrs Matina’s major interventions had been made in the kitchen and bathroom, Sophia gathered as she went past. The era that prevailed in these two rooms, unlike the bedroom and the living room that were stuck in the past, was clearly the present era. Not a single electrical

¹ **Skyros** is an island in Greece, the southernmost of the Sporades, an archipelago in the Aegean Sea. At 209 square kilometres (81 sq. mi) it is the largest of the Sporades, and has a population of about 3,000 (in 2011). It is part of the regional unit of Euboea. The Hellenic Air Force has a major base in Skyros, because of the island's strategic location in the middle of the Aegean.

device from those that make our lives easier was missing. The ‘magic’ in the bathroom and terrace they would have to discover later with the first light of day.

"At first sight, things look fine," Sophia remarked, "apart from the dust that is having a party everywhere and will continue to have one only for tonight. Can we endure it for one night?" she asked Michael, and her eyelids were overcome by drowsiness.

"I have a suggestion," he said smiling.

"Let's imagine that we are forced to spend the night at the train station, waiting for a delayed service, and we have to sleep with our clothes on, just not on a bench of course," Michael said, and looked meaningfully at the comfortable double bed, "but rather much more comfortably, and let's imagine that we have arrived well-rested early in the morning. Isn't that a better thought?"

"You're right, and by noon we will have put everything in order," Sophia said optimistically.

"I am really incapable to do anything else tonight. I am dead tired," Sophia justified, and pulled the white protective cover off the bed.

Sleep took over them quickly and it felt like self-preservation to their bodies.

Around seven a.m., Sophia opened her eyes unwittingly. A big blue sea filled her entire view.

"Where am I?" she wondered for a few seconds.

She closed her eyes and reopened them. Absorbed in the deep blue, the realisation came. Something fluttered inside her and she jumped out of bed.

"Michael wake up! Wake up and see your dream come alive!" Sophia said, nudging him softly. He opened his eyes for a moment, laughed and turned his back to her going back to sleep.

Sophia left him there and got up. She combed her long hair with her fingers and pulled it back.

She opened the flimsy curtain and stepped out into the ‘Blue Heaven’. Barefoot, as she did when she was little, she walked in those same childhood footprints and sat at the same spot on the terrace, with one knee bent and hugging it with her hands. She leaned her chin on her knee and set herself free.

As expected, her memories struck again, knocking at her mind's door for the third time. This time, however, she welcomed them wholeheartedly and let the sweet emotions of her heart take over.

So many years had gone by, years filled with new memories, yet nothing had changed that childhood fluttering in her heart. Sophia looked at the blue door of the future and this was the exact same sea, as she remembered it: then and now. This feeling that swelled and gushed

inside of her like a storm was the same: then and now. She took two deep breaths and the familiar smell put a coveted smile on her face as it did then and now too.

Only now, she felt closer: closer to the future that her fate had intended.

She released her hands and freed her knee.

She lay down on the wide bench and let the sky caress her. Seagulls were flying high, embroidering laces in the air.

Spontaneously, a single word came to her lips.

"Mom, mom!"

Memories flooded her mind like heavy rain. The large drops ached as they crashed down on her naked body from the force of the storm. She got trapped. She almost drowned at times, but in the end as the rain cleanses everything in its path, so too was her soul cleansed; it started shining like well-polished silver; like a mirror in which you can see your reflection clearly.

This complete immobility that took over strengthened her senses.

She felt his presence behind her. She turned her head to look back and she saw Michael's face, upside down.

"Baby, you got up!" she said and gave him a warm kiss on the lips.

She stood upright and looked at him in the eyes.

"This is the gift I promised you, all dressed in a blue wrapper! Inside it hides all the dreams, desires and fantasies. I give it to you with all my heart. Take it!" Sophia said, and she pointed at the vastness of the sea that was revealed in all its splendour, from the royal throne of Grandmother Sophia's courtyard.

"My gift, sweetheart, is you! Your existence, your breath, your touch, your kiss," he whispered and took her in his arms.

This moment was etched in their hearts forever; in all subsequent difficult years that followed. It was God's gift to them and it prevented them from drowning in life's waves. It was the beacon that always showed them how to keep away from life's reefs.

The horn of the ship entering the port of Skala brought them back to reality. Sophia stretched her arms up high, as she did every morning when she woke up, and she looked at Michael energetically.

"I will take care of the cleaning and you can take care of the shopping," she said. "You will find the shops further down from where the taxi dropped us off yesterday. Buy all the essentials: milk, cheese, fruit and whatever else you think that we will need."

"Oh! Do go to the bakery as well, and apart from bread, buy a few cookies for breakfast."

"That's fair!" Michael told her as he was walking backwards and off to perform his part of the deal.

Once he left, Sophia – acting like a good housewife - gathered her hair with a hair clip and disappeared in the house with all the necessary 'tools'.

For the next two hours, spiders and cockroaches were subjected to unceasing alarm. Their forts were being mercilessly attacked and, unfortunately for them, this particular war was won by their sworn enemies: a broom, a mop and a pound of detergent ammunition that had been left there by Mrs. Matina.

Sophia was sweating profusely after this 'battle' and the summer heat was reaching its highest temperatures for the day. Sophia put her hands on her waist and moved around the house for inspection.

All the forts were under full guard control and they sparkled with cleanliness.

"Let's also await approval by the other 'inspector' who will be arriving any minute now!" She had not completed her thought when Michael (the other inspector!) appeared at the door asking for help. His hands were full of nylon bags with groceries.

"Did you get supplies to see us through a possible war that could last thirty years?" Sophia asked and took a few bags off him to lighten him.

"Sophia, don't make fun of me please! I see that you are in really good mood. Maybe we should live here forever then," he said, and placed some things on the kitchen table.

By the time the coffee-maker jug was full (Mrs. Matina had also taken of that), they had managed to put all the food in place.

"A hot cup of coffee is the best compensation! Go take a seat in the 'Blue Heaven'" – she could not call it a courtyard as it seemed like a very poor expression – "and I will get the coffee," Sophia said while searching for a tray in the kitchen cabinet.

On hearing the word 'blue' that spontaneously came out of her mouth, Sophia's mind instantly travelled to another paradise with different colours: green, purple, red, yellow; Maria's courtyard was filled with colours, in contrast to the one here where the colours white, blue and a little grey were dominant.