

Sisters

by Shawn Matheny

I first spotted her on the platform of the Athens station. Backpack slung across one shoulder, she had the same tenseness as the rest of us—a “see if you can beat me to a seat” look. Yet, she was different. She appeared to be alone, for she skirted the groups of talking, laughing and singing travelers—never joining in. Stopping by a pillar, she let the pack slide down her back, then pulled a map out from one of its compartments.

Ignoring my sister Monica, who was still angry over our morning disagreement, I started playing the game of the summer—“guess the nationality.”

The girl’s hair was too dark for her to be Swedish, although she had the full, high breasts and long, tanned legs of the Swedes. She was not traveling amidst a herd of twittering girls; so, she couldn’t possibly be Italian or Spanish. But she did have an air about her—chic, fresh, and indifferent to those around her. She was the arrival of dawn in a sweltering night.

Sitting cross-legged next to me, Monica was absorbed in some travel guide to the Greek Islands. I nudged her and then motioned to the girl in the white tanktop and blue jean cut-offs. “What do you think, German or French?”

Monica’s eyes traveled through the crowd until they located the girl—a solitary island among the clusters. She studied her for a moment and then muttered, “Purely slut,” as she returned to her book.

The peace offering had failed. All summer I had been making peace offerings. Monica and I had never been particularly close growing up. I suppose the age difference had something to do with it—five years can really separate two people—especially two of such different temperaments. Also, I hadn’t been around much. Summer camp, college and then Israel. This trip had been our parents’ idea. They reasoned, I suppose, that three months of bumming around Europe would naturally draw us together. The plan was doomed from the beginning. Monica was still the ever-evasive shadow—first silent, then angry - always petulant. But, trying another olive branch (by reason of age and compassion), I said, “When did the guys say that they would return? The train should be coming soon.”

Not looking up Monica answered, “Don’t worry, they’ll be back in time.”

“I’m not really worried. Only, I’d hate for them to be left behind—they’re so much fun.”

“Do you think so? Sometimes I think they bore you.”

She had caught me. I didn’t really think they were all that much “fun.” More of a nuisance. But, Monica thought that they were fun. And while she was occupied with them, I could go my own way. Deception had become a part of me, so I answered, “Only sometimes, but then, I’m the old lady here.”

It hurt to see her so distant from me. We were always so close physically—sleeping in double beds, using the same bathroom, sharing clothes—but emotionally we were separated by some barrier I could not figure out. Keep talking about the boys, I decided. It was a subject on which we could exchange at least a half dozen words. “It looked like you and Mike were having an intense conversation on in the aisle last night.”

“We were, but . . . I wish Danny had come out.” She looked up at the brownish Athen’s sky for a moment and then hesitantly asked, “Ivy. . . do you think he likes me?”

"Mike? Yeah, I know. . ."

"No, not Mike. Danny."

"Monica. Danny is the type of guy who likes all girls."

"I know, but I . . ."

She was on a roll. She hardly ever talked to me about men. About important aspects, that is. In Florence she would comment on the perfection of the men passing by on the streets or call them "fags" or "dicks" when they tried to talk to her. Yet, when she stayed out all night with some greasy, dark Italian in Rome she didn't say one word about it—she didn't even apologize when I told her I had almost gone to the police station.

As Monica was trying to finish her sentence, an unmistakably American voice cut her off. "Do either of you have a light?" Tall, lithe and ebony-headed, my French/German girl was American.

Although Monica was carrying the lighter, she said nothing. Once again she had turned into a close, hostile stranger—the antagonist.

"Sure, Monica, do you mind handing her the lighter?" As Monica passed it, the girl leaned her pack against the stucco wall, pulled a cigarette from a pouch hanging from her neck and squatted in front of us. After lighting the tip of some sweet smelling Greek brand, she turned her attention to Monica. "Does that have the ship schedule for the islands?"

Monica nodded.

"Do you mind if I take a peek? I just arrived from northern Greece and I didn't have a chance to check the times." She smiled—her curving lips revealing perfect white teeth. "I guess I was relying on luck or the gods to get me here in time for the right ship."

Mutely Monica held it out to the girl. Jesus Christ, I thought, the first interesting girl we meet and Monica has to act like the royal bitch.

The girl bent over the book and slowly ran her finger down the column. Monica had averted her eyes and was watching a group of blond German boys passing a bottle of wine.

Frustrated, I turned my attention back to the girl. "Where are you headed?"

"I'm afraid I'm terribly unoriginal. People tell me that I should find a deserted island and remain there the rest of my life, but I'm following the crowd to Santorini and then on to Crete."

"Hey, so are we. At least to Santorini."

"Then I guess introductions are in order. I'm Amanda Blair from Chicago. And you two are?"

"I'm Ivy Steinmetz and this is my sister Monica. We're from Saginaw, Michigan."

The girl looked uncomfortable for one second and then recovered her composure. "Saginaw. I wouldn't have guessed that. You look too, I don't know, New Yorkish."

I laughed with pleasure (our family had always considered itself a little too cultured for Michigan). "Yes, Saginaw. We're travelling with several guys—Americans also. We call them JAPS—Jewish American Princes—they're off looking at jewelry right now, but they should be back soon."

Amanda had lost that disinterested look that had at first seemed such a part of her; now, she was gregarious and beaming with life. "Well, now that the introductions are completed, how would the sisters Steinmetz like to go for a beer at the cafe across the way?"

Immediately I said "Love to!" but then I remembered Monica. I turned to her and asked, "How about you?"

"No thanks, I think I'll wait here for the guys."

With the rationalization that, after all, I had asked and she was not

receptive, Amanda and I walked through the inside of the station. Amanda kept shaking her head and saying, "Can you believe all of these people? It's going to be hell trying to find a place to stay."

We emerged on a wide sidewalk half covered with an awning and littered with small round tables, dirty and chipped, each surrounded by wobbly chairs.

Amanda looked at the congested traffic in the street and then turned to me. "Let's just stay here. The sun feels wonderful, the cafe is probably a pit and, besides, we may never make it back with all this traffic."

I really didn't care where we went. It was enough of a novelty being with another female and being away from Monica.

As we sat down, a waiter in a perspiration-stained shirt hurried to our table. With a scowl on his face he asked us what we wanted and, to my surprise, Amanda ordered in Greek. The dark face of the man crinkled into a smile that revealed two glittering gold teeth. He rapped out a short question; she answered hesitantly and then giggled. It was not at all the giggle of nervousness nor embarrassment, but the bubbling over of sheer pleasure. Pleasure in what, I didn't know—perhaps in her knowledge of a squiggly tongue or perhaps in the way the eyes of the sun-baked man lingered on her face.

Then the man turned to me. "And you, miss," he said in thickly accented English. "You do not speak such perfect Greek as your friend?"

"No, I'm afraid and a little ashamed that I do not. In fact, I know no Greek."

"Ah, it is a shame. Two such beautiful women. So much alike." There was real curiosity in his face, as if Amanda's knowledge in his language had given him the right to question. "You are sister perhaps, no?"

Amanda and I both looked at one another and shook our heads. Amanda told him with a laugh, "No, in fact we are strangers—we just met."

It did not strike me until he said those words that, yes, we did resemble one another to a certain degree. I was a bad copy of her perfection. My hair was not quite so black-black and thick, my face not so delicately proportioned nor my body so lean and hard-muscled. People had always commented that Monica and I looked alike. So where did that put her in this comparison to Amanda? Perhaps we were a copy in triplicate: Amanda, the maker's original; me, the slightly blurred copy; and Monica, with her fuzzy dark hair, round madonna's face and awkward body, the marred carbon. Perhaps that was not fair. At times Monica could be very beautiful. When she was bent over a painting, when a ray of sunlight cutting through a shadowed cathedral caught her face or when she was laughing with Mike, she was then, corny as it may sound, illuminated. But most of the times her face was frozen in a frown of hostility or the blankness of neutrality. I could sometimes feel that she wanted to confide in me, that she was pulling me towards her with a tenacious hold—somehow needing me—but at the same time pushing me away, testing me.

As if reading my thoughts Amanda said, "I'm sorry that Monica—it is Monica isn't it?—didn't come. She didn't say much. Isn't she feeling well?"

"She's okay, it's just. . . she's moody. Don't take it personally if she doesn't talk much to you. . . lord knows I don't. . . she's been like this since we met in England."

"Met?"

"Yes. I've been working in Israel for the past two years. We're Jewish, as you may have guessed, and after my sophomore year at college I went to Israel to work on a farm for the summer. For various reasons, I ended up staying and my parents thought that this tour of Europe would be a good way

for us to get to know one another better. I think my mother phrased it, "rediscover your unique personalities,"—you'd have to know my mother to understand. We're also meeting all of our relatives who still live over here. Actually we're now headed towards Yugoslavia in a very round-about way."

The hot late afternoon sun created a heavy atmosphere in which we seemed to be the only two living creatures, despite the hum from the other tables and the droning traffic. Sweat was trickling down my back and under my long heavy braid; Amanda's bare arms and legs took on a sheen—the lustre of smooth plastic. Amanda pulled a cigarette out of her bag and the man sitting at the next table who had been watching her from the corner of his eyes quickly turned to offer a light. Smiling, but with a restraint that discouraged further communication, she accepted his offer and then thanked him in Greek.

She was the first to break the lull in the conversation. "Has it worked out, this "rediscovery?"

"No, not really. We are further apart than we ever were." Why was I telling her all this? She was, as she had admitted, a complete stranger; yet, she was a type of sorceress—a weaver of words and keeper of secrets. And didn't people claim that it was so much easier to tell a stranger your most private thoughts? "We were never close growing up. I was so involved in other things. When she was in high school, I was in college. Then on to Israel where I met this guy—someone who was really special—so I stayed. Monica never really fit into my life nor I into hers. It's so hard now to force the pieces to fit." I turned to watch a group of old women dressed completely in black cross the street. They sounded like a clutter of hens cackling away over the day's gossip. Down the street between the box-like white buildings they passed still shouting to one another.

The strangeness of it all—the hot heavy sun, the warm beer, the man with the golden teeth and black mysterious eyes that were still watching us—allowed me to articulate feelings to this girl—this Amanda Blair—which I had not been able to tell anyone before that time.

I continued on. "The guys that I mentioned, the three boys from Cincinnati, we met them in Brindisi as we were crossing to Corfu. Well, they stayed in the same hotel and we ended up spending a lot of time with them. It's been so much easier for us to get along since we hooked up with them. They're nice guys. Mike has a lot of interests in common with Monica, but she has a crush on Danny, a real Don Juan. But at least she has a good time when they're around and I can have a little time away by myself. They've kind of adopted her as a little sister. She's so pliable with them—so unlike what she's like when we're alone. I feel sometimes that we're two suspicious cats—each circling our own territory—protecting something, but I don't really know what."

Amanda, who was looking down at her empty glass, said softly, "Ivy, we never know what we're fighting to protect or save. It's a joke, don't you see? We put so much energy into forming relationships, then the sheet is pulled away and we find out that we get something that we really didn't want. Or else we decide that someone isn't worth the effort but in the end discover that that person was exactly what we wanted or needed."

Wisps of clouds spread across the hazy sky and then gathered around the monastery on a hill in the distance. I heard singing in the distance but didn't pay attention until it came closer to us. Looking up I saw the three guys who had been traveling with us, singing a slightly off-key version of "Taking It Easy." Weaving through the crowd they continued singing until they reached our table. As they approached, all eyes were on Amanda. Although the others had stopped, Danny continued "Such a fine sight to see, It's a girl, my

lord. . ."staring at her. A few minutes before, caught in the stillness of the afternoon and her words, she had sat motionless as if her mind were miles away in years past, but when I began the introductions, she returned to the here and now. Speaking in her clear low voice she acknowledged each and then her eyes returned to Danny. Light and dark, they complemented one another perfectly.

When we returned to Monica, Amanda and Danny alone were singing in voices that blended completely.

* * *

Two weeks after that meeting in Athens, Monica and I alone were travelling to Yugoslavia. I felt lost, as though I had lost part of myself on that dry, white island. Watching the tall green mountains pass by, I wondered, given the choice, would I be here sitting beside Monica or would I be travelling on to Crete with Amanda.

Amanda and I had formed a unique friendship that first night on the ship. While mixing Ouzo and water and drinking the pungent, milky mixture, I had told her about my three months on the farm and the following time in Jerusalem. I had even told her about my affair, something I had told no one before then. After telling her, she had merely said, "Love and desire make us do strange things." It was as if she had said that all was forgiven, nothing condemned.

In the early hours of the morning Danny had picked up his guitar and begun to pluck out a song. Slowly he entered into "Brown-Eyes Girl" while staring through the darkness at Amanda. When he finished she crawled over to him and held out her hands for the instrument. Surprised he handed it to her and then she awkwardly strummed a few chords. Her finger gained confidence after several minutes as she played chord progressions and then a simple flamenco-style tune. The sadness of the music reflected in her face, her eyes taking on a dreamy quality and her lips, perpetually curving, became slack and o-shaped. Curling around the guitar her body seemed to be a buffer between the world and her music. She played and sang a few old Bread hits and then played the Stones' "I'm Not Looking for a Lover, I'm Just Looking for a Friend."

After that she looked up and said, "All done, that's my repertoire."

As she relinquished the instrument to Danny, her face was transformed back into the perfect planes and sheer confidence.

During Amanda's performance Monica had listened along with the rest. But once it was over she had turned back to Mike and Tom, throwing uncommon enthusiasm into their conversation until she saw Danny stand up and join Amanda. Then her words faltered and she turned to me, her whole body yelling at me "stop this."

But what could I do? Monica turned away from me and the boys toward the black night. I don't think that Mike knew how to handle her in this pained silence. After a few moments he came over and sat down next to me. We both watched her, body posed in hurt or rage, watch the shadows creep by the ship.

Mike whispered, "I didn't know she was that far gone over Danny. I knew she was attracted to him, but . . . Amanda is more his type. He doesn't go for the Monicas. I should know. He likes his girls witty and . . . chic. Monica is too quiet and sweet for him."

Surprised I asked, "You think she is sweet?"

"Yes, very much so. I know you two don't get along very well. That's

obvious. Personally, I don't think you have enough patience with her."

"Maybe not. I get so frustrated, Mike. Monica walks around with her head in a cloud. This morning she walked right out into an intersection. I had to grab her arm before she was hit, and even then it was a close call. And it didn't even phase her—she could be dead now and she was mad at me for stopping her. She wants to be so independent; yet, a minute ago she was asking me to stop Danny from going off with Amanda. What could I do? 'Danny, do you mind staying here with my sister—she has the hots for your body.' Impossible. Like I told Amanda, Monica and I are always dancing around—never quite understanding what we want from one another.

"Right now she's just hurt. She sees Amanda as a rival. Danny has changed camps and now she thinks you're on Amanda's side also."

"Her side? What side? Sure, I like Amanda. Who wouldn't? She's the type of person I know how to deal with—straightforward and uncomplicated. I'm so fucking tired of trying to guess what Monica is feeling, what I've done to make her upset. For a change I'd like being with someone who talks to me, who's pleasant, who's enthusiastic about something. . ."

Laughter interrupted me as Amanda and Danny turned the corner.

"Ta-da," said Amanda in a lilting voice as she pulled small bundles out from behind her back. "Look what they're selling downstairs—cheese pies. Smell. . . isn't it heavenly?"

The ship approached Santorini sometime before noon. At the old port white ships zigzagged up the steep cliff to Phera. Small brightly colored dinghies crossed the smooth sea to the ship and caught the bundles being thrown down. From there the ship slowly moved through the azure water to the new port and the waiting bus. During the approach, Amanda, hanging onto an overhead rail, stood on one of the benches like a bird poised for flight. The deck was crowded, all the barely clad travelers taking photos of the odd volcanic island. It was strange, but Amanda did not own a camera. When I asked her about it she glibly answered something about the "mind's eye" and not wanting to live in memories.

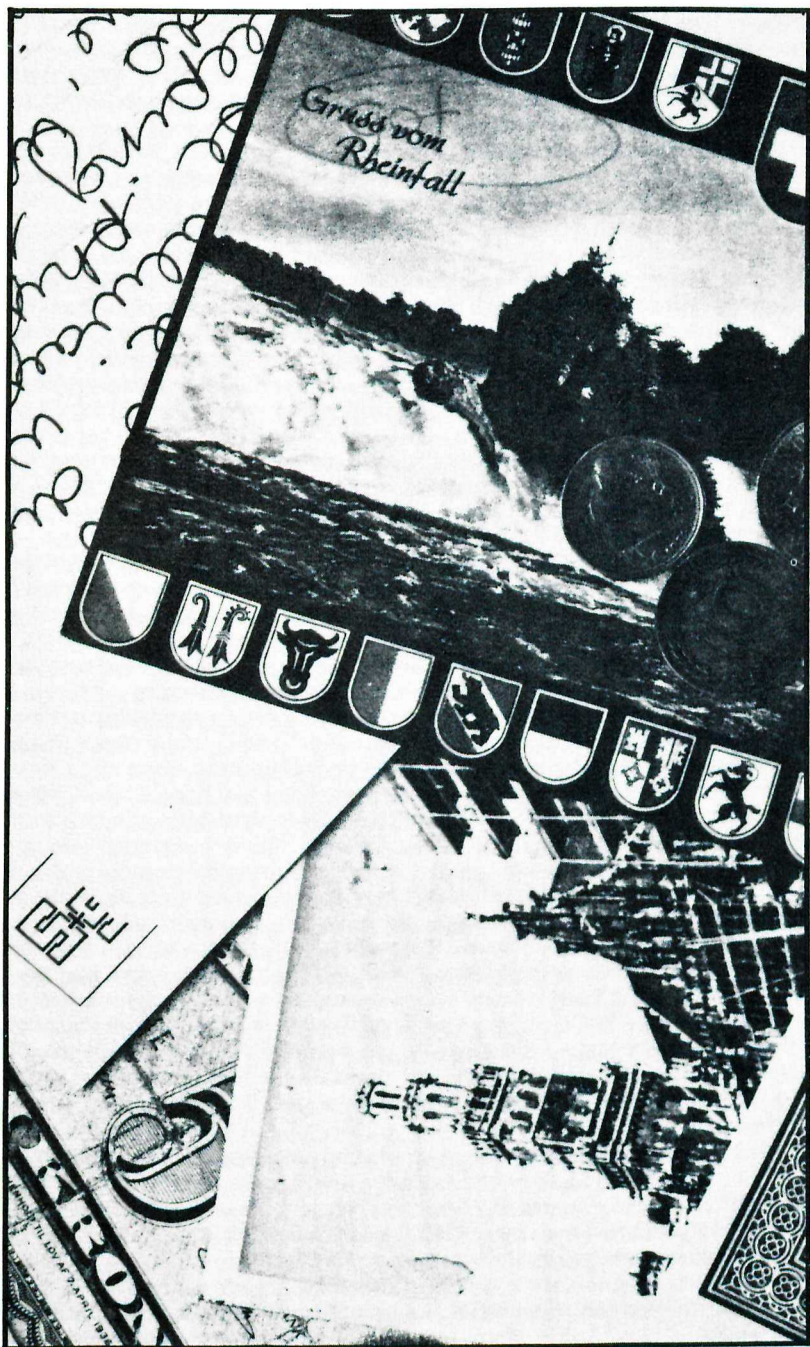
In Phera we managed to all find rooms up over a pub and a moped shop. They were small but clean. Ours had a small balcony overlooking a narrow street. Amanda's, which was the smallest of the three, had a balcony overlooking the sea. Each night all six of us, wine bottles in hand, would sit on her balcony and watch the sun set. The sky blazed orange, then red, then pink as the flaming sun lowered behind a mountain of clouds.

We spent our nights moving from one pub or disco to the next. Amanda's favorite was the Casablanca, a bar in an old abandoned church precariously hanging to the cliff. After our first evening there, she was a favorite. The Australian waiter, who immediately called her "luv," would greet her with a hug and a goblet of white wine. Each night she wore the same hot pink T-shirt dress which clung to her body as she danced on the patio overlooking Phera.

During the days we would ride the crowded buses to different beaches on the island. Of all of us, Amanda least minded the long rides on the bus. Hanging onto the overhead bar, her body would sway with each curve, moving to the blare of the Greek music from the driver's radio.

The first day on the beach Monica and I were surprised as Amanda abandoned all of her clothes in a pile next to her mat. Underneath the white tank top and shorts, she was the same glossy brown of her arms and legs. She turned to us with a laugh and said, "I know, I have no shame."

I could tell that Monica resented the way that the boys reacted to this sea nymph image of Amanda. When talking to her their eyes rarely traveled below her neck; yet, when she was lying, eyes closed, on her back or



stomach, their eyes lingered over her entire body.

These days were spent in paradise. The occasional cool breeze fluttering over our bodies, the heat of the smooth black pebbles beneath us slowing everything down was seductive. Startling was the coolness of the water; hypnotic was the droning voices of the old men selling grapes and apricots from the baskets on their laden donkeys.

Soon the three boys became comfortable with Amanda's nakedness. All four would play in the waves and build "pebble castles" while arguing over who was to be the chief architect. I was of a different nature, preferring to lie on my mat, book in hand, but seldom turning a page. I was content to merely laugh at their antics as a spectator. These times at the beach were painful to Monica. She would simply lie still for hours completely encompassed in a black tank suit. Mike, as if guilty of his desertion, would occasionally sit next to her and talk or try to coax her into joining the others in the water. She was terribly self-conscious of her body, though. As if closeness somehow implied a comparison, she would not remain long with them. Any enthusiasm that Mike induced soon retreated like the tide and she would slowly make her way back to her mat.

After several days, Monica's attitude toward Amanda changed. It was the day after an evening when we had all drunk too much Ouzo that Monica began her new approach toward—or now, with hindsight, I would say campaign against—Amanda.

That evening we had gone to the Casablanca and Danny, who had been good about spreading his charm between us three girls, devoted himself entirely to Amanda. Mike, Tom and I, hidden away in a corner, were in a heated debate about the Zionist Youth movement and our role as American Jews, while Monica kept her eyes on the dancing Danny and Amanda. As we walked back to our rooms, Danny would catch Amanda's hand or put his arm around her bare shoulders. She did not seem to be encouraging him, but she was not rejecting him either. Later that night I heard a soft tapping on Amanda's door and Danny's voice. Then I heard the door open and close.

The next morning we all knew that the status quo had been altered. Mike and Tom began spending less time with Amanda. And Monica's behavior was different for she began to talk to Amanda. No, not so much talk but interrogate her. And Amanda seemed slightly nervous and suspicious about this new interest. Amanda had always seemed too much a creature of the present, a vital and exciting present, for me to be concerned with her past. She had invited confidence from others; yet, she never confided in anyone. We all knew that she was from Chicago and had been travelling about Europe for several months. Every once in awhile she would refer to people she knew in Spain, France and Germany—friends of the family or exchange students she had met at college—but these would be merely anecdotes. Monica's questions, however, were only about the past. These Amanda would answer with vague evasions or glib answers which left Monica with a smug, complacent expression.

The afternoon before Monica and I planned to head back to Athens we were sitting with Amanda on the balcony watching the people pass below. For the last evening we had planned a cheese and wine party and were waiting only for the boys' arrival. Having already started in on the wine, all three of us were buzzed.

Amanda, staring out at the sea, said dreamily, "I love the islands. Eternal summer. No harsh winds and biting rain like the beaches of the north during the winter."

Barely intruding on her thoughts, Monica asked softly, "You've been in the

north during the winter?"

In her dream state Amanda replied without the usual carefulness, "Yes."

Like a sly feline stalking a mouse, Monica said, "But I thought that you've been here only two months. How could you have felt the "biting rain" of winter during June?"

Suddenly alert, Amanda said, "I was there a couple of years ago with my parents."

"But you told us that this was your first trip to Europe."

Playing with her fingernails Amanda answered casually. "I think you misunderstood me. This is my first trip alone. I've been here several times with Mother and Father."

Monica looked at her with unrelenting intensity. "I really do doubt that Amanda. In fact, I did a little snooping. I know for a fact that, according to your passport, you've been here for exactly fourteen months. Since you have lied to us about that, what else have you lied about? Like being from Chicago, when you don't know the first thing about the city? Half the pictures that you claim are in the Chicago Art Museum haven't been out of New York or Europe in the past thirty years. And your money—I have my own ideas where that's coming from, but I won't voice them—it's too vulgar." Monica had finished her tirade triumphantly. For the first time in a week she had looked alive; face flushed, vitality was oozing from her.

Amanda continued sitting with her arms wrapped around her legs for a few moments and then she stood up. Turning to me, she said in a voice without any emotion, "Do you mind locking up my room after you are finished. I don't want people looking through my things. Who knows what they might find. Tell the guys I'm sorry I couldn't make it. And if I don't see you before you leave, have a good life." She walked out of the room and seconds later I heard the door below us open and then bang shut.

I turned to my sister, opened my mouth and then shut it. Finally I said, "I don't know you at all. I can't believe that you did that to her. Why? Pure jealousy? Envy? What did it matter to you whether she was telling a few white lies or the unadulterated truth? After tonight you'll never see her again."

"I'm just tired of everyone being under some grand illusion about her. It's all a lie."

"Maybe some of it, but who cares? It's not an illusion that she's fun to be with—she makes people feel good. But you, you're such a jealous bitch you can't see that." Tears began to form in her eyes, but I couldn't stop myself. "I'll tell you something else, something we weren't going to tell you because Amanda knew that you'd be hurt. Danny is going to Crete with her. He is really in love with her."

"But . . . but she's a fake—a fraud. Can't he see that?"

"No, and if you tell him, you can go to Yugoslavia alone because I'll go to Crete with Amanda."

She looked at me with unbelieving eyes. "But you can't. You're my sister—not hers. You've got to . . . stand by me."

"At this moment, even this whole trip, I've felt like anything but your sister. Enemy, adversary, I don't know what, but not sister."

We both sat in silence until the boys arrived. I wanted to go after Amanda, but I felt that she wanted to be alone. I told them that she wasn't feeling well and had gone for a walk, but I knew that they felt something else was wrong. After watching the sun set, we went to the Casablanca. I kept hoping that she would return to the fold on her own—laughing, joking and wearing her dancing shoes—but she didn't.

About midnight I told Danny that I would find her. I had a good idea where

she would be. There was an abandoned house with crumbling walls and decayed doors and shutters that Amanda and I had discovered while exploring. We had walked through it discussing what we would do with it if we could buy it. Jokingly she had said, "With a little paint, plaster and a roof it would be perfect for us." It was decided that we would all remain on the island in this house. She could work as a bartender ("all the free drinks I want"), I could work in a shop, Monica could paint, Danny could play his music, Tom could run a jewelry shop and Mike, well, we hadn't decided what Mike could do. She had teased me saying that I could be den mother since I was the "old lady."

In the dark I passed under what was left of the arched door. Amanda was sitting in one of the windows smoking a cigarette. Not sure whether I should leave or approach her, I simply stood and waited till she recognized me.

Below us the lights of Phera took on an unreal quality, pin points of darkness far away. The clouds were milky white like Ouzo dropped in milk, under a jet black heaven. A slight breeze coming from the ocean ruffled Amanda's dress, seagreen foam cloth cut like a goddess dress, causing it to billow and then flatten against her body.

After a few minutes she turned toward me. "You didn't have to come. I'm okay, really. Don't you know that a cat always lands on its feet?"

"Danny and I were worried. I knew you'd be here. I wanted to see if you wanted to talk." I headed toward the other window, which was almost circular from age.

Still looking out at the sea she began to speak, softly but without emotion. "Your sister has my number. She's right—it was all a lie. I have been here for over a year. I'm not from Chicago. . . . do you know what I love most about travelling? You can be a pampered wealthy child from Chicago. You can be a student at Northwestern. Anything you want. You don't have to be a farm girl from Mount Pleasant, Indiana. A girl who grew up on a tiny piece of land in a trashy house with six other kids. Here I don't have to spend my nights getting it on with a redneck farm boy in the back of a pickup or my days working in an IGA. You see, Ivy, here I can. . . . live out my fantasies. Here, I'm beautiful and interesting."

I didn't know what to say so I simply asked, "How did you get here?"

"One day I borrowed a friend's car and drove to Chicago to get a passport. Then I took all my money out of the bank and bought a one way ticket to Luxemburg. I planned to meet someone, anyone, there—tall, dark, handsome and kind—the answer to my dreams who would take care of me and treasure me. Harlequin Romance mentality, right?"

It was hard for me to comprehend. How could anyone be that courageous, desperate and stupid? "But how do you get by?" I asked with Monica's innuendoes still in my mind.

"At first I played my guitar on the streets at night. I made enough doing that, but soon it got colder. . . . then my guitar was stolen. I picked grapes for a while in France. Then in Spain I worked in a bar in Marbella since I knew a little German. I even modeled—black lace corset and undies in Hamberg. I met people along the way."

She moved from her perch in the window and walked over to me. "Do you want a cig?"

"Sure."

She lit one and handed it to me and then leaned against the wall. "Do you remember the "friend" in Madrid that I was telling you about?" I dumbly nodded. "Well, he was a friend when I left, but when I first met him. . . . Ivy, I had eighty pesetas—what, less than a dollar? — and it was cold and raining. His

apartment was warm and he had a shower — not to mention food. When I left he gave me enough money to get to the coast. What else could I do?"

"Go home."

"No, as they say, there's no going back. I am where I want to be. Sure, sometimes it's rough. But right now I have some money and I'm seeing things. I'm happy . . . as happy as I can be."

"Where did you get the money?"

First studying me as if to decide whether she should tell, she finally began to speak. "I met this Greek guy in Italy. He was the one that taught me the Greek. He wasn't bad, a little pompous, but . . . anyway he had a vacation home in a small town above Athens. I stayed there with him for a week. Obviously he was richer than I thought — he was also a little in love with me or sorry for me, don't know which, maybe both. When I left he gave me nearly three hundred dollars.

I was intrigued, yet repulsed, by all that she was telling me. She was a stranger and yet she was the same. Unable to articulate my feelings I simply asked, "What are you going to do now?"

"Go to Crete with Danny."

"And then?"

She must have thought I was judging her, for she answered flippantly, "Oh, I don't know. Things turn up . . . people turn up. What's the difference? Some guy back home or some guy here? You've got to admit, the scenery is better here."

"Amanda, come to Yugoslavia with me. We could do something . . . call my parents. They would give you the money to go somewhere — to get out of this. Maybe you could go back with me."

"Where? To Saginaw? No thank you. I think I'd rather stay here and be on my own. And I really am on my own. Sure, I get money from other people, but when it comes down to it, it's just me. Do you understand?"

Although I shook my head "no," in a way I did understand. Like a cat landing on its paws, she enjoyed her life. "I'm going back to the room. Monica and I are leaving in the morning. Are you coming?"

"No, I think I'll stay here for a while. Lord knows, if I went back Danny would come knocking on my door and I feel like I've already been through enough tonight without that."

"I guess it's good-bye then." Before she could answer I gave her a hug and started walking away.

"Ivy, wait." I turned and looked at her. "Remember what the waiter said about us looking like sisters? I wish that we were." Then she turned back toward the sea, her gaze fixed somewhere far beyond.

Because a work of art does not aim at reproducing natural appearances, it is not, therefore, an escape from life . . . but an expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to greater effort in living.

— Henry Moore