

Homesick

ALEXANDROS PAPADIAMANDIS,
‘Η Νοσταλγός (1894)

translated by LEO MARSHALL

The moon appeared, just waning now three nights past its utmost fullness, at the summit of the mountain, and she, all in white, after many a sigh and many a melancholy song, cried out:

– Oh! If I could just get in a boat right now. . . . that’s what I’d like so we could go over there!

And with her hand she was pointing beyond the harbour.

Mathios had not perhaps noted that in her speech she had shifted to the plural – at the close of her wish. But instinctively, without thinking about it, he replied:

– I could push out that boat on the beach How about it? Shall we give it a try?

And he too used the plural at the end of his speech. Without moreover pausing to think, as though he wanted to see if his muscles were strong, he started to push the boat.

The lad was standing near the water’s edge, where, time after time, whispering softly as they arrived, the waves were swallowed by the sand – without their becoming tired ever of this their eternal monotonous diversion, without its becoming sated ever with this its everlasting salty irrigation. The woman was on the balcony of the house, which her husband, an elderly fifty-three-year-old, had rented to receive her in; a house situated on the shore, now in and now out of the waves: in with the flood-tide brought by the south wind, or out with the ebb-tide induced by the north. The boat was resting on the land and rocking on the sea, its bow stuck in the sand, its stern swayed by the waves, a light skiff, graceful, with a pointed prow and space for four or five.

A large local schooner with its cargo had put in at the harbour three days before and was waiting for a favourable wind before setting off on the final leg of its voyage; the captain for the third night now had reposed at home, made much of

in the proximity of spouse and offspring; his ship-mates, all of them locals, were making the round of the bars, compensating in three nights for the enforced abstinence of weeks and months; the ship's boy, not himself a local, was left sole guard of the ship with its tackle and its freight; and the sole guard of the ship's boy was the ship's dog. But that evening, the ship's boy, a lanky eighteen year-old who had all the expectations of a sailor but not the wage, had lingered at a bar which was somewhat out of the way, being on the inner road of the coastal market, and had found his own consolation there, as a stranger among strangers. He had left the dinghy half dragged up on the beach, with its bow stuck in the sand and its stern swaying on the waves, with its two oars resting on the stern, two light oars which a youth would handle with indescribable joy, glorying, as he did so, in a strength multiplied by the fleeting softness of waves as yielding as a mother in her weakness for her pampered child, which carries her where it wills with its whimpers, with its wants; oars that, resembling a gull's two wings, which carry the downy white body of that bird to the surface of the sea, would guide the boat towards the sand and the outstretched arms of the land, as its wings guide the gull to its cave in the sea-washed rock.

Mathios placed his two hands on the bow, braced his two legs behind him, pushed with all his strength, and the small dinghy gave ground and fell with a splash into the sea. It nearly got away, acting under the powerful impetus; for he had neglected to hang on to the bowfast, the line attached to the bow. But at that, he threw off his flimsy sandals, he did not have time to roll up his trousers, he went up to his knees in the water, and he caught the boat by its bow. He dragged it toward a small and makeshift mole.

She meanwhile had vanished from the balcony, and a few moments later she appeared, with her white smock shining in the light of the moon, at the northern corner of the house, stepping down onto the sand.

The youth saw her and felt both joy and fear. He was acting almost unconsciously. He had not dared to hope her capable of doing it.

She, not caring to disclose her innermost reflections, said:

– Yes . . . Why not? Yes. Let's go once round the harbour, now in the moonlight.

And then, shortly after, came:

– So that I can see how I'll like it, when I take ship to go over there . . .

She said *over there* each time, and she meant home. Behind the first, green mountain, that above which the moon had risen, a mountain black at night, but

ashen now and umbrous in the light of the moon, there rose the peak of a high, a white, a sometimes snow-covered and sometimes bare and rocky mountain. That was her home, the place where she was born. And she sighed after it as if separated from it by an entire ocean, when, in fact, there was but scarcely twelve miles between and in daylight the green mountain's low ridge did not suffice to conceal the tall summit of the white mountain. And she yearned after it as much as if she had been parted from it many years since, when but scarcely a few weeks had she been on the neighbouring island.

At all events, she placed her hand, white and so light, innocently on the shoulder of the young man, who trembled at the touch from head to toe, and she stepped into the little boat.

He followed after her and, taking an oar, began clumsily to push off. But instead of pushing against the pier, he pushed on the left against the bottom, and in consequence the boat swung round, and it bumped slightly against one of the stones in the pier.

– Watch out! We'll damage their boat.

This made her reflect more soberly on things, and afterwards came:

– Won't the boat be missed? Won't they want it? . . . Whose can it be?

Disconcerted, the youth replied:

– As we're just going once round the harbour and coming back . . . I shouldn't think it'll be missed before then, whoever it belongs to.

He sat at the oars and started rowing. She was seated in the stern, and the moon's pale light was shining on her, seeming to dust the fine features of her handsome face with silver. The lad was gazing timidly at her.

He was not a sailor, but having been reared near the sea, he could row. He had come home half-way through the year; having left his school in the region's capital after declining the punishment prescribed for him following an argument with a schoolmaster of his; one seeming to him to be possessed of a greater than his due degree of ignorance. He was just eighteen, but with the already dense first growth of his chestnut beard and moustache, he looked nineteen or twenty.

The young woman, once she had sat down, by way of afterword to her expression of anxiety of shortly before as to the possibility of the boat's being sought by its owner, facetiously voiced this thought of hers too:

– The boat's owner will be looking for his boat, and Uncle-Monachakis will be looking for his Lialio.

The young man grinned. Uncle-Monachakis was the name of her husband. Lialio was her own.

At that moment a dog could be heard barking loudly on the deck of a ship. It was the ship's dog on the same laden schooner to which the dinghy belonged, and it had jumped on to the fo'c'sle, next to the *Macedonian Girl*, the crude crested figurehead in the bows. At first, recognising the boat, the dog whined and wagged its tail, but when the boat got closer, and the dog recognized in the two passengers neither the ship's boy nor any other member of the crew, it started frantically to yelp and howl.

The young student went a little wide of the schooner, but the further away the dog saw the boat go, the more frantically it howled.

- What's got into it? Why won't it stop? Lialio asked anxiously.
- It must have recognized the boat.
- Is this little boat that schooner's?
- So it seems.

The youth voiced this conjecture with regret, foreseeing that this circumstance would of necessity cut short this for him dream-like excursion, but, instead, like an ill-behaved child that gets most pleasure from doing what others forbid it, Lialio clapped her hands.

- Then, I'm glad, she said; let the dog howl for his boat, and let them hunt for me at home . . .

The youth found the courage to ask:

- Where was Kir-Monachakis when you came down from the house?
- He's always at the cafe . . . He never budes from there before midnight . . . I'm always left on my own.

And she seemed on the point of tears. But with an effort she held herself in check, and no tears came.

The youth went on rowing. Soon they were not far from the eastern entrance to the harbour, from which was visible, breaking the horizon opposite, the long island on which stood the white, sometimes snowy, sometimes bare and rocky mountain. When they were nearing the cape that shut off there on one side the harbour mouth, which further to the south-east was shut off by two or three small islands, the young woman gazed steadily beyond, towards the horizon, as though she wished to see further and more, or as much at least as the pale gleam of the moon allowed.

– Let me see over there, and then we can go back, she said.

And she sighed.

The youth found the courage to make a request:

– How does that song go that you sing sometimes?

– Which song?

– The song . . . about sails, and the wheel . . . and about the far mountains, stammered the youth.

– Ah!

And with that, in a low contralto, on a passionate murmured note, she started to sing:

When will we make sail, that I might take the wheel,

Might see the far mountains, my pains to heal

She repeated this couplet a second time, then a third, to an old tune long known to her.

– Here, you can see them now, the far mountains, said Mathios, only instead of sails we have oars; and we're missing the wheel too.

Once again the young woman sighed.

– Is it time we went back now? asked the youth.

He said this with sadness; the words seemed to shrivel on his tongue.

– A bit further, just a bit further, said Lialio. The shadow cast by those islands stops you seeing right over there . . . All I can see is Derfi.

– Derfi's down there, said the youth, pointing towards Euboea in the south.

– We call the tall mountain at home Derfi, responded Lialio, pointing to the east.

And once again she sang her song, but with one phrase changed:

When will we make sail, that I might take the wheel,

Might see Mount Derfi, my pains to heal

The youth let out a deep breath, exactly like a sigh.

– Oh, I wasn't thinking. This much rowing must be back-breaking for you, said Lialio . . . I must be out of my mind . . . Your dainty hands aren't meant for rowing, Master Mathios.

The youth protested:

– No, no, I'm not tired . . . The oars are quite light . . . How could little oars like these tire me?

Lialio insisted she have one of the oars, and bending forward a little, she started to pull with her white hands at one of the rowlocks: wanting to move it further

towards her in the stern. But the youth resisted, and their hands came together in warm contact.

– And you say that my hands are soft, he said restrained reproachfulness in his voice.

– Well then, what about putting up a sail like it says in the song? proposed the young woman playfully.

– What with?

And he was looking involuntarily at her pure white smock.

Lialio laughed and leant back again against the stern.

Already they had reached the mouth of the harbour and had on one side of them the cliffs of the cape, which seemed, breaking as they did the verdant harmony of the mountain, to be the result of an earthquake or a landslide, and, on the other, two or three islands, those closing the harbour to the south east. The moon was rising constantly higher in the firmament, darkening the last of the stars, which, though invisible now, still shone meekly in the depths of the sky. The sea was trembling a little in the slight breeze – all that was left of the wind which had furrowed it in the morning. It was a warm May night and the slight breeze was cooler there, blowing as it did across the open sea at the mouth of the harbour. Two dark masses, faintly silvered and polished by the melancholy light of the moon, one to the east and one to the west, stood out without its being possible through the alternations of light and shadow to distinguish the features of the land. These were the two neighbouring islands. Mysterious enchantment filled the moonlit night. The boat was floating past the first small island, and emerging there in turn were patches of light and darkness, rocks glowing lambently in the moonlight, shadowy foliage rustling gently in the eddies of the evening breeze, and caverns washed by swirling waves, where one sensed the presence of sea birds and heard the anxious wing-beat of wild doves put up by the soft splash of the oars and the small boat's proximity. Beyond, to the north-east, on a declivity of the mountain, were some flickering lights, marking the point at which, visible during the day, were the small white dwellings of a village high above the sea. Next to the island was a rock, hollowed and holed, and the waves falling on it boomed and roared, and it seemed as if, sonorous within the general harmony of the moonlit sea, there were a separate orchestra there that on its own produced more sound than was generated by every beach, by every bay and gulf, by every reef and every shore, that was washed by the waves. Unthinkingly, Mathios raised the oars and rested

them on the gunwale, and lapsing into stillness, he became like that white bird of the sea dropping gracefully towards the waves, one wing down, the other up, motionless a few moments, before swooping to catch the swimming fish and lift it gasping and writhing through the air. He was experiencing indescribable rapture. Lialio too was feeling a mysterious entrancement, and their gazes met.

– Shall we make sail? repeated the young woman.

It seems she had not ceased to think about this since she had first said it; and she was saying it now in a manner so simple and natural it was as if she were merely formulating a thought common to them both.

– Let’s, Mathios responded innocently.

And as he no longer knew what he was saying, this time he didn’t ask *what with*.

But Lialio spared him the trouble of seeking the means. She stood up and, bending down gracefully, with a few dextrous movements took off her white, finely-pleated smock, and proffered it to Mathios.

– You get the mast ready, she said.

Surprised, but spellbound and smiling, the youngster took one oar, raised it perpendicular to the cross-beam, took one end of the bowfast, and tied the oar to the beam with it. Next, having freed the other end of the bowfast from the ring on the bow, he took the other oar and tied it to the first, cross-wise, like a yard to the mast. And then he took hold, warm still from its contact with her skin, of the young woman’s white smock, and he fastened it to the second oar, as a sail.

Lialio was left with her shift, stopping at the calf and white as her smock, and with her white stockings, through which, whiter still, might be divined her shapely rounded calves. She was left with the lily-white of her neck imperfectly concealed by her silken, purple kerchief, and she sat constrainedly, near the stern, seeming shorter than she was, given her medium and handsome build.

And the breeze had strengthened, and the improvised sail was filling, and the small boat was gathering speed.

Nothing more was said about returning to the harbour. What for? It was evident henceforth that they were sailing “to the far mountains”.

Shyly, Mathios sat down not very near her, on the other side of the stern, and, so as not to look too long at his companion and embarrass her, he was looking at the sea.

At that moment, that verse by a poet of the Ionian Islands was coming into his

mind that figured so largely in all the love affairs of that time, “Awake, my sweet love . . .” and he was thinking of the couplet, “The misty moon alone . . .” and of this one also:

*Farewell you gorges, springs, and icy waters
Sweet dawns, small birds, farewell forever!*

He was thinking of these lines, but he didn’t want to sing them. They seemed to him now to be out of place. Instead, the song that he judged best fitted that night was the song best loved by Lialio.

*When will we make sail, that I might take the wheel,
Might see the far mountains, my pains to heal*

He had sat down not very far from her, close enough to her for it to be impossible for him to look at her without an effort, far enough from her for him not to sense her warm flesh’s and her breath’s proximity. All the same he kept wanting to look at her, and, in the end, became dizzy from looking at the waves.

The youth took off his thin, short jacket and was pleading with her to cover herself with it to keep herself from getting cold – for, as the night advanced, the off-shore winds started coming off the mountains. She was refusing to take the garment, saying she did not feel in the least cold; no, she was rather hot.

Mathios insisted no further, but started to reflect on matters concerning her, on whatever of her life and lot was known to him. For among those with whom he was intimate there were people that the young woman had come into contact with during her brief time on the island. Lialio was not in her first youth, albeit she retained almost all her girlish freshness. Nor in respect of her marriage to Kir-Monachakis was she still newly-wed. She was twenty-five, and she had married five years before. Kir-Monachakis had taken her as his second wife, having buried his first and married off his daughter, who was Lialio’s senior by one year. It had appeared to him that in marrying this twenty-year-old girl, he would become younger by twenty years himself. Still, as long as he’d been kept far from his birth-place, working for the revenue service wherever the government chose to send him, Lialio had not suffered greatly. She had stayed by her parents’ side, unable to follow Kir-Monachakis on his gipsy-like wanderings round Greece, in which he went wherever he was required, like, as he said himself, “an old boat yawing this way and that”.

Ah! The air there was not fit for tender blooms, and she would have wilted there in a month had irreverent hands dared transplant her. The pot was of

alabaster, the plant was delicate, and the bloom exuded a perfume too fine for vulgar nostrils. But recently, when, after long efforts, Kir-Monachakis had had himself transferred to the neighbouring island, he persuaded his father-in-law, who esteemed him above all others of their generation, to send Lialio to him at his posting, that he might live with her under one roof. Weeping, Lialio, who bore toward her a sisterly affection, said good-bye to her step-daughter – just become a mother and ceasing now to fear that she might have a little step-brother there, an uncle to her new-born child – and having boarded ship, she came, or rather removed, to the neighbouring island.

On the day of her arrival, Kir-Monachakis entertained his friends liberally, but on the morrow he ceased to receive at home. And in this, there was nothing strange, since, in fact, he was never there. He was either at his office or at the café. He would light his yard-long hubble-bubble, which would burn without let almost along the whole length of his sky-blue breeches, and he would become jovial, a garrulous ever and noisy boaster, his cheeks as red almost as his tall, scarlet fez, which was given a slight tilt towards his right ear by a crease it had in one side, and which had too, covering his shoulder with its strands, a heavy, corded tassel.

From the second week on, Lialio never failed, if she was awake as he returned homeward during the early hours, to moan and to demand he send her back to her parents. It was impossible, so she said, for her to live far from them. And, in truth, from the first days of her removal her heart began to hurt, her appetite to leave her, and her face to grow constantly paler. But Uncle-Monachakis sternly gave her to understand that it would not be fitting for her, having once come, to leave him so soon. He expounded a lengthy theory according to which it is the duty of a woman to be wherever her husband is; for to do otherwise is to frustrate the purpose of Christian marriage, which according to the most orthodox sources is not to multiply the species, but is rather to instil restraint in man and woman; for were it otherwise, he said, childlessness would naturally be sufficient grounds for divorce, and, besides, all that is required for the multiplying of the species is common-law marriage, which is altogether different from religious and civil marriage; and he ranged against her numerous quotations from the two Testaments, such as “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” and “Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder” and “The head of the woman is the man”, and so forth. She stifled her sobs in the two palms of her hands and in her two plaits, and with the two ends of her white head-scarf she sponged the traces of her tears.

The youth, as a neighbour, had heard how things stood, and fell secretly in love with her. The grace of her lithe figure was not concealed by the waistless frock she wore. And the curls adorning her lovely forehead were natural and not factitious. The light in her dark, deep-set eyes burned darkly below her vaulted brows, and her crimson lips showed, rose-like, against the translucent pallor of her cheeks, which easily, with the slightest effort or the least emotion, became faintly flushed. Yet the fine, calm fire in her eyes was what burned the youngster's heart.

In fine, he loved her. She, when she came out on to the balcony, as she often did, would look, pensive and abstracted, towards him for a moment. Then, her gaze straying, she would look towards a point on the eastern horizon, towards the *far mountains*; till, that is, that night, when, with the moon rising, her husband missing, she saw the lad, out after supper for a breath of sea air, standing on the shore. Mathios, seeing her on the balcony, wished her good evening, exchanged a few words with her, and then, quite by chance, without its being in her mind either, made the altogether unexpected proposal of a brief boat trip from which this curious voyage ensued. The young woman seemed to live a life of dreams, a dream existence. From time to time, waking suddenly from her long trance, she seemed to become aware again of the real world, but no more than a few minutes would go by before she dropped once more into her torpid slumber and sank deeper still into her treasured dream.

It was already midnight, and either because of the current or because of the off-shore wind, and because they had no rudder, they had been carried little by little northwards: to a point opposite the high village's flickering lights, which now looked closer, and next to the isolated, small and rocky island off the north-eastern shore, which to a few coneyes put there by the islanders was their prison, and to every kind of gull and other sea bird was their palace; it was called White Isle.

Not till then did Mathios take one of the oars (he had been obliged to take down the makeshift sail to give Lialio her smock; for although she wouldn't admit it, she had got cold, and he had had to abolish mast and sail) and use it as a rudder to try and turn the bow to the right, towards the easternmost point on the opposite shore, that known as Trachili. But he saw that he was achieving nothing, it being impossible with this surrogate rudder to turn the current to advantage, and he was forced to take his seat again at the oars.

But it seems either the nymphs of the night breezes, which were starting to blow off the land, or those of the ocean currents, furrowing the sound between the two islands, wished Lialio well. For they were but a few metres beyond White Isle

when, close to the three south-eastern islands, coming from the harbour, there appeared a large launch, which, moving at great speed, its bows pointing toward Cape Trachili, its six oars striking the water, dashed over the sea's back as a mare bolting from the race-track dashes over the meadow.

Lialio gave a start. The youth turned and looked. Automatically, he stopped rowing and sat undecided.

– Quick, quick, said Lialio in a whisper, as though the sound of her voice might be heard. Get behind White Isle, quick! . . .

The youth started backing the oars rapidly. Already, they lay just within the shadow of the land, which screened the moon from view. They rounded a rocky point and hid behind the island.

– What do you think it is? asked Lialio uneasily.

– It must have come after us, replied the youth.

– They've come out to catch us?

– It's us they're after. No question.

– And what's that big boat?

– It's a launch, with lots of oars, very fast.

– So if we were out there, they'd catch us?

– They're making for Trachili. They'd soon have caught up with us if we'd headed that way.

– So, we were right to come this way, were we?

– We didn't do it intentionally; we were carried here by the current.

– The currents know what they are about! said Lialio in a tone so exalted that she seemed like certain people who, whilst having premonitory dreams, extemporize apophthegms in their trance. And, at that moment, as she spoke, she believed that inanimate things were possessed of understanding, and that for each thing there was a god under whose custodianship it fell.

In truth, she wanted it to be as if the Nereid of ocean currents, or the Nymph of off-shore winds, had brought the little boat and its comely freight there deliberately and by design.

– And what shall we do now? asked Mathios, feeling inwardly that he was helpless without the support of that benevolent nymph. And he understood then why the world had never, not since the Creation, ceased to be ruled by women.

– Now, Lialio said, so lucidly and articulately that it was as if she had foreseen the whole situation, we'll wait half an hour, and if they don't suspect something and come and look over here, we'll go and land over at St Nicholas while they're

still heading for Trachili. From there, in half an hour on foot, we can get up to Platana, the high village, and when God brings the dawn, in three hours we can walk from there to the big village, my village. Oh! if I might only set foot on that sacred soil again just once! If, though, they should suspect something and come this way, then off we go to your Xanemo, or whatever you call it, your Kefala; there, we dump the boat on the beach and go back over land to your village. ‘Where were you, Lialio?’ . . . ‘I gave myself a bit of an outing, Uncle-Monachakis, and here I am again, back.’

She laughed to herself as she said this. Then, as the youth still looked anxious:

– The main thing is for them not to catch us, she added. I don’t care what people will say! Not one jot! I couldn’t care less! As long as we’re really innocent, let the fools say what they like.

The youth leant forward passionately and kissed the tips of her fingers, thinking that, yes, he was innocent, like many of those who, as History relates, were unjustly condemned to slow death by fire. She reacted sternly:

– If I wanted to fool around, the safest thing would be for me to stick with Uncle-Monachakis. Proof that I don’t want to is that I set out to go back to my parents. My parents couldn’t cover for me if I played around: Uncle-Monachakis could, and would very well, what’s more.

A sharp knife clove the young man’s heart. He imagined that doubtless the young woman had another lover at home. It was towards him then that she was running, towards him that she was charting this singular course. And his own role then was what? What was he in that event? A bridge on which two beings in love trod that they might meet, a Charon in the service of infernal passions! . . .

Oh! what fire flamed within him! And how he felt roaring and raging inside him at that moment all the instincts of a tragic hero! (And, did the artistic conscience of the writer but allow it, how easy for the present idyll to be transformed into a melodrama! Imagine the launch giving chase to the two fugitives on the light skiff, Mathios by a miraculous feat of oarsmanship giving their pursuers the slip, and then, having discovered at the last moment that the homesick girl had a lover, plunging his dagger into her breast or sinking the boat and drowning the woman before abandoning himself too to the waves! Finally, under the light of the moon, the launch searching for the two bodies in the depths of the sea! What prodigies of romance, what sensitive shedding of tears! . . .)

And so, with a great effort, he restrained himself, and gazing at the young woman, he asked her simply:

– And before Kir-Monachakis wed you, was there no-one over there that loved you?

– Well, I like that! Of course there was. Lots of them, what's more! Lialio declared gaily. But the thing is, they only love poor girls the way they love flowers; they sniff at them once, then let them wither, or they pluck their petals; and, you see, I wasn't some heiress for them to fall in love with me and marry me formally with a fine ceremony, or even for them to elope with me and get a priest to marry us in secret, knowing all the while that my parents would get so desperate they'd hand over the dowry in the end . . . That's why nobody but Uncle-Monachakis could be found to take me. Lucky he did!

Then in a whisper she pronounced this popular rhyme:

My parents gave me away

But me they gave no say . . .

– Then why are you leaving Kir-Monachakis? asked the youth, referring back to the exclamation at the close of her speech.

– I'm not leaving him, I'm going home, back to my parents . . . Should Uncle-Monachakis come to look for me, he'll be welcome! He knows very well I wouldn't dishonour him. But he knows this too: I can't live away from home.

– Can it be that apart from the others there was no-one special that loved you? . . . that you wanted too . . . before you were married . . . or later, after you were married?

Lialio sighed deeply and said:

– Ah! yes . . . to tell you the truth . . . The one they wanted for me . . . and I wanted too . . . It's six years now since the Black Sea took him . . . The boat went down with all hands . . . But if you've any heart, don't make me talk about it . . .

Meanwhile, the launch, which the two fugitives had not ceased to observe, had gone quite some way with its bow pointing eastwards, when, suddenly, as it reached the furthest side of the third and easternmost islet, it stopped for a few moments. Mathios pointed this out to his fellow-traveller.

– I know what's going on, she said.

– What?

– You'll see in a moment.

The youth looked her in the eyes.

– Be patient, and I'll let you into the secret. Now you'll see it making for Trachili.

– How can you tell? You must be a witch.

– Yes, I am . . . I'm a witch! she said with conviction.

Mathios sensed indefinite apprehension in her flashing gaze.

That same moment, the launch finally turned to the east and continued rapidly on its way.

Mathios gave a gasp of wonder.

– Here's what's been going on, repeated Lialio. I bet, in fact I'm ninety-five per cent sure, that Uncle-Monachakis is in the launch.

– And so?

– The others, the oarsmen, partly because they want to get out of breaking their backs on the long crossing, and partly because it strikes them as more sensible, will have suggested looking round the islands, hoping that maybe they'll find us holed up there somewhere. Uncle-Monachakis, who well knows I'd have no business on the island and that all I would want to do is go home, is certain that I've headed straight over there for Trachili; and he hopes that if he catches up with me before I set foot in Agnonda, our island's little port, he'll get me to go back with him to your village. That's why he won't have wanted to lose time looking round the islands – so I won't have time to get over there and get away from him. And so he's persuaded the ones who are rowing to keep on going; and if that's got them cursing him under their breath, too bad!

– So?

– Now, once they've gone on some way, we'll cross over. Give me one of the oars.

The youth did not resist; he shifted an oar towards the stern.

A short time elapsed, and the launch had gone so far that it was just visible in the depths of the immense horizon as a dark dot in motion and as a black speck on the silver-plate surface of the sea.

– Now let's row for it! Lialio called out with engaging high spirits.

Kir-Monachakis was indeed on the launch, and the homesick young woman had not been mistaken. Half an hour after the two fugitives had embarked, he learned to his displeasure that 'his Lialio' was no longer at home. At the café, where he sat engaged in lively political discussion, with the smoke rising unremittingly from the long hubble-bubble beyond his wide breeches, a ten-year-old boy came in, without shoes, with a shirt with stripes and trousers the same, and said:

– Please, mister, yer missus's gone.

– Gone? Gone where? said the worthy fellow, startled.

– I dunno.

– You don't know? Who told you?

– Markina's Vasilis. Ee were down on the beach an' ee seen'er.

– And who's he, this Markina's Vasilis?

Turning towards the door the boy said:

– There. 'im standing outside the door.

Kir-Monachakis and the others, his fellow-disputants of a moment before, whose curiosity was greatly whetted, all turned towards the door.

A second boy, an eight year-old, bare-footed, capless, with one leg of his trousers rolled up to just below the knee and his feet still wet from the sea, was standing outside the door, one half of his face hidden behind the door-post and one half of his body behind the wall, looking into the cafe with one eye.

– You there! Did you see my wife leaving? shouted Kir-Monachakis.

– I seen'er, mister, replied the youngster.

– And where's she going?

– I dunno.

Kir Monachakis jumped up in great distress, and with an angry gesture made as if to dash his hubble-bubble to the ground.

The first boy, who stood five paces from him, trembling lest he be hit by the hubble-bubble, took fright and made to run off.

The second boy, outside the door, vanished behind the wall.

– Don't be afraid, said Kir-Monachakis, nobody'll hurt you if you're telling the truth, but, come here . . . tell me what you know . . . because . . .

This was to be the only word that he would utter to express his grief, his rage and shame.

– Well, mister, said the lad, feeling reassured and stopping near the door, Vasilis, ee saw the boat as your missus got into with Kalior's son, an' them go rowing around near the school-house. An' ee called me an' all, an' ee showed me the boat in the distance, but I never seen no people. An' we thought as how they were going to come back, an' they didn't come back.

– And how long is it since you saw them?

– Well, a couple o' hours per'aps, bit more maybe . . . only a while ago.

– And why didn't you come and tell me sooner?

– But it weren't very long . . . an hour or so, per'aps, no more'n an hour . . . and a bit maybe . . . a short while ago really.

Kir-Monachakis made a second enraged gesture, as if to hurl his hubble-bubble into the corner. The boy hastened to make his escape.

Meanwhile Markina's Vasilis, who was some three hundred paces further on, was running with the eagerness that children display when bearing good news or bad, hoping as they do, in the first case, to secure for themselves thereby a reward, and, in the second, to enjoy the spectacle provided by the discomfiture of those involved. Panting, he reached the home of the schooner's master, and, seeing the door to the balcony was open and the chamber beyond well-lit, he stood underneath and started shouting with the full force of his lungs.

– Hey mister! They've taken yer boat.

Vasilis had not earlier had the courage to go into the café and tell Kir-Monachakis the news. But now, seeing that his companion had communicated the news without getting a hiding, and knowing also that it would be impossible for the captain's stout stick to reach him from the balcony, he had become bolder and hastened to anticipate his companion in order that this time he might himself savour the pleasure.

Captain Kiriakos, who was still seated at his table, never wearying of another nibble or another sip, like many another sailor come home for a few days to his fireside, endlessly prolonging and ruminating on a pleasure for him so rare, stood up and came out on to the balcony.

– Well, what is it, then?

– They've taken yer boat, 'aven't they.

– Who has?

– Malamo's Mathios.

– What Malamo's Mathios?

– You know, 'im what's the son of Ma Kaliori, what's 'is name?

– And where's he taken it?

– Out o' the 'arbour!

– On his own?

– He were with a woman.

– With a woman, repeated Captain Kiriakos astonished. What woman?

The lad's answer remained unheard; for, just to be on the safe side, he sought the protection of the balcony.

– And why on earth didn't you come and tell me while they were taking it! shouted Captain Kiriakos.

But the boy had disappeared round the corner of the wall, and only his footsteps were heard as he raced headlong over the cobblestones.

'That damned fool of a ship's boy must have gone and got himself pie-eyed somewhere,' the captain started muttering to himself, 'and left the dinghy to take its chances.'

Right away, he sent out in search of the ship's boy, whom, after many fruitless inquiries made in the bars in the port, they finally found in an out-of-the-way bar on the inner road.

The captain gave orders for two of his comrades, then taking their ease at home, to procure themselves the use of a boat, so they could row over to the schooner and lower the big six-oared launch from the deck. He was concerned not so much about the woman who had, so it seemed, been abducted, or the young man fortunate enough to be her companion, as about his newly-built, sound and shapely skiff. He further instructed that two or three boatmen be recruited on the quay to man the oars, and that they set off in pursuit of the little boat.

In the meantime, Kir-Monachakis, having learnt to whom the stolen boat belonged, appeared at the captain's house, looking wretched.

— You can go along in the launch yourself, Captain Kiriakos said, having learnt at last whose wife the abducted woman (according, that is, to the interpretation that people naturally put on the incident) was.

Kir-Monachakis wanted precisely that, to go with the launch. He was afraid of staying waiting in the town in anguished anticipation, and it seemed to him that if he took part in the pursuit, he might through this distraction feel his pain less keenly. He had complete trust in Lialio, holding her incapable, as she herself said, of betraying his honour. But there again, who can tell? To whom is it given to penetrate the mysteries of the female mind? He recognized in her a dreamy tendency, a tendency toward languidness, and he was aware of her great, her profound homesickness. But how could he get others to understand? Let water be never so clean, woe to him that stumbles into a pit full of it. Though they may well decide to proffer a helping hand, people will never thereafter cease to mock you. But he was sure himself, though, of his Lialio, as sure as a man ever can be of a woman. From the time when, a close friend of the family, he, then a thirty year-old, had kissed and dandled her, then a three year-old, on his knee; from the time when in her fifth year, with no ulterior motive, with no prophetic eye to the future, he had treated her to sweets; from the years when, still lisping, she had

called him 'Uncou-Monachakis', till now, when, though now his wife, she addressed him as 'Uncle-Monachakis', he had observed her, child, girl, and woman, and he had studied her well, and he knew that more than any other woman, she was ruled by her nerve and her head.

Half an hour passed before Captain Kiriakos' sailors could be persuaded to turn out of their homes. Another half hour before they found a boat, reached the schooner, and lowered the launch into the sea. A further half hour on the quay till some boatmen or fishermen had been enlisted to man the launch – their own boats, being heavy and only two or four-oared, were pronounced unsuitable for the chase – and until everyone had come to an understanding and agreed to put to sea. Finally, they boarded the launch. Kir-Monachakis, as seventh man, sat at the rudder, and they set off.

Concerted rowing brought them out of the harbour. But where could they find the little boat? The sea, while garrulous as a woman, is no less secretive, and never yields its secrets. As easy as it is for someone to discover the traces of another's kisses on a woman's lips, so easy is it to discover on that limitless blue expanse a trace of the little boat. Who could say! Kir-Monachakis was thinking; after all, she was a woman. Love is a cheat and youth is easily led astray. Who could say whether she had not sinned already? Ah! how right he had been when he had told her that at his side she would be safe; for among other things an older husband is like a parent to his young wife. How right she had been, too, when she had said that at his side she would be safe even if she chose to do wrong. Now, innocent though she might be a thousand times over, the world would condemn her. But at his side, even had she actually sinned a thousand times over, still would she have remained *virtuous* in the eyes of the world.

Alas! like the princess of the fairy tale, were she to be shot at with arrows, and were it to be a sign of God's judgement that she be hit, then would an arrow but barely touch the tips of the pale fingers of one hand.

On the ocean, in the sound between the two islands, the boat was sailing on. The kindly Naiad of the ocean currents bore a favourable current beneath its keel, and the gentle nymph of off-shore winds set a soft breeze at its stern. The cool wind brought new strength to the arms and shoulders of the youth and tempered the young woman's slender muscles. They were rowing like two skilled oarsmen; the light oars did not tire them; and already they had travelled more than half their watery course.

It was when the launch, moving at the pace of a mare set loose, was nearing Cape Trachili, not till then, that the sailors on board it sighted the small boat.

– What’s that?

– The boat!

Kir-Monachakis turned his head to the left.

– Yes! It is!

– Hard to say. I shouldn’t think so, though, said a sailor, who, so as to be spared further, additional, extremely wearisome efforts, wished that there might be some way of its not being it.

– Yes, it is. It must be, said another, who desired that it should be in every possible way it; for he was greatly excited at the thought of the curious sea-borne drama that would ensue, if they did succeed in apprehending the boat and with it the woman and her lover.

– Yes, it is! declared Kir-Monachakis. Turn that way, lads, and I’ll bring her round.

– What’s it doing over there? asked one sailor.

– It’s heading for St Nicholas; they’ve gone the quickest way, see; and all this time we’ve been breaking our backs for nothing.

– Let’s put about, lads! called out Kir-Monachakis. Quickly, for God’s sake, put about; one of you back, so I can bring her round!

The six oarsmen had laid down their oars, and the launch was still being carried onwards by its “acquired momentum”. Kir-Monachakis, however, begrudging the time being lost, shouted:

– Back them, lads, back. Turn that way! . . . Round with the launch!

But no-one was listening to him. A conference was being held in mid-ocean. Some favoured keeping on the way they were going, others turning north in the direction of the small boat. Those finally to prevail were the latter, who were electrified at the entrancing spectacle envisaged.

They turned the bows leftwards and took up the oars with the new zest engendered in them by the prospect of their exotic prey and by the exaltation natural in sight of victory. But the launch was still three times more distant than the boat was from the bay to which they were headed. And if the first had three times the man-power, it also had, however, five times the volume and three times the draught.

Mathios was quick to see the turn suddenly being executed by the launch, and he pointed it out to his companion.

– Look, he said; they’re coming after us.

– Let them catch us now, if they can! cried Lialio gaily. They’ve further to go than us, haven’t they?

– Oh! yes. Much further. But they’ve got a lot of oars.

– And we’ve got a lot of strength.

And she redoubled the vigour of her rowing.

For a full hour and more, while the sallow moon went slowly down in the west, and the cockerel was heard to crow, sending out its second call over fields sown in hollow and on crest, was the game played out, along the whole length of that coast, of the terrible and mighty-tentacled octopus hunting the small fry down and of the submerged and gamesome dolphin coursing after the horn-fish. The launch moved with the rhythmic knock of the oars in the oar-locks’ iron forks, with the dire power of the shark, imposing and insistent. The little boat was carried on the waves like a cork, its small toy-like oars, with a soft as the sound of a kiss swish, pushing away the waves, which, attending it and accompanying it, ran with it, like an escort of honour preceding and succeeding a royal carriage; and one would have thought it had been raised by unseen Tritons to the surface of the waves so that its speed might not be checked by the depth of its keel.

Even so, the launch was visibly gaining on the little boat. They rowed on, they rowed hard, and all the while the launch kept gaining, and all the while it seemed to get closer – until the distance separating the boat from the beach was already small, very small, and fast though the launch was going, Mathios still had time to drive the boat hard onto the sand beneath the shallows.

– We’ve done it! Lialio called out happily.

She turned; seeing the white wall of the chapel of St Nicholas shining brightly in the moonlight, she crossed herself; and she jumped off first onto the sand on the shore, wetting her heels in the water

Mathios jumped after her and tried to drag up the boat.

The launch was already no more than forty yards from the bay.

The youth was struggling to drag the boat up on to the beach, hurrying to accompany Lialio up to the village. He suspected that those on the launch would pursue them on shore, and, without knowing why, he was glad of it. Lialio’s last revelation, regarding her fiancé drowned in the Black Sea, had not sufficed to soothe his fears, and temptation was prompting in him now the thought that a woman who could so far forget that first hapless wretch as to marry an old man

might well forsake this second for a third, if this last lived where she came from. But if, though, he and she should be pursued together on shore, and, there, she should entrust herself once more to him, and, at her village, they should arrive together, oh! why, his love would have been sanctified then both at sea and on shore.

Suddenly, the voice of Kir-Monachakis, who could be seen upright in the moonlight, near the launch's stern, was heard in the silence of the night.

– Lialio! Hey! Lialio!

Lialio stood, thoughtful, her head bowed, and then cried out in answer:

– Yes, Uncle-Monachakis!

– Is it your parents you want to go to, my sweet? Quite right! Wait, I'll come too. I'll go along with you till you get there – so no harm can come to you, my love, *all alone* on the road.

– And welcome, Uncle-Monachakis, answered Lialio unhesitatingly.

The youth was standing shyly beside her, looking at her, apprehensive and uncomprehending.

– Go back with the launch. Goodbye Mathio. Good luck, my lamb, Lialio said to him, a note of undisguised emotion in her voice. Too bad that I'm older by years than you are; if Uncle-Monachakis died, I'd take you.