

He girded his loins and went
go to battle for Islam and slaughter infidels.

He leafed through the Koran and found the following passage in the second Surah: "O Men of the Faith! Go to battle against the infidels who live along your borders, strike the infidels wherever you can. Go to battle until all evil is destroyed, until nothing remains but the religion of the one and only God."

After this the Aga, supported by Fatmé, returned to his quarters, entered his room, lay down on the soft divan, and never rose again.

Siraina, the prophetess, had foretold that he would not live forty days.

And the Aga died on the thirty-ninth day after the prophesy. He died of the prophesy, of its suggestion, of the enchantment of that woman. He died because he was ill.

As for the Sick Man,⁷ chronically ill, now 444 years old, who will enchant him?

THE SEAL'S DIRGE

Beneath the cliff where the waves spray and the path from Mamoyiannis's windmill descends lies the cemetery, and the area to the west, where the shore juts out and the village urchins swim from morning to night all summer long is called Kohili, "shell," as it has the shape of a shell. Toward evening old Loukena, a poor, death-singed woman, came down the path carrying a bundle of clothes under her arm, to wash the woolen blankets in the salty waves and then rinse them in the small fountain of the brackish waters that trickle from the slate rock face and empties calmly into the waves.

⁷The declining Ottoman Empire, which had occupied Constantinople in 1453. Papadiamantis wrote "The Enchanting of the Aga" in 1897, 444 years after the fall of Constantinople, traditionally seen in Greece as the beginning of the Ottoman Empire.

She walked slowly, down the path, down the slope, singing a mournful dirge in a whispering voice, raising her hand to shade her eyes from the glare of the sun setting behind the mountain across the water, its rays caressing opposite her the small enclosure and the tombs, bleached, whitewashed, shining in the sun's last blaze. She thought of the five children she had buried one after the other in that threshing floor of death, that garden of decay, many years ago when she was still young. Two girls and three boys, all in their infancy. Ravenous death had scythed them down. Death finally seized her husband too, and she was left only two sons, who had moved to foreign lands. One, she had been told, had gone to Australia. He had not sent a letter in three years. She had no idea what had become of him. The other, the younger, traveled the Mediterranean on ships, and still remembered her from time to time. She was also left a daughter, married now with half a dozen children. Old Loukena was working alongside her in her old age, and it was for her that she was walking down the path, down the slope, to wash the woolen blankets and the clothes in the salty waves and then rinse them in the fountain of the brackish waters. The old woman bent over the side of the low, sea-eaten rock and began the wash. To her right lay the smoother and less abrupt slope of the earthen hill on which the cemetery stood, and from whose sides rotting wood rolled toward the all-embracing sea from the unearthings, in other words from the digging up of human remains, and the removal of young women's golden slippers and gold-embroidered clothes that had been buried with them, of tresses of blonde hair and other spoils of death.

Above her head a little to her right, in a hidden hollow next to the cemetery, sat a young shepherd who had just returned from the meadows with his small flock, and who, without considering the mournfulness of the area, had taken his flute from his bag and begun playing a merry shepherd's tune.

The old woman's dirge fell silent at the sound of the flute, and the villagers returning from the meadows—the sun had set in the meantime—heard the flute but could not see the flute player who was hidden among the bushes in the deep hollow on the hill. A schooner was preparing to put out to sea and was tacking across the harbor. But its sails were not filling and so it did not reach the open water past the western cape. A seal meandering through the deep waters close to the shore, perhaps hearing the old woman's whispered dirge and enticed by the young shepherd's loud flute, swam into the shallows, taking pleasure in the sound and frolicking in the waves.

A small girl, one of the old woman's grandchildren, her name was Akrivoula, nine years old, her mother had perhaps sent her, or more likely she had slipped away from under her mother's watchful eye, and hearing that her grandma was down at Kohili, washing clothes by the shore, went to look for her so she could play a little by the waves. But she did not know where the path began by Mamoyiannis's windmill across from the cemetery, and, hearing the flute, she went toward it and found the hidden flute player. Listening to the music and admiring the young shepherd, she saw in the twilight of the approaching darkness a small path that descended steeply, quite sharply, and she thought that that was the path her grandma had taken, and so she began going down the steep slope to find her by the shore. By now night had fallen. The little girl descended another few steps and then saw that the path was becoming even steeper. She called out in fear, and tried to scamper back up the slope. She had come to the rock that hung above the waves twice the height of a man. The sky darkened, clouds hid the stars, the moon was on the wane. She tried to find the path by which she had come down but could not. She turned back toward the edge of the rock and tried to continue her descent. She slipped and—splash—fell into the waves. The sea was as deep as the rock was tall, a good two fathoms. The sound of the flute covered her cry. The shepherd heard the splash, but he could not see the base of the rock and the edge of the shore. Furthermore he had not seen the little girl, he had barely felt her presence. As night had already fallen, old Loukena had finished her wash and was climbing up the path back toward the house. Halfway up the slope she heard the splash, turned, and looked into the darkness in the direction of the flute player. "It must have been him," she said to herself, for she knew the boy. "Not only does he wake the dead with that flute of his, now he's also throwing stones into the sea to pass the time. What a loner and misfit that boy is!" And she went on her way. And the schooner continued tacking back and forth in the harbor, and the young shepherd continued blowing on his flute into the silence of the night. And the seal that had swum into the shallows found the little drowned body of poor Akrivoula and began swimming around it in a dirge before its nighttime feed. An old fisherman, versed in the voiceless language of seals, translated it into the words of man:

Akrivoula lies among the seaweed wild,
Death-singed Loukena's daughter's child,

Alexandros Papadiamantis

Garland of sea flowers in her hair,
Her dowry of sparkling shells so rare,
And the old woman still sheds bitter tears
For the infants lost in distant years.
Man's troubles and sorrows never end

LOVE IN THE SNOW

of winter. Christmas, New Year's, Epiphany.
and into his old jacket, the only