

# 1 – A Murder and a Funeral

**Saturday, 12 March 1888, Feast of St Theodore  
the Great Martyr**

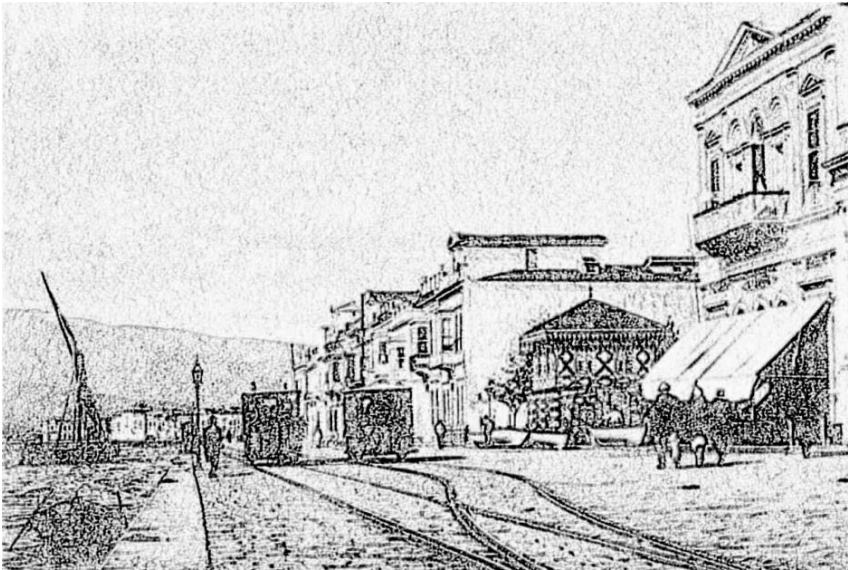
*Yesternoon past the meridian, tidings were conveyed hither ... that a new governor of our Province had been appointed, namely, Nashid Pasha, who had formerly held such office in this place, and was the former governor of Syria. Yet, after the passage of a few hours, a further telegram arrived from Damascus, bearing the lamentable news that Nashid Pasha had most unexpectedly succumbed to a stroke of apoplexy.*

*From Theira, it is reported unto us that vigorous measures have been taken for the destruction of the locust eggs by the local kaymakam ...*

*Many of the cart-drivers have once more begun to cast the sweepings and filth by the bridge of Meles ... We do believe that the municipality shall take the necessary measures to hinder this harmful indecency.*



On the evening of Saturday, 12 March, 1888, the front hall of the café-bar “Alhambra”, situated on Smyrna’s bustling quay was filled to capacity with men of all walks of life. They conversed boisterously, their voices rising above the clink of glasses, as they drank and smoked in unrestrained fashion. The waiters, few in number, scurried from table to table, barely managing to serve the patrons – refilling hookahs, delivering mugs of beer and glasses of *raki*, accompanied by the requisite platters of *meze*. Above them, a thick haze of smoke hung like a low cloud, shrouding the electric lamp that dangled from the ceiling, making it appear as though it were the dim nucleus of some vast, elliptical galaxy. In the corner, upon a small stage, an ensemble



The *Alhambra* café-bar on the right, and to its left, the elegant wooden *Aphrodite* pavilion of the French Consulate.

consisting of violin, mandolin, and *santur* struggled in vain to allow their languid, sensual melody to rise above the din.

However, in the private room towards the rear of the establishment, little of the commotion disturbed the guests, for Kallergis, the proprietor, had taken great pains to ensure the gamblers within were not distracted. At four tables, draped with green baize, only the quiet murmurs of wagers broke the silence.

“All in,” declared a ruddy-faced man, his expression unreadable. He was balding, with a thick, jet-black moustache that contrasted sharply with his otherwise fair complexion. Pushing a sizable sum of money into the centre of the table, he then reached into the breast pocket of his jacket and withdrew a thick cigar. With practiced, almost ceremonial motions, he lit the cigar, took a long, deliberate draw, and exhaled slowly, the smoke rising in a perfectly round ring above his head.

The crowd shifted their attention towards the sole remaining player yet to make his move. He was a well-built young man, perhaps

twenty or twenty-five, with thick chestnut hair, a fine, slender moustache, and dark, piercing eyes. With deliberate care, he lifted his cards ever so slightly, revealing just enough to give them a final glance. Then, snapping them shut with a swift motion, he fixed his gaze intently upon his opponent. His hand was far from the strongest, yet something within told him his adversary was bluffing.

While those around the table remained wholly absorbed by the tense moment unfolding, the door at the rear of the room burst open with a resounding bang, drawing the attention of every man present – save for the young gambler, who remained deep in thought. In the doorway stood a tall, slender figure, no older than twenty-five, his thinning hair only just beginning to recede. He wore round, gold-rimmed spectacles, which gleamed faintly in the dim light. A murmur rippled through the room, as several of the patrons recognised him as Georgios Papagregoriadis, the Greek vice-consul in Smyrna.

Without hesitation, the vice-consul strode directly to the table where the young player sat, absorbed in contemplation over whether to match the wager. Breaking the silence, he cried out in a voice that caused the room to stir:

“Hari! Hari! They’ve stabbed Crusulentis!”

The young player turned slowly to face him, a look of momentary confusion flickering across his features. Then, quite suddenly, a smile crept over his lips as he turned back to the man with the cigar.

“Call,” he said calmly, revealing his hand – two small pairs, sevens and threes.

The bald man’s face flushed crimson, not unlike a ripened tomato, as the truth of his failure dawned on him. His bluff, utterly shattered, left him no recourse but to fling his cards upon the table in a fit of frustration. Rising abruptly from his seat, he stormed from the room, muttering curses under his breath.

The remaining players exchanged glances, some puzzled, others astonished. A handful leaned in to ask how Hari had so deftly seen

through the bluff, while one or two clapped him on the back, offering words of congratulation. Throughout it all, Hari remained composed, a faint smile playing at the corners of his mouth as he calmly collected his winnings and stood to leave.

“What was that you said, Georgie?” Hari inquired of the vice-consul as he calmly tucked the money into his pockets. “Sorry, I wasn’t paying much attention.”

“Some wretches stabbed Johnnie Crusulentis and his uncle near their home. Our friend is in a precarious state – it is uncertain whether he will survive.”

Hari’s demeanour shifted at once.

“Good heavens! How on earth did you come by this?”

“Johnnie and his uncle are both Greek subjects, so we were informed straightaway.”

“Where are they now?”

“They have been taken to their residence, or so I have been informed. The consul has tasked me with going there to learn more.”

“So, you’ve come to fetch me, fearing you might faint at the sight of blood... Very well, I shall accompany you,” Hari replied after a brief pause. The truth was, if anyone had an aversion to blood, it was him, and Crusulentis was hardly what one might call a close companion. Yet, at that moment, he found himself with no pressing engagements, and this offered a convenient opportunity to leave the game with his winnings unscathed.

The two men stepped out onto the quay, turning right towards the “Little Port”, as the road leading to Trassa Boulevard was known.

“Do you suppose this has anything to do with those threats they received?” Hari suddenly asked.

“What threats?” the vice-consul replied.

“Oh, I forgot – you were still in Athens then. It was just before Christmas. The old man received a note, demanding 100 pounds in exchange for his family’s safety. Seizanis even wrote an article about it

in the ‘Harmony’<sup>1</sup> at the time. Do you think this attack might be related?”

“Who can say...” the vice-consul murmured after a brief pause. “Let’s press on, and we shall uncover the truth soon enough.”

They quickened their pace, with Hari nearly breaking into a run to keep up with his companion’s long strides. Upon reaching Trassa, near the French Consulate, they turned sharply to the right and made their way along Fasoulas Boulevard. Just before the square, they veered left onto Great Dyers Street. In bygone days, a branch of the Meles River had flowed here, attracting a number of textile dyeing houses, which required copious amounts of running water. But once the stream was covered over, the dye houses vanished, and the area gradually transformed into a genteel, urban neighbourhood, its narrow streets lined with large, well-kept two-storey residences.

At the end of a narrow alley off this street, known as Doctor Papa’s Lane, resided Jean Petrokitrinos and his nephew, Johnnie.

The night had descended into a profound darkness, yet nearly all the neighbours had gathered outside the house of the Petrokitrinos family. Strangely absent were the gendarmes, despite the police station’s proximity at Fasoulas Square, less than a hundred and fifty meters away. The Greek vice-consul, pushing aside the throng of curious onlookers that crowded the sidewalk, rapped insistently upon the brass knocker until a comely young maid, scarcely seventeen, answered the door – one whom Hari had never encountered before. The girl appeared flustered, yet the authoritative countenance of Papagregoriadis brooked no hesitation, compelling her to permit their entrance.

“Upstairs, in the master’s chamber,” she said as she gently closed the door, the clamour from the street gradually diminishing.

They ascended the wooden staircase that wound its way to the first floor, where the sleeping quarters resided, and halted before the imposing door of the grand chamber that commanded a view of the

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<sup>1</sup> A Smyrna newspaper, published by Miltiades Seizanis.

street. Upon the bed lay Jean Petrokitrinos, as pale as a spectre, covered to his neck, his eyes shut. The sight prompted Hari to stifle a laugh.

“What’s got you laughing, you rogue?” his companion murmured, glancing sideways.

“Look at the hue of Petrokitrinos! Just like the stones at *Sarı Kışla*<sup>2</sup> – most fitting for one of his name...<sup>3</sup>”

A curious sound, akin to a sneeze, reverberated through the chamber as the vice-consul too tried to suppress his laughter. At the sound, two gentlemen engaged in low conversation near the window turned their gaze towards the newcomers.

The vice-consul stepped forward, extending a cordial introduction:

“Georgios Papagregoriadis, vice-consul of the Kingdom of Greece in Smyrna.”

“Panagiotis Depastas, the attending physician of Mr Petrokitrinos,” the elder of the two responded briskly. He appeared to be in his sixties, relatively short of stature, with a long, snow-white beard and spectacles encased in a metal frame. “And this is Dr John Vardas, a surgeon affiliated with the Greek Hospital,” he continued, gesturing towards his significantly younger colleague.

The vice-consul shook their hands, a grave expression clouding his features. “How fares Mr Petrokitrinos?” he inquired.

“He was fortunate, Mr Papagregoriadis,” Vardas interjected with a hint of relief. “The knife wound was halted by his ribs, sparing the thoracic cavity from penetration. His injury is merely superficial and poses no immediate cause for alarm. However, he shall require ample rest, hence we administered a draught to ensure a peaceful slumber.”

“And the nephew?” the vice-consul pressed, his tone shifting to one of concern.

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<sup>2</sup> Turkish for “Yellow Barracks”, the camp to the south of Smyrna, built from yellowish stones.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek name “Petrokitrinos” translates to “Yellowstone”.

The two doctors exchanged solemn glances, and Depastas pursed his lips in dismay.

“Regrettably, we were unable to intervene. He succumbed only a short while ago,” he lamented, shaking his head in sorrow.

“Where is he?” Hari inquired, having remained silent until that moment, his voice tinged with an urgency that pierced the sombre atmosphere.

Before a response could be offered, a woman emerged in the doorway, her age ranging between thirty-five and forty years, with a countenance marked by sternness. She was attired conservatively, her hair drawn back into a tight bun.

“My cousin lies in the back room. Follow me,” she commanded, taking a candle and igniting it from the silver candlestick perched upon the walnut dresser. She guided them out of the room where the injured man lay.

“You are...” began the Greek vice-consul as they stepped into the dim corridor.

“Amalia Pascaloudi. I am the niece of Mr Petrokitrinos, the daughter of his elder brother, Stavros,” she replied, opening the door to a modest back chamber.

In the flickering light of the candle, they beheld the lifeless form of their friend stretched upon the bed. His face was pale like weathered parchment, and his shirt was saturated with blood, a deep wound gaping across his abdomen from side to side.

Upon entering the dimly lit room, Hari was seized by a feeling of suffocation. The air grew thick around him, rendering each breath a laborious effort, while his heart raced with fervour. A sudden draft caused the candle flame to waver, and a bead of cold sweat trickled down his brow. He sensed that if he lingered there any longer, he would surely succumb to faintness. Turning to retreat, his gaze inadvertently fell upon the woman’s visage in the doorway. A curious sensation washed over him, for there was not a trace of sorrow etched upon her features. In fact, he fancied he detected a faint smile of

satisfaction gracing her lips. Yet, in this dim light, certainty eluded him...

“Let’s depart... There is naught for us to accomplish here,” declared his companion, Georgie, in a voice thick with emotion. “Mrs Pascaloudi,” he continued as they stepped out of the room, “I realise this may not be the most opportune moment, but your uncle received a menacing letter not long past, did he not? Might it be possible for us to examine it?”

“He’s got two letters, not merely one,” she replied. “The first showed up before Christmas, and the second arrived just last Tuesday. I believe I know where he’s tucked them away.”

Retracing their steps to the chamber of her unconscious uncle, his niece delved into the depths of the nightstand drawer and produced the letters, which she promptly handed over.

“We are no longer required here,” Dr Depastas announced with a sigh. “Mr Petrokitrinos shall remain in slumber for at least twelve hours. I shall return on the morrow, Mrs Pascaloudi. Should any urgent matter arise in the interim, you are aware of my whereabouts.”

As soon as the doctors took their leave, the vice-consul carefully unfolded the first letter. The paper upon which it was inscribed bore the mark of quality, yet a strip was conspicuously absent from the top, as though it had been severed by hand. The handwriting was meticulous and consistent, implying it had been penned by a person of education; however, the text was marred by a multitude of spelling errors:

*“Mr Jean Petrokitrinos mercer in Smyrna.*

*Take into acount that we are seven (7) people who are being pursud by the Govenment and we have nowere to lay our heds. Knowing well that you are a grate benefactor, we have writen to ask you to send us one hunderd (100) pounds. Furthemore, keep in mind that if you refuse, you will regreat it, and your regreat will be of no use. Don’t think that you can hide, and we wont find you. Your kin will be in our hands, and you aswell. Our desicion is grave. Lest you become the*



*caus of any serious crimes, keep the one hunderd (100) pounds on you from the day you recieve this letter. If you entertin the idea that you shold aproach the Govenment, know that you will be kiled, as we too have our means.*

*You must keep this secret, just as others did. If we lern that you have disclosed it, you will be dangerous, along with your famely. You shold keep the one hunderd close to you, for you will never kno when we may ask for them (the pasword will be the seven's pledge). If any one aproaches you with the pasword, you must hand them over rite away, whatever clothes he may be wearing. You must complie without hesitashun, or we will kill you immediatly.*

*The gang of seven."*

"Well, what do you make of this, Hari?" the vice-consul inquired, as they concluded their perusal of the first letter.

"I already knew most of it, my friend. Johnnie over yonder," Hari replied, gesturing behind him with a casual flick of his thumb, "had recounted the tale to me in great detail. He took it as a jest, spreading it around town, which is how it ended up in the pages of 'Harmony', the gazette I mentioned. His uncle, however, was far from amused. Alarmed, he hired a bodyguard – a robust, fierce-looking Albanian, well-armed and always at his side. Even at church, the man stayed with him, though, being a Moslem, he had to remain outside in the courtyard. Yet, it seems he dismissed the Albanian not long ago, thinking the danger had passed; otherwise, they wouldn't find themselves in such dire straits now."

"Just as you say," Mrs Pascaloudi affirmed. "A few days past, he told the Albanian his services were no longer needed, thinking the danger had blown over."

"Indeed. Let's examine what this one has to convey," the vice-consul muttered, unfolding the second note, which appeared to be inscribed in the same hand, though on plain and inferior paper.

*"Gentlmen Petrokitrinos, you recived the first leter from the gang of seven, but we sow it anounced in the newspaper that you now have a*

*gard from the Govenment, despit us instructing you to keap this secret. You have made a grav mistake. Not only did you discloze it to all your frends, but cleerly, you did not take it sersiously. For the last time, we rite to inform you that as a penalti, an additinal twent-five (25) Otoman pounds will be added, bringing the total to one hunderd twenty-five (125). For if, at the momment the gang apears, you do not have the monee redy, the punisment for your betrayel to the Govenment will be carried out. That is, eather the monee or deth. And do not think that you can hide from us – we wil find you. Even if you disappear, your nieces and evryone living with you will pay the price. We askd for the monee to forgive you, but you wish to be killd. We kno the way to make it hapen. Do not think time will pas, and we will forgit – we won't forgit, especilly now that you have betrayed us, there won't be any hope for salvashun. We are merciful; you wealthy men are beasts. But if you do not give the 125, we will turn you into skeletons, no mater how much time pases. You will not escape, wether months or yeers..."*

The perusal of the note was abruptly interrupted by Hari's uproarious laughter, which erupted uncontrollably this time.

"Hahaha! Haha! 'We will turn you into skeletons!' Listen to that – 'skeletons!' Ahahahahaha!"

Georgios Papagregoriadis cast a disapproving glance in his direction, befitting his position as secretary of the consular court, and Hari's merriment ceased at once. After a brief pause, the vice-consul resumed:

*"...and I advize you to pubsh through Harmony that your frends have sent the leter as a joke and to deny the first pubshed statments.*

*Gentlmen Johns, whether one or the other, you must hold the monee. Both of you shold hold it at the momment when someone may ask you for the pledge of the seven. If you don't have it, be awar that you will be at fault, and we will be guilty of the crime, but you will be to blaim for your stinginess and your greed. A confessed sin is no sin at all.*

*We are among the grait families, the seven who apeared in the newspaper, and we shal show you.*

*The Captin, being iliteral, signes with his cigarett."*

Indeed, there were four cigarette burns upon the corners of the paper.

"I hadn't heard of this second letter," Hari remarked as soon as his friend concluded his reading. "What's more, there's been no mention of it in 'Harmony', as the rascals had asked."

The vice-consul nodded, his expression one of comprehension.

"If you permit me, I shall retain these, Mrs Pascaloudi," he stated thereafter. "As for the burial, rest assured; we shall see to it. We will also inform the Turkish authorities, should you have neglected to do so."

As they made their departure, the young maid stood by to see them off.

"Well, what's your name, my dear?" inquired Hari as he stepped out into the cool evening air.

"Afroula..." the girl whispered, her cheeks aflame with a deep blush.

Out on the street, Papagregoriadis endeavoured to ascertain whether any of those gathered had witnessed anything of note, but none could provide him with any information. However, as they were about to depart, Hari's attention was drawn to a poorly clad, barefoot lad, no more than twelve summers old, who watched them from the opposite corner. Seizing his friend by the arm, he led him over.

"What do they call you, young lad?" he inquired as they approached.

"Philippis, effendi," the street urchin replied, a mocking smirk playing upon his lips.

Hari retrieved a *metelik*<sup>4</sup> coin from his pocket, deftly flicked it upwards with his thumb, and caught it in his palm as it descended. The boy's eyes tracked the coin's arc with keen interest.

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<sup>4</sup> A small-value bronze coin worth a quarter of a piaster.

“You’ve seen something, haven’t you, Philippis?” Hari pressed once more.

The lad nodded, his gaze locked upon Hari’s closed fist.

“Speak, and this shall be yours,” Hari enticed, extending his offer.

“Hand it over first, then I’ll spill the beans,” Philippis countered boldly.

“Very well, if you are unwilling to speak, then so be it,” Hari replied, feigning a departure as he turned to walk away.

“Wait, effendi!” the boy called, tugging at his sleeve. “Chuck the coin on the ground, and I’ll tell you the whole lot.”

With a flourish, Hari let the coin tumble from his fingers, allowing it to land in the dirt between them. He appreciated the boy’s quick wits and audacity, yet maintained his pretence of annoyance.

“Speak quickly, lad, before my patience runs out!”

Philippis, his face lighting up with a broad grin, began to recount his tale:

“Well, see, I was standin’ right here on the corner, and I spotted ‘em comin’ up from the square. The old fella was leadin’ the way, and trailin’ behind was his lackey – a right fancy fop he was. Soon as they crossed the alley, out jumps two rough types – one dressed all proper, like a gent, and the other, filthy as a street dog, wearin’ rags. The gent in the nice clothes hollers at ‘em to stop and says, *‘Where’s the cash we been askin’ for? You ain’t paid up – why’s that?’* The dandy shouts back, *‘Get lost, you turds!’* And then, just like that, the gent snaps and jabs him in the gut with a knife, dropped him right there. The old man starts hollerin’, *‘Help, Christians! Aiuto<sup>5</sup>, they’re butcherin’ us! Saint Theodore, have mercy!’* He tries to leg it, but the killer catches up to him and sticks him too. Then he wipes the blood off the blade with his tongue and says to the other, *‘Let’s get outta here,’* and off they scarpered. Went that way, down towards the girls’ school,” the boy rattled off, barely pausing for breath as he pointed down the street.

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<sup>5</sup> Italian for “Help”.

Hari whistled in admiration.

“Well, well, what a splendid tale! You’ve earned that coin fair and square, little scamp.”

With a quick motion, Philippis bent down to retrieve the coin and deftly tucked it into his belt.

“Where will I find you if I have need of your services again, huh?” Hari inquired as the boy turned to leave.

“Look for me down at the Burnt Theatre<sup>6</sup>,” the street urchin replied, striding away with a jaunty whistle on his lips.



Loud knocks upon his door shattered Hari’s slumber the following morning. At first, he tried to ignore them, attempting to sink back into the realm of dreams, but the persistent rapping refused to relent. Finally, resigned to the interruption, he called out:

“Enough! Who’s there at such an ungodly hour?”

“Mr Hari, your friend the vice-consul’s downstairs. He’s a-persistin’ on comin’ up to fetch ya,” came the shrill voice of his landlady.

“What time is it, Madam Vangeli?”

“It’s almost noon, my son. What should I tell the gentleman?”

“Tell him I’m coming down right away,” Hari grumbled, cursing silently to himself. It had been a mistake to drink so heavily the previous night, he thought.

Five minutes later, Hari climbed into the carriage where his friend was waiting for him.

“By all that’s holy! Didn’t we agree to go to the funeral together? Where were you wandering about last night?” the vice-consul asked, taking in Hari’s unshaven face and dishevelled appearance, with wild hair and bloodshot eyes. “What do I even ask for... You reek of wine!”

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<sup>6</sup> The old Smyrna Theatre (“Camerano”), near Fasoulas Square, which was burned in 1884.

“Jealous, are you? Next time, I’ll bring you along. At the joint I was at, they serve that dark, rich juice – pure nectar, I swear,” Hari replied, straightening the cuffs of his shirt.

The carriage rolled onward, making its way towards the Orthodox cemetery in Daragatch. As they neared St Catherine, the small wooden church of the neighbourhood<sup>7</sup>, they proceeded at a snail’s pace. It was the time when the Sunday service of Orthodoxy was concluding, a grand feast, and the surrounding alleys teemed with churchgoers returning to their homes. However, once they emerged onto the Boulevard, the crowds began to thin. The rhythmic clop of the horse’s hooves on the cobblestones lulled Hari into a stupor, and as he had scarcely slept, he leaned to the side and succumbed once more to the embrace of slumber.

He awoke with a jolt from the sudden bump of the carriage and glanced outside to see where they were. To his left, he spotted the two-storey buildings of the Wilmington English School, entirely constructed of red brick, slipping away behind them. First the school, and then the dormitory, where he had spent his most tender years. Memories of what he had endured there of late flooded back, sending a shiver through his body. With great effort, he managed to push the traumatic images from his mind.

They passed through the Bella Vista square and the gendarmerie post of Punta, turning right onto the carriage road to Bournabat. Bypassing the grand Issigonis factories and Veuve Prokopp’s brewery, they arrived at the Aïdin railway station. Skirting around it, they took the road to Daragatch and soon halted at the northern gate of the cemetery.

As they passed beneath the semi-circular archway of the entrance, the two young men made their way down the central avenue of the cemetery, bordered by young cypress trees, freshly planted less than ten years prior. At the same time, the small yet

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<sup>7</sup> In its place, the largest church in Smyrna was erected in 1898, measuring 44 x 30 meters and standing 23 meters tall.

intricately designed chapel of St Michael the Archangel had also been completed, standing right at the heart of the enclosed grounds. This chapel was crafted from the plans of Xenophon Latris, the architect renowned for erecting the famous bell tower of St Photini cathedral.

From afar they heard the chanting, quickening their pace as it became clear that the funeral service had already commenced. Upon arriving, Hari's gaze was drawn to the oversized marble rosette above the chapel's central door, flanked by equally grand marble cherubs. If he weren't so drowsy, he would have remarked on their striking beauty.

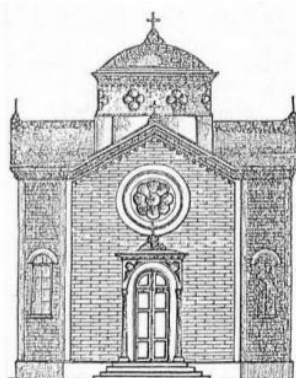
"I must head up front," whispered the vice-consul as they entered. "If you'd like, you can sit somewhere in the back, and I'll be with you later."

Little did the sleepless youth desire anything more. He mechanically crossed himself and made his way to the back right corner of the chapel, where, despite the considerable crowd attending the funeral, he noticed an unoccupied pew. He settled in, leaned his head forward, and within less than a minute he was sound asleep.

It was the last words of the eulogy, delivered by the Greek consul, Mr Argyropoulos, that roused him from his slumber:

"...of our esteemed fellow citizen, John Crusulentis, who was tragically murdered, a man who was always distinguished by his piety, patriotism, industriousness, and commercial integrity. May the earth rest lightly upon him..."

A faint smile tugged at the corners of Hari's lips as he listened to the consul's exaggerated praise. He rose, manoeuvring his way through the crowd, which had grown even denser since their arrival, and stepped outside into the crisp air. He retrieved his tobacco pouch and rolling papers, deftly crafting a cigarette. Striking a match, he lit it



St Michael's chapel at the Orthodox cemetery.

and took a deep drag. A chill ran through his lungs, and he felt a slight dizziness – though it was not the result of yesterday’s indulgence. That had faded long ago; the slumber he had managed to secure was quite restorative.

He was finishing his cigarette when the pallbearers emerged, bearing the wooden coffin with the deceased upon their shoulders. They were followed by relatives, dignitaries, friends, and onlookers, led foremost by Amalia Pascaloudi, the cousin, accompanied by a balding middle-aged man, likely her husband. Just as nearly everyone had exited, Georgios Papagregoriadis, the vice-consul, made his appearance. Beside him strode a man in mourning attire, a thirty-something with a thin moustache and a scraggly goatee, beginning just beneath his lip and tapering off at his chin. The vice-consul proceeded to introduce them:

“This is Mr Socrates Solomonidis, publisher of ‘Amalthea’<sup>8</sup>, the gazette. And here is Hari, a dear friend of mine and a companion of the departed,” the vice-consul announced.

“Delighted to meet you, Mr Hari,” Solomonidis extended his hand. “Just Hari?”

“Around these parts, they know me as Hari ‘the Englishman’,” Hari replied with a smile, squeezing the journalist’s hand a tad too firmly.

“Ohhh...” came a small gasp from Solomonidis, a mix of surprise and pain. He opened his mouth to say something but the vice-consul interrupted him before he could inquire further about the curious nickname.

“I must follow the grieving relatives and the other mourners, like it or not. Hari, if it’s not too much trouble, please recount to Mr Solomonidis what we learned yesterday. This matter is particularly grave, and it is improper to allow baseless rumours to linger. The true

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<sup>8</sup> The oldest and most reputable newspaper in Smyrna, published by Socrates Solomonidis and Georgios Hyperidis.



facts must be made known, and there is no one better suited for this than Socrates.”

As Papagregoriadis hurried away to catch up with the others, the publisher of “Amalthea” took out a notepad and pencil, looking at Hari questioningly.

Hari had absolutely no desire to recount anything. What he longed for more than anything at that moment was to stretch out on a chair at one of the waterfront cafés and savour a cup of coffee while gazing at the sea. Yet he managed to conceal his yearning, not wanting to displease his friend, Georgie.

“Well, Mr Publisher,” he began with a smile, “last night I was playing poker at the ‘Alhambra’ when Georgie came looking for me and told me that uncle and nephew had been stabbed...”

He continued his tale, recounting their visit to Petrokitrinos’ house, summarising the content of the two letters, and sharing what the little street urchin had told them. The only detail he left out was the effect of Mrs Pascaloudi’s enigmatic smile upon him in the room of their deceased friend. He decided it was best to keep it to himself, as he wasn’t entirely certain he’d actually seen such a thing.

Once Hari finished, Solomonidis pocketed his notebook and pencil.

“There is a rumour that Mr Petrokitrinos refused to grant his servant girl to her suitor, who was demanding a dowry of 100 pounds; that’s why he ended up stabbing them. What’s your take on this?” he inquired.

Hari scratched his head, struggling to gather his thoughts. After a prolonged moment of hesitation, he replied, “I can’t believe it. Afroula, the maid, didn’t strike me as the type.”

“Fair enough, I’ll look into it myself. Now, Mr ‘Englishman’, I have to thank you. However, I must take my leave. The paper goes to print tomorrow, and I need to rush to the office to prepare the edition. Until we meet again!”

Hari waited for Solomonidis to distance himself before he, too, began to leave. Yet, he had scarcely taken a few steps when a change of heart seized him. It would be improper not to pay a visit to Crusulentis' grave; they were friends, after all. But not just yet. It would be wiser to linger a bit until the crowd that could be seen further back in the cemetery dispersed.

He settled himself upon a gravestone and reached for his tobacco pouch to roll another cigarette. His gaze fell upon the tomb across from him. A marble tree trunk loomed above it, likely symbolising a life severed abruptly. He read the inscription:

*"Here lies the final scion  
Of the noble Yovanoff line,  
The delight of his parents,  
Freddy, their only son.  
Spirit, youth, and beauty rare,  
And Freddy, a form so divine,  
Yet fate, with a heavy hand,  
Has turned him to fragrant dust."*

A bitter smile formed on Hari's lips. He sighed and took a drag from his cigarette. Then he settled in to wait...

After a considerable while and three cigarettes later, he rose to his feet. The crowd had long dispersed. He made his way towards the freshly dug grave but suddenly halted. His attention was drawn to a feminine figure approaching his friend's tomb. Instinctively, he concealed himself behind a grand sepulchral monument that resembled an ancient temple.

As he remained concealed, Hari observed her intently. From her movements, she appeared to be quite young. She wore a dark purple dress with even darker highlights and an elegant black hat, which failed to entirely conceal her fiery golden hair. A dense black veil shrouded her face completely. Who could this mysterious woman be, who, like him, awaited the departure of others before daring to approach?

The woman paused before the grave and remained still for a moment. Hari saw her lean down, and it seemed to him that she placed something upon the earth.

Curiosity gnawed at the young man. What connection could she possibly have with Johnnie Crusulentis? Suddenly, the peculiar behaviour of their friend sprang to mind; how he sometimes departed abruptly from their gatherings without revealing his destination. He recalled the enigmatic smile he wore when pressed for answers, leading them to conclude he must be off to meet some secret sweetheart he preferred to keep hidden. Moreover, there was that instance when Johnnie, half-drunk, had asked them to recommend a good jeweller, stubbornly refusing to disclose for whom he intended to purchase the items. And yet another time when he had vanished for over a week, leaving his uncle alone at the shop. Even then, he had deftly avoided sharing his whereabouts, skilfully diverting the conversation elsewhere.

A collared dove took off noisily from a nearby tree, catching the attention of the mysterious woman. As if awakened from a daydream, she slowly began to make her way towards the exit. The moment she moved away, Hari hurried to the grave. On the earth, he found a small bouquet of tulips, their hue a vibrant orange-yellow, with veins as red as blood – reminding him of the woman's fiery hair. He picked it up, and without quite understanding why, he plucked a single flower and tucked it into his lapel. Leaving the rest behind, he swiftly followed after the woman, careful to remain unseen.

At the gate, he paused. Just in time, he caught sight of the unknown woman stepping into an opulent *landau* drawn by a sleek, black Hungarian horse. As soon as the door closed behind her, the Turkish coachman cracked his whip in the air, and the carriage set off towards Punta.

Even if he had wanted to, it would have been impossible for Hari to follow them. Left with the lingering curiosity about the woman's identity, he turned towards the quay. It was time for coffee.