

"Allo, allo . . ." she repeated several times.

Christos kept silent. He recognized the voices of his brothers in the background and tried to picture the scene at the other end of the line.

"Allo." The voice was angry now.

A reply formed on his lips but he did not sound it. There was so much that he wished to tell his mother now. He felt lost and sorry for himself and wished that at this moment his mother could take him in her arms and let him cry in her lap as when he was a boy.

"Allo."

But things had changed. Christos was no longer a boy and his mother had grown hard, bony and adamant. They no longer shared the same life. It was simply too much of a defeat for him to tell her what she had prophesied from the beginning. She would find it out in time, he thought. No, he must not speak even though it left him with nothing.

The phone went dead. Christos kept the receiver to his ear until the last possible moment then returned slowly to his chair. He sat down and looked sadly about him. The objects in the room seemed to shrink from his gaze, and the light, so sharp and brilliant, appeared to illuminate the emptiness that surrounded him too clearly.

He sighed deeply and let his head fall back on the chair. He stared into the light above and was struck by the reflection of his own emptiness. He was weak, humiliated, pitiful and slightly drunk. His heart cringed faintly. He felt cold and knew that he was alone.

Kapetan Nikola

Nicholas Athanasou

Sydney, 1948.

It was still dark when Kapetan Nikola opened the shop. He stepped inside and groped his way toward the light switch at the far end of the room. He traced a path around the sack of potatoes near the door, between the rows of sloping shelves filled with fruits of all kind and the counter on which lay the cash register, the sweets cupboard and the open sheets of newspaper, then edged his way carefully toward the wall. He trod on the leaves of yesterday's vegetables and heard them crackle drily underneath. The naked brightness of a hundred-watt bulb showed him the work he would have to do that morning.

He followed methodically the routine he had established over the last two months. First he swept the floor, then he went over it again with a wet mop; he wiped the shelves and the counter vigorously with a damp cloth. He restored the display of apples, pears and oranges, replacing any fruit that had fallen to the floor during the night. Then he emptied the rubbish into the garbage tin at the back of the shop, stored the empty bottles of soft drink into a box, carried in the milk and cut the double sheets of newspaper used for wrapping, into single sheets. His last job was to sharpen the knives which were used for slicing the vegetables.

Kapetan Nikola pulled out a packet of cork-tipped cigarettes from his pocket and sat down behind the counter to enjoy a smoke. He gazed at a mirror above the rows of fruit and brushed back an untidy shock of white hair that had fallen over his brow. He was wearing a collarless white shirt, buttoned to the top, and a pair of blue-striped trousers held by suspenders. He was not tall but broad shouldered, and his hands were thick and hairy. His immobile expression-

less face was thrown into areas that reflected the light differently. His cheeks were shiny and smooth, his lips, beneath a thick grey moustache, thin and colourless, and his eyes, dark and thoughtful. He stared fixedly at the objects before him and blinked deliberately.

His work took no longer than forty-five minutes but often, like today, he could stretch it to the hour. Now he had only to wait for Tony his son-in-law to return from the markets with a fresh load of vegetables and fruit. He had nothing to do till then. His daughter, Evangelia, and the other women employed in the shop would arrive in a few minutes to officially open the business. For Kapetan Nikola could neither speak nor understand English, so even if a customer had chanced to enter the shop, he would not have been able to help him.

Six months ago, he had left his island in the Aegean and emigrated to Australia. The war had devastated the small island, and most of the inhabitants had been forced to migrate either to Australia or America. During the war, he had transported refugees from Cyprus to Port Said in his own caique, and had managed slowly to scrape together the passage money to Australia for each of his six children. Why Australia? Simply because others from his own island, Kastellorizo, some even before the war, had already settled there and had sent back favourable reports of the country. So first, he had sent his eldest son to scout the land, weigh its people and plan his family's settlement. But in his first letter his son had written that this was no place for foreigners, "... Here, they work you in the markets for fifteen hours a day and pay you barely enough to live on. The people swear at you and laugh at your appearance... they hate your dark skin and the way you talk... I hate these people and their damned country..." Kapetan Nikola had pitied his son but knew that there was little else he could do. His son was young and would adapt quickly, and he had expected the letters which followed to be more hopeful. Once his son had become reasonably established in the new country, Kapetan Nikola sent out his four daughters, singly or in pairs, and with this injunction to his son: "Find them husbands, men from our own island." So each girl had been matched either while en route or soon after her arrival in Australia.

He had been the last to come himself. For now that the war was over, there was trade in neither people nor goods among the islands. Everyone had spoken of bad times and even worse ahead. Before the war, Kapetan Nikola had seen good times, sailing regular trade routes between the islands and even venturing as far as the mainland, Cyprus and Egypt. But the islands were now for the most part deserted, and what little trade existed was taken over by the big companies with their larger and more efficient vessels. On Kastellorizo, just a handful of people had remained, and Kapetan Nikola had sat in *kafeneia* filled with only the oldest men. Almost every week, he had found himself farewelling relatives or friends setting out for other countries. They would embark saying, "We shall see you in Australia. Don't you worry Kapetan Nikola. This will not be the last time." His family had sent numerous letters clamouring for his presence, but he had continued to postpone departure. He had been reluctant to leave the things he knew so well. Finally a generous offer was made for the caique, and Kapetan Nikola found that he could delay his departure no longer. He had gone the rounds of all his friends and relatives to bid them farewell. He had felt them slap his back and toast him one more time; he had listened to their well known stories and had wondered whether he would ever hear them again. His cousins had cried and embraced him. His own voice had choked and the tears had flowed slowly down his cheeks. And before leaving, he had walked down to the pier and had gazed at his caique for the last time. The brass of her wheel had shone in the moonlight and her masts had stood bare and tall. The rope had been pulled taut, the caique had groaned to be set free, and a gnawing sense of emptiness had overwhelmed him as he had felt in his heart that this life was over and he would never know it again.

Kapetan Nikola took out his pocket watch to check the time. It was almost 7:30, time for his daughter to come down from the rooms above, where they all lived together. He extinguished his cigarette and began to whistle a Greek melody, but he seemed to run out of puff half-way and could not end it satisfactorily. He moved to the window and looked out through its misty pane at the early Sydney morning. On

the other side of the road, two women stood at a tram stop, talking to each other. They signalled a tram but it raced past them, ignoring their angry shouts and gestures.

He was about to turn away when he noticed that one of the apples in the window display was missing. He picked another from the box behind him and gently tried to wedge it between the others. But he succeeded only in upsetting the balance completely so that the apples went tumbling down. Kapetan Nikola swore aloud. He began to gather the apples but when he had collected an armful, did not know what to do with them. He placed them on the counter nearby; then, just as he turned round to collect another armful, he spotted some of these apples rolling toward the edge. He dropped what he had and turned to stop them — but not quite in time. Five of them had already fallen to the floor. Kapetan Nikola swore aloud again.

"What are you doing there?" a shrill voice cried in Greek from the back of the shop.

Evangelia, Kapetan Nikola's daughter, strode into the room, paused, and surveyed the disaster with outraged authority. She was a slim young girl with a smooth olive complexion and thick, wiry, chestnut hair. Her lips were compressed tightly into a thin angry line as they regarded the hapless Kapetan Nikola. He looked so awkward there, beside the counter, his arms outstretched in both directions to prevent more apples running off the edge.

"Father, what are you doing there? You've wrecked the display. Why are all these apples on the floor? Look, they're all over the place. Now they're soft and have been opened. We won't be able to sell them if they've been opened. You know that."

From the moment his daughter had entered the room, Kapetan Nikola had been expecting this tirade, and to some extent, he felt he deserved it. But his attention was strangely less taken by his present embarrassment as by the Greek word that his daughter had used for "floor", *flori*, a borrowing from English, rather than the correct word *patoma*. He let her continue until she had worked off most of her indignation.

"Well, haven't you got anything to say, father? At least do something!"

"Come here and give me a hand, daughter, and stop gabbling away! Come on!"

She appeared satisfied that her point had been made and went over to help him.

"But what are you trying to do?"

"I was trying to rearrange those apples. That's all."

"Oh silly, it's always like that. You can never get that row filled tight."

"How was I to know that?"

They checked if any apples had escaped their notice.

"No more?" she asked.

"None."

Kapetan Nikola watched in silent resentment as his daughter began to check and rearrange what he had already done that morning. She chatted about her sister's baby and Kapetan Nikola agreed that he did look a little like him. They stood facing one another. Evangelia seemed to pause deliberately before saying, "Listen father, Tony and I have been thinking. We don't really need your help that much in the mornings. We're very grateful that you do it, of course, but if you'd rather stay upstairs and rest in the morning, we can always get someone else to do this. It wouldn't cost much, really."

Kapetan Nikola looked kindly at his daughter. Yes, she meant well by it. She was a good girl. But how long had she been wanting to say all this? He tried to answer in as unobtrusive a voice as possible:

"No use throwing good money away, girl. It's really no trouble. And I've little enough to do now anyway."

She shrugged her shoulders; she said "All right . . .," but asked him to think about it anyway.

With order restored, Evangelia cheerfully kissed her father and ran up the stairs, promising to bring him down a cup of Turkish coffee. He was about to light up another cigarette when the door opened and the Australian shopgirls, Moya and Sandra, entered.

"G'day pop, 'ow are ya?" said Moya, the livelier and more friendly of the two.

"'Allo Moya, 'allo Sahndra."

Sandra did not acknowledge his greeting but walked

straight past him. She looked into the back room then turned round and asked abruptly, "Where's Angie?"

Kapetan Nikola did not understand at first but when Sandra repeated "Angie" more loudly and clearly, he pointed upstairs. Kapetan Nikola did not like Sandra. Her large figure reminded him of a sow. She spoke roughly to him even when his daughter was present and called him such names as "dago", "wog", "Balt". She often laughed unfairly at his strange-sounding language and his inability to express or comprehend the simplest ideas in English. He hated the advantage this gave her. Normally he would have had nothing to do with her, have never given her a thought; but he had no choice here. He was forced to notice her.

The women retired into the back room to store their bags and prepare themselves for the morning's work. Evangelia returned with the coffee and a glass of water. She asked him how he felt and when Kapetan Nikola replied that he was fine, pecked him quickly with a kiss and ran off. He drank his coffee slowly, savouring its strong rich taste, then gulped down the water quickly to clear his mouth. Evangelia came down again, this time dressed for work. She opened the cash register and counted the money into the till. The women returned and awaited the first customers. Kapetan Nikola saw that there was nothing else for him to do downstairs, so he went up to his room with the empty cup and glass. He washed these in the sink, dried them carefully and put them away. Then he sat in his cane chair and rested his head on a cushion.

Eleven o'clock came and found Kapetan Nikola asleep in the same chair. His sleep had been dreamless and satisfying but finally disturbed by a series of loud thudding noises. He stirred half consciously and gradually began to recognize the passage of time and where he was. He yawned, passed his hand through his hair and stretched out his arms. He heard the noise again and identified the familiar sound. Yes, it was Tony unloading the truck. Had he really slept that long? He rose quickly and went downstairs. He passed through the crowded shop and out the door where he found Tony struggling with a sack of potatoes.

"Antoni," he shouted, "let me give you a hand with that one."

"Oh, there you are Pop. Okay, let's go."

They carried the sack into the shop, one of them grabbing each end. After a few seconds, Kapetan Nikola began to feel the weight and wanted to let the sack go, but he managed to keep hold of it. After they had deposited the sack in a corner, Kapetan Nikola noticed that his forearm muscles were rhythmically contracting and that his hands were shaking slightly. They went outside to carry in the rest of the goods. As it turned out, Tony had already done most of the work.

"You were a bit slow today, Pop."

"I overslept."

"Ah, you're getting old Pop. Anyway, there was no problem. I could handle it alone."

Although his son-in-law had been born and raised in Australia, Kapetan Nikola liked Tony. He was certainly Greek. In fact, he had known both his parents back on Kastellorizo. They had migrated early, after the first war, and had brought up their family in Australia. He could not help feeling, however, that they were a different breed, these Greek-Australians. They spoke English with a broad accent that differed even from the type he had heard in Cyprus. Their Greek was imperfect and poorly pronounced. Often they used a mixture of the two tongues, preserving in Greek the more basic words and resorting to English or anglicizing a Greek word when a difficult or abstract expression was required. But in the eyes of Australians, there was no difference between a fresh immigrant and a Greek who had lived all his life in Australia. This, above all, united them.

So it was with Tony. He maintained the Greek customs, respected both the church and the family and tried to preserve the language. Kapetan Nikola could also see that Tony knew the way to survive in Australia. He was a hard worker. His shop was open seven days a week, eight in the morning till eleven at night. His other daughters had taken similar husbands and his sons had adopted the same policy of survival. He was not worried about the fate of his children in Australia. Under their care, they would easily adapt.

"The shop looks busy."

Kapetan Nikola meant this remark as an invitation to talk.

"Good. I suppose I'd better get in there. They like to see the owner of the shop, you know."

"Won't you be needing me this afternoon then, Antoni?" Kapetan Nikola asked before Tony could turn to disappear. "No. Don't think so. Why don't you go down to the Leski in town, Pop? Anyway . . ." Tony added in English, but he did not finish the sentence as he noticed two more customers were entering the shop. He followed them inside. Kapetan Nikola watched the short steps of the retreating figure and thought to himself, "Yes, I cannot help but like this man. Even though he leaves me here with my mouth open, gaping like a fool. For he will ensure that my daughter's future in this country is secure. Besides, it is the way of people here — to act like that."

The tram lurched down Anzac Parade, rocking its passengers back and forth monotonously. Kapetan Nikola sat at the back of the tram staring absently out of the window. He was now dressed for the Leski, having added a grey vest, a striped coat and a wide black hat. Whatever Kapetan Nikola knew of Sydney had been learnt from this tram route. He had come to recognize each of the streets, the shops and the pubs along the way. He had tried to guess the message of posters on billboards and the sides of buildings. He enjoyed the colourful illustrations of oversize jars of food, packets of biscuits, tea and cigarettes. He particularly liked the paintings of sporting events and beer glasses that decorated the walls of pubs.

As the conductor drew near, Kapetan Nikola prepared the exact change for the fare. He turned to face him and got an impression of a dark blue uniform, a badge, smooth white skin and a wide ill-formed mouth.

"Ox-for Stree", he pronounced very slowly.

"You'll need more than that, mate. Fares 'ave gone up. 'Aven't you heard? Costs thruppence now."

Kapetan Nikola did not know why the conductor refused to accept his two pence as all the others had for the last two

months. He could not understand what the conductor was saying. He repeated, "Ox-for Stree."

"Look mate. Fares gone up. No good this," and he pointed to the coins in Kapetan Nikola's outstretched hand and shook his head, "Need more — thruppence," and he indicated this by raising his middle three fingers, "three — sabee."

"But Kapetan Nikola could not see why things should change today or any other day. He still believed that the conductor could not understand his poor English and he repeated even more slowly, "Ox-for-t Stree."

The conductor tore off a threepenny ticket and pushed it under Kapetan Nikola's nose.

"Thruppence, see you bloody wog. You ignorant old dago. Why don't you bloody well learn English!"

Kapetan Nikola recognized the words of abuse. He pushed away the conductor's hand and pulled out an extra penny. The conductor took the money and purposely dropped the ticket onto the floor. He walked away grumbling to himself.

Kapetan Nikola bent down to pick up the ticket. He fingered it nervously with his thumb. He looked out the window but now found it difficult to recognize the landmarks. The colourful advertisements whose meaning he could only guess now seemed to mock him. His mouth felt dry and he was strangely conscious of his own breathing. It was somehow too deep and too loud. He could feel nothing but shame for his ignorance and hate for all Australians and this conductor in particular. He looked down wishing to avoid the accusing stares of his fellow passengers. But it was not his fault. He had never wanted to come to this goddamn awful country. He could not speak English. So what? Could they speak Greek?

With relief, he escaped from the tram at Oxford Street. He crossed the road and walked up a narrow set of stairs into the Kastellorizian Leski. This clubhouse was little more than a large upstairs room into which were crowded five or six round tables with chairs and a tiny bar that served coffee, spirits and beer. Smoke rose heavily from several tables where the men were playing cards, backgammon or just talking and drinking together. Kapetan Nikola nodded to one or two of his friends, refused an offer to join in a game of cards saying

that he did not feel like it, and then went up to the counter where he ordered a coffee without sugar.

"Yassu, Kapetan Nikola."

Kapetan Nikola turned to meet a short old crony with a bald head, a prominent fleshy nose and a wrinkled bleached face. He saw that he was drunk again.

"Where have you been since Sunday, Niko?"

"Yassu, Manoli. What do you mean, where have I been? It's only Tuesday today. I can't spend all my time here, you know. I've got to help Antoni at the shop."

Kapetan Nikola did not often use gestures when he spoke, but this time, he waved his right hand impatiently and spoke in a loud voice to his friend. He was immediately ashamed of his loss of temper; he apologized and asked him more gently, "Did you see the doctor yesterday?"

Manoli nodded.

"Well what did he tell you?"

Manoli's face brightened.

"He told me to stop drinking. Can you imagine that, Niko — me without a drink? Otherwise, he said, my belly would get bigger. My son told him he'd do his best to persuade me to stop but, as you can see, he hasn't been too successful."

And here, he took another sip from a cloudy glass that was filled with ouzo and water.

"You ought to listen to him. You remember Kapetas back on Kastellorizo. He went that way. His belly grew to be as big as a house before he died. Remember, the doctor kept taking out fluid but it just kept coming back. It was awful to see."

"Yes, I remember. But he was much older than me." "But he suffered for years, Manoli."

Manoli grew thoughtful and paused to take another sip from his glass. He seemed to gain fresh heart.

"Suffering eh! And aren't we suffering here now, Niko, with nothing to do all day except play cards, drink and wait for death?"

"Shut up, Manoli. You're talking donkey shit."

"No listen," and here he touched Kapetan Nikola on the chest with one of his fingers that was wrapped around the

glass, and brought his face closer to that of Kapetan Nikola to whisper confidentially:

"Today my son said to me, 'You're a pisspot, dad, a bloody pisspot.' You know what that Australian word 'pisspot' means, Kapetan Nikola? A 'metho', a drunkard. He called me, his own father, a 'metho'. I went after him with the first thing I could lay my hands on, a hammer I think it was. And do you think he begged my forgiveness like a true son? No, he twisted my arm and wrenched the hammer away. He pushed me off and told me to go to my room and sober up. And I wasn't even drunk, Niko, I swear it. I couldn't believe it. What are our children coming to in this country when they begin to swear at their parents and even raise their hand against them!"

When Kapetan Nikola did not reply, Manoli stared at him for a while before asking softly, "You're not drinking, Niko?"

"No."

Manoli moved off to annoy the backgammon players with the same story. One of these players, the former policeman on Kastellorizo, a dark fat man with a bald head was angered by his intrusion and shouted at Manoli to go to hell. Kapetan Nikola took pleasure in watching this man play backgammon. He took every loss as a personal affront; he revelled in each victory, pointing out the superiority of his play and his opponent's mistakes, but cursed the dice when he lost.

He concentrated wildly on the game, never raising his eyes from the board but staring at the position of all the men and holding his breath at each roll of the dice.

The kafetzi returned with his coffee and a glass of water.

"How's it been, Kapetan Nikola?"

"Not too bad. Yourself?"

"All right."

He carried his cup to the only vacant table in the room and sat down to enjoy a smoke with his coffee. For a brief moment, the odour and taste of the coffee, the sight of the men playing cards and backgammon reminded him of the quiet sleepy *kafeneion* he had left on Kastellorizo. Yes, if he were to close his eyes the sounds would be the same. He heard the roll of the dice over the board, someone curse his luck, a murmured bid, cards being shuffled and the loud

sipping of coffee. Outside, a truck roared past and blew its horn; Kapetan Nikola opened his eyes.

Laughter rose from the next table. It was Manoli again, this time telling his story to a group of younger Kastellorizians and Greek-Australians.

"But you are a pisspot, mate," one of them said in English. "And a bloody fool too, just like Kapetas," another added in Greek.

Manoli glared angrily at each of the mocking group. Kapetan Nikola feared that Manoli might go too far and start a fight with them. He was about to get up and restrain Manoli when Manoli suddenly turned and faced Kapetan Nikola. Manoli seemed to look past him as if he did not recognize him. He groaned softly and covered his face with both hands. Kapetan Nikola went over and placed his hand on Manoli's shoulder, and tried to make him sit down. He looked at Kapetan Nikola and whispered, "See! I told you." Then he tore himself away and ran out of the room.

Snap! The group at the table burst into laughter. Several other tables joined in.

"Just like Kapetas, didn't I tell you? He'll go the same way."

Hooligan, liar, thought Kapetan Nikola. How could he treat a dog, let alone a man, that way? And how could he have known Kapetas, the drunkard? He grew sick and died well after this fellow had migrated.

He resented these new "Cassies", as they called themselves, who boasted of the good old days back on Kastellorizo, days which they had never known. Most of them had migrated when they were very young, and from the gossip they had heard at the club over the years, could identify most of the characters who had lived on the island. But now it seemed to him as if they had become their own characters, and as if the island had belonged to them alone. He was secretly ashamed that one of these "Cassies" had shared his own thought.

He did not bother to finish his coffee but decided to follow Manoli. Perhaps he would need to be taken home. He crossed the room as quickly as he could, the laughter of the "Cassies" still echoing in his ears. Outside, in the busy street,

he walked up and down and looked for him in every direction; he checked the lanes and the shop fronts but could find no trace of Manoli.

He checked his pocket watch. It was still too early to go home. He pulled down his hat and struck a path in the direction of the city. He walked briskly and absently, with bent head. He did not regard the people who passed him nor did he care to look about him on the street. However, occasionally he would pause and become conscious of things, as one aroused from a deep sleep who wakes and says, "Ah yes, I know you," then instantly falls to sleep again. He strode down a steep hill following the easiest most available path. By moving to the side of the road, he automatically avoided a group of children who were playing hopscotch on the pavement. He stopped to watch a young girl spin a hoop around her waist and heard her mother call her inside. He passed a pub with its door half open. Inside, he saw a crowd of big-bellied men, some of their shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbow shouting to their mates, others, red-faced, leaning against the bar, sipping their beers.

He crossed a wide main street among a crowd of people then held straight on. The road seemed to close before him so he turned down a more comfortable side lane. He passed rows and rows of houses, all old, all the same.

Toward evening, he found himself at the edge of a wide curving road. Opposite, there were a number of tall green warehouses. There were large numerals painted in yellow on the doors. He began walking along the road, then stopped abruptly when he saw in the gap between two of the buildings, the black hull of a ship. He looked up. There was her funnel and her masts. He was at the docks. But how had he failed to smell the sea? He crossed the road but found his path blocked by a wire fence. He gazed through the holes in the wire at the long black hull. She was a Norwegian cargo vessel, about ten thousand tons. The Plimsoil was high; she was unloading.

How many times had his caique passed one of these giants in the Aegean? And how often had he asked himself where was she going? what was her cargo? who was her captain? and what manner of men had chosen to sail in her? His

caique would blow her shrill little horn in greeting, and the ship like a dying god would sound a deep mournful reply.

He followed the line of warehouses until he reached the end of the fence. At this end, there was a wharf to which were tied a number of lighter craft, then further on, a jetty where a few misshapen fish hooks and some leftover bait wrapped in newspaper were scattered.

He sat down on one of the pylons at the water's edge. He took off his hat and was grateful for the cool breeze that refreshed his brow. He watched the traffic cross the bridge, a tug butt its way madly across the harbour. He listened to the screeching of the gulls, and in the distance followed the bright lights of a ferry as she approached the quay. In Kastellorizo, he had often sat for hours by the water, enchanted by the perfect stillness of the evening. He had felt so tiny before that huge dark expanse of sea and sky; but it seemed to give his life a sense of design to think that he, too, was part of such a moment; he had felt at peace with the world — content.

He looked across the bay toward the North Side where the square yellow lights of the houses and flats betokened warmth and comfortable living. He smiled at the irony which left him alone, out in the cold. But this was as it should be, he thought, for he was the outsider here, the man with the funny looking hat who could not speak the language and whom they laughed and swore at in the street. The cold sobered him more than he wished. His smile no longer seemed natural but rather weak and foolish. Not for the first time, he found himself regarding his life critically and demanding to know in what direction it was leading him. But his answers were always the same. The life was different; the people were different. Here he searched vainly for things to occupy his time. In Kastellorizo, at least his days had been full; and moreover, he had been somebody. Kapetan Nikola. It had been enough just to say his name. Everyone had known him.

He had never expected one side of the world to resemble the other. There, he had made his living with sail and motor, pursuing a retreating horizon he had never expected to capture. Here, he stood face to face with dirt and grey, the

work of fruit shops and markets, and the insults of strangers he had no wish to understand. It was as if what he had been pursuing all these years in the Aegean had suddenly turned about and devoured him.

He paused to watch a launch pass in front of him. In its wake it blew a cool spray that thrilled his cheeks. His neck felt stiff and he threw back his head and looked up at the night sky. But he could not identify any of the bright stars; the constellations were different in the south. He sighed aloud and felt the heaviness of his body; his heart was empty. Not since he had seen his caique for the last time had he felt this way. For now, as then, he understood the void and knew nothing would ever fill it.

He turned his eyes to the dark waters below him and watched the moonlight play on the surface. It had always seemed to him that the dark waters of the night concealed a secret, and that if he were to gaze long enough at the rippling surface, the waters would open and he would be granted a glimpse of the mystery. Now he considered discovering the whole truth. He shaded his eyes from the glistening water; his thoughts were strangely empty and he could hear nothing but the sound of the water gently lapping the pylons.

He groaned aloud. No, no, no, no. It was useless. It could never be. This was no solution for a Greek. His hands shook; he was sweating all over. He took off his hat and wiped his brow. He was surprised to feel the trail of two hot tears that had involuntarily run down his cheeks.

Kapetan Nikola sat there a while longer, rose, then walked slowly back the way he had come. He stopped once to listen to the night. The stillness was now complete.