

THE FLOOD

"To *Thalassoma*" by **Alexandros Papadiamantis**, the great modern Greek writer, was first published in the Athenian newspaper "Neo Asty" on September 13, 1906. Translated by Anthony G. Maroussis].

As the storm descended forcefully in the early afternoon and all the waterfalls of the sky were for two hours uninterruptedly bathing the city, with thunder and clamor and with bolts of lightning, all the waters from Plaka and part of those from Kifisia Street and from Colonaki, coming together into a deep and turbulent torrent, were rushing with a terrible clatter down Metropoleos Street, through the sloping side street, flooding here and there, many shops and almost all the basements. In a roomy cafe down the street, several customers were stranded inside by the unending rain.

All the side streets around the old mosque had turned into rivers. The railway station had turned into a lake. Inside the cafe five or six pairs of men, at several tables, were playing backgammon, only three were playing *prefa*¹, and two old men, captain Gagaris, the retired major, and *mastro-Yiannis Yiapitzis*, were playing the great *beziki*², with 256 cards. Another old man, by their side, was nodding off holding persistently on to a newspaper.

The floor of the cafe was situated two or three palm breadths above the road level, which was now serving as the bed of the rushing torrent. A few customers, uneasy and curious at the same time, had gotten up and had assembled about the three doors, enjoying themselves to the sight of the waterfall. From outside, voices and laughter were heard. The river had carried off the merchandise from the stand of a greengrocer; nearby it was carrying off a young donkey loaded with grapes, whose master was trying to save, pulling it by the tail.

Inside the cafe, some were making the cross sign when hearing the terrible thunderclaps. The backgammon players were not moved. The trick-track sound of the dice was heard uninterruptedly. Captain Gagaris and *mastro-Yiannis*, having and his *narghile*³ continuously lit, undaunted kept on playing their great *beziki* with the 256 cards. The old man, by their side, seemingly insisted in reading the newspaper although he had already taken two or three short naps.

The water started coming inside the cafe and through all of the three doors. The doors were blocked up hurriedly, except all this was in vain. The liquid element was pouring in unrestrained, even through the opening of the tobacco shop that was attached at the corner of the coffee shop. Within a few seconds the floor was flooded. All the chairs were lifted off and placed on the tables and on the billiard table. The customers, the ones who wished to be seated, were sitting with

their legs crossed on the benches. All the backgammon and *prefa* players interrupted their game and stood up. Captain Gagaris and *mastro-Yiannis*, did not stop the great *beziki*. The old man kept on "reading" his newspaper.

Two waiters, the coffee maker and his helper, the manager of the cafe and two shoe polishers, attached to the service of the cafe, armed themselves with brooms, some having long handles and some not, and attempted with coordinated efforts to push the water out. Some customers already gathered by the doors were becoming an obstacle in performing this task. Others were taking command, as often happens with Greeks:

"This way, this way!"

"Through that door!"

"The way you go, you are not doing anything!"

"All together! All together now!"

Others were joining into conversations and commenting:

"Where did the water come in from?"

"Through the upper door".

"From the lower door".

"Through the middle door".

"From the tobacco shop it came in... the tobacco shop".

Still only one chair was occupied, besides the benches on which the customers were sitting, lifting, and crossing their legs. It was that chair, on which *mastro-Yiannis* was sitting undisturbed, continuing his *beziki* with the retired major.

Finally, *kyr-Nikolakis*, the cafe owner, approached with his broom.

"Hey, get up *mastro-Yianni*! Enough! Can't you see! We are about to drown in here!"

"But the captain doesn't want to stop the *beziki*".

"Then, you both move up and sit on the bench".

One hour later the storm finally calmed down and the water started to recede. Then the floor of the cafe, after the many efforts that accomplished the pushing of the water out, from a lake that it was, turned into a swamp. The service personnel now started to spread plenty of wood chips down on the ground.

The two *beziki* players sat down, side by side, without looking anywhere in particular, without even saying anything. The *narghile* of *mastro-Yianni* was put out, for a long time now, since nobody was free to bring him a hot coal. But the man still kept the tip of the pipe hanging from his mouth.

Last of all to stand up was the little old man, the one by their side. He dropped the newspaper, raised his eyes and asked.

"Hey, where from did all this water come in here?"

¹ A game of cards.

² Another game of cards.

³ A tobacco water pipe, hookah.