

## 1. Kos Island, Greece

My brother Ryan gets a bandage on his upper right arm, which is where our injury is. Two small measures of clear liquid are placed in front of us, and their deliverer waits while we consume them, before taking the glasses away. Without asking whether or not we smoke, cigarettes are slipped into our mouths and lighters are flicked. We just sit dumb. Even after it's gone I can still see the flame in front of my eyes, a wound of yellow.

Ryan looks at me. His lips move, but no words come out. Across the street, one of the staff disappears into the bar, only to reappear a few seconds later with a look of panic in his eyes. I can guess what has happened. The story of our arrival has been reported to the boss; our bloodied condition described.

Everyone waits. And waits.

Then the bar door opens and the boss appears, weaving his way between the tables outside with a succession of tight, deliberate steps. His black hair is slicked back from his face, his nose is underlined by a powerful black moustache. He signals with his hands as he walks, issuing a number of silent directives to the four bar staff who have surrounded us outside the café. He reaches our table, his mouth chewing at something uncomfortable.

Someone deals with the introductions, bowing ever-so-slightly as he says the name:

*Mr Fotopoulos.*

One of them moves the chair opposite us out. One of them pushes it forward beneath his bending legs as he sits. One of them suspends a lighter at the end of his cigar, checking first for a tiny affirmative crinkle of his brow before administering fire. There are some kissing noises. For a few moments Mr Fotopoulos is engulfed in the

effort of kindling. One of the staff fans away the excess smoke.

Mr Fotopoulos grumbles quietly at Ryan's bandaged right arm, shaking his head, gesturing with hands, eyes all sympathetic. Then he takes his cigar by the hand and leads it a healthy distance from his lips and begins to speak.

"Now, we go in the car, we find the ones that attack you, and we kill them. You got knives?"

Ryan shakes his head. I shake mine.

*No.*

*No knives.*

Mr Fotopoulos scowls at us. "We get you knives. They insult my business by doing these things to you. You work for me- they insult my business."

I try to speak but the words won't come. My lungs are already surviving on thimble-sized rations. This- just- can't- be- happening-

But it is.

Ryan manages to stutter out something like: "we're okay, it's- just a cut," but Mr Fotopoulos dismisses his protest with a broad, backhanded wave. He puts the cigar back into his mouth, its smoke dwindled. One of the staff readies himself with a lighter. Another gets his out for backup. Mr Fotopoulos watches us carefully as the cigar is resurrected by a minutes worth of sucking and tugging. We all wait. The lighters are put away. The smoke-cloud is cleared.

"Today it's just a cut, but tomorrow- who knows?"

Somehow, from somewhere, I get my voice back. "They thought we were Matt Harris. They said something about him killing one of their Greek friends- in the alleyway- at the side of the bar." I point to the alley.

Mr Fotopoulos bangs his fist down on the table. The bar staff gathered round all jump back a step. Hands flutter supportively at shoulders. One of them has his eyes

squeezed shut.

“Matt Harris? He never touched the Greek in the alley! He slip and fall on sharp things. And this was an accident, a sad thing that we all regret. Death is bad for business. Bad for the reputation of business.”

I nod furiously.

He nods.

I nod again, matching him.

He stops nodding. “Now I go find the wheels we need. You two can ride with me.”

Coughing away an amphibian, Mr Fotopoulos stands up so quickly that his plastic chair scrapes backwards and almost tumbles over.

He nods at us both in turn, sealing our agreement, before walking briskly back across the road towards a small group of older men standing outside The British Bulldog bar. The staff follow him, three go inside, while one remains to stack the surrounding chairs.

*Now what?*

Ryan and I sit outside the café, paralysed from heart down. The café is on the ground floor of the building where our apartment is, where we’ve been staying as guests of a stranger, a friend of a friend, for less than twenty-four hours. It’s just past three in the morning. The bar still has a straggle of customers, tugging drunkenly at their last lagers. I recognise the English accents; the phonetic of fellows. They begin to help each other off stools, laughing, insulting, lurching off into a muddle of voices and limbs.

Ryan watches Mr Fotopoulos arranging our doom with the group of older men and closes his eyes. “Things are going from bad to worse” he says, flicking the ash from his half-smoked cigarette. A tiny gust grabs it up into the air for a dance before

depositing it into his lap. I watch the fragile ash getting crushed into a smudge. He talks on, oblivious. “Well, what if it’s *true*? What if Matt Harris *did* kill that Greek in the alley?” He points to the dark alley at the side of The British Bulldog bar. “And if you think about what Lisa and Donna told us about him, it fits, it makes sense, it’s probably true.”

Lisa and Donna are the two English girls we met shortly after disembarking at Kos harbour in the early hours of yesterday morning. We asked them for directions. They told us that Matt Harris had killed the Greek in the alley.

Ryan drops his cigarette onto the ground beneath the table. It lands in some spilt beer and lets off a satisfied sizzle, its mission completed; the delivery made.

Mr Fotopoulos is still with the group across the street. He flings his arms around in the air as he talks, while the men with him nod in enthusiastic agreement. He starts using his right arm to make huge slashing motions with what could be an imaginary blade, and the men nod even more encouragingly. I wonder stupidly about the sort of tunes his orchestra might play if he were the conductor. Nervous, edgy melodies, with large, unpredictable percussion. And who would choose to play beaten-up second fiddle for that?

We’ve got to get out of here.

There is the vague hope that Mr Fotopoulos enjoys the contemplation of revenge activities so much, that the reality of chasing around in a car armed with knives might become less appealing. Someone from the bar has given him a drink to complement the now half smoked cigar, which he is waving around as an accompaniment to his words.

The guy stacking chairs looks over at us. It’s hard to guess what he’s thinking. What would he do, in our situation? I don’t know who we can trust. I feel like my thoughts are being broadcast. We just need our bags and our passports. I don’t care if

we have to wait hours for a boat. We can sleep on the beach. We just need to get our things. I can see them in my mind, leant up against a wall or sprawling untidily on a floor. I can picture the colour of the fabric, the nostalgic dangle of address tags. I think about the security of their weight upon my back, of straps gnawing affectionately at my shoulders.

It's time to go.

The guy doing the chairs has gone inside.

Mr Fotopoulos has his back to us, still holding court, seemingly distracted.

Ryan stands up first, very slowly, lifting his chair up and moving it back, trying to avoid the scrape. Cringing, I do the same. Then we edge ourselves away from the table in the direction of the stairwell that opens up at the side of the cafe. Ryan grins bleakly at me. He wants his pack on his back as much as I do, I'm sure. He wants his travel documentation in hand, bending subserviently to the will of his fingers.

I think about all the places that we could be staying at: the campsites and the luxurious complications of tent erection; the overpriced hotels. Then I think about where we *are* staying.

In Matt's apartment. Matt Harris: the alleged alley-killer.

We reach the stairwell.

We pause briefly. Mr Fotopoulos is still talking, waving his arms about.

Matt's place is on the second floor. Our feet take the steps. Questions escort my ascension.

Is Matt Harris going to be there?

Did he *really* kill the Greek in the alley?

What if the Greek boys from outside The Union Jack bar that attacked us have realised their mistake, and have somehow sneaked into Matt's apartment, looking to finish the job?

I expect footsteps to sound behind us at any moment, for there to be cries demanding our location.

*Where are they?*

*The English!*

“C’mon,” Ryan says, to speed us up. We reach the first floor landing. One more flight.

There is nothing left to say.

We reach the second floor and begin to move along an open plan hallway made from grey, angular concrete. One side looks out over the street from above the café; the other is lined with doors leading off to various apartments. Matt’s apartment is at the very end of the hall. We edge our way along, keeping our bodies in single file against the far wall. There is no internal lighting, but plenty of neon floods in from outside. So far, no one seems to have noticed that we have moved.

We creep further along the corridor, getting closer to Matt’s apartment door. Through the open side, I see a car pull up alongside Mr Fotopoulos and his deputies outside The British Bulldog bar.

“Look!”

Ryan looks. “Shit.”

“We’ve got to get out of here. Lisa and Donna were right. We should never have come.”

The cars’ engine idles. A conversation begins between Mr Fotopoulos and the driver.

Any second now they’ll call out. Any second now...

We arrive outside Matt’s door, which is very slightly ajar. There is something ominous about an ajar door. Light frames the door in thin, bright slits, making a man sized rectangle at its edges. I give the door a slight push. It opens onto a short hallway,

about ten feet long, lit from above by a bold strip-light. At the end is another door that opens onto the main space of the apartment. We enter the hallway, closing the front door behind us, leaving it on the latch. The silvery glints of Matt's precious *collection* adorn the walls.

There is silence.

"Matt?" I call softly, but there's no answer. Maybe he didn't hear me? I almost call louder. Ryan puts a finger up to his lips and makes his eyes look urgent.

I hear a squeak noise like a mattress. I wait with anxious ears for a voice, for Ryan's name, or my name, to be called expectantly from behind the door.

*Ryan?*

*Oliver?*

Maybe the door will open, with a welcome- or unwelcome greeting. But then suddenly high-volume electronic dance music blasts out from inside the apartment. We both jump. Ryan is thrown backwards, crashing theatrically against the wall. He winces, clutching at his injured arm. What is going on? Is he having a *party*?

Then it stops. Dead. The music. As quickly as it had started.

Now think. It could be the Greek boys from town. From outside The Union Jack bar- they could have sneaked in, realised their mistake in attacking us. Made their hit on Matt Harris. But then it could be Matt *waiting* for their attack. Maybe he thinks *we're* in league with them somehow? He doesn't know us, really. Maybe Mr Fotopoulos thinks we are in league with them?

I want to run. I want to run until my legs collapse beneath me, until I don't care anymore. But there is no point in running without our stuff, since we can't get off the island without it. And even if we could get off the island, we couldn't get out of the country. So there'd be know point. We need our passports. A spark of frustration and irritation at being caught up in the troubles of others shoots a pinball of pain around

inside of me. We didn't ask for any of this. We just have to get our stuff.

But everything about the door leading into the apartment- into *Matt's* apartment- everything about it shouts *threat*, shouts *danger*, shouts *risk*...

I nod at the walls of the hallway, at Matt's *collection*, and then look at Ryan. He narrows his eyes, indicating that he understands me, and then nods in agreement. I lift one of the collected items carefully down from its mount.

At that moment I hear another noise coming from inside, a kind of sharp click. The long metal shape I hold before me glints in the strip-light. We listen, squinting, craning for clues, trying to distinguish sounds from the thump of blood in our heads.

I hear the mattress springs again.

Whoever it is, they're sat on the bed. Probably.

We both make another step forward.

I nod at Ryan. He puts his hand on my shoulder and gives me a squeeze. It is the squeeze of brotherly agreement, our contract signed. Then I raise my right leg slowly off the ground, and while balancing on my left, kick the door open with as much force as I can manage.

We rush into the apartment.