

NORTH SHORE FRIDAY

Nick Mamatás

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Back when Paraskevi's grandmother was in charge of getting guys off the boats and safely married off before they could be found and deported, she gave her granddaughter the same advice every week. One, don't hide anyone at the Greek church, that's the first place they look. Go to the Methodists, they are the kindest of the xeni. Two, if Immigration finds you, throw a huge screaming fit—rip at your clothes, scratch your own breast till it bleeds, kick and scream and cry and say over and over that you're going to kill yourself—and they probably won't arrest you. Three, if you feel the government trying to read your mind, *think in Greek*.

Between the backwater dialect, the generation-old slang she learned from her parents, and Red cant, Paraskevi would greet her charges and they would hear something analogous to this: "Can thou y'all comrades dig this crazy-struggle for liberty? Forsooth, thine art copacetic, no?" But yiayia knew that even if the INS had a Greek on their side, they'd get nothing from Paraskevi. Not even in 1965, when we began large-scale full-time brainscanning across Long Island.

Getting Greeks off the boats had the feel of a game. Only a few of the big ships bothered with Port Jefferson anymore. Most of the illegals were someone's brother or everyone's cousin, a far-flung friend, the sons of godmothers, or buddies from the Civil War gone to sea and then looking to go to ground. Immigration went armed and wore their suits like they were mobile homes, but they weren't too bad as authority figures go, not back then anyway. Yiayia ran the show because men were too hot-headed, too ready to throw fists or start screaming at nothing, too proud to beg forgiveness or just skulk away when someone got nabbed and dragged back to the city to be sent on the first plane back to Greece. Plus, the men in the family, like me, didn't have an eye for the nice girls who'd come into the Lobster House with their parents or even by themselves. Girls who knew to pick a man who wore pants with the knees worn out from working, not a man whose pants had patches over the ass from sitting around all day doing nothing. Human smuggling was women's work, and generally not too hard. Yiayia didn't spend more than forty-eight hours in prison at a time and Paraskevi was never caught even once. Well, once . . .

* * *

"Hey, Friday," Jimmy the *mavro* said. "Your grandma is on the pay-phone." Paraskevi went to the phone.

"Hello, Poppi?"

"No, yiayia, it's your other granddaughter," she said. "The one who actually works. The one you called?"

"Oh, I know who I called," yiayia said. "Listen, you have to go to church tonight and light one candle. Do you understand?"

"Malesta, yes. I will."

I hope yiayia's just sick. Maybe I can go home and watch some TV for a change. This place is always dead in November. Three dollars in tips all night, it's so stupid that we even open on—

Smelly gasoline, mustaches. "Eh? Eh?" at the end of sentence. "You like, no? Eh?" Say *ti kanes ti kanes*, will they bring . . .

"Where's Georgi? Is he there?"

"No, he's not here. He's at work. Why would he be here?"

"Work? At night, outside?"

"Well, he's not here anyway."

"Maybe he stopped in for some dinner?"

"He *didn't*, yiayia. It's not even dinner time yet."

"Then you have plenty of time for church, before the dinner rush." The sun hadn't even gone down yet.

These codewords are so dumb.

I wasn't working outside anymore. That was in the summertime. I was an engineer back in the 1960s, and a computer programmer of sorts. This was back in the days of room-sized humming monstrosities, the CDC 3600 and that was the cutting edge—we had older machines too. You know why it was called the Sage System? It knew everything, sure. And it was truly a system. That was my summer job—yiayia thought I was just cutting down trees along Nesconsent Highway to make room for radio towers and telephone poles, but it was all part of the system. Even the two screens on the console were round, not like radar displays, but like crystal balls. There was blood in the wiring, magic everywhere. A multidisciplinary endeavor between Stony Brook's computer science and religious studies department.

I can't do a thing with computers now.

Back then, though, I was a genius. I could look at a punch card and divine the data recorded on it. Spread them out on my desk and read them like coffee grains at the bottom of a very large cup. And I was in love with my cousin.

My second cousin, mind you. Maybe it's just a Greek thing, or maybe it was just how we were raised. You know, everyone hanging out together all the time, the distrust of the *xeni*. It's hard not to fall in love with whoever is nearby.

Everyone on the North Shore was a test subject. Long Island was our lab. I got very good at what I had to do, and not just swinging an axe. That was only the job my parents, my grandmother and aunt, could understand. I had to explain over and over again

Ah Friday, where are you now, under all that all skin and sixty years of flab? In your snaggle-toothed smile, I still see what I loved . . .

were adding machines, **like the cash register**, except it could do all the math itself. I was a genius back then. What *fassarea* it all was, really. Most people don't think much of anything. Like apes. We thought the first experiments were a failure because we didn't get any positives in animal testing.

FOOD FOOD FOOD
I'm a bit hungry right now myself, actually . . .

I know that the government is reading my mind now. I hope that my thoughts make them blush.

Paraskevi let Jimmy the *mavro* wait with her under the pier, as hobos and rats liked to congregate there, plus he too had a crush on her, and one didn't need a cool billion dollars worth of mind-reading equipment to know that. He played it tight to the vest though, and never even thought about Paraskevi that way. It was beyond our observations, all in the autonomic nervous system, in sweat and twitches and clenching fingers. Poor guy—it was hard to be a black man on Long Island in the 1960s. He was nervous that night, because Paraskevi was.

It's like my father said when he emigrated. "The CIA is responsible! They are behind the *junta*! They sent the tanks through the streets . . ." and he'd just trail off. "So then why did you move to America, papa?" I asked. "I wanted to go to a country with a government the *Amerikanoí* wouldn't overthrow . . ."

"You're going to have to go, and go before he sees you," she explained. "You know?"
"Yeah, yeah, I know."

"I mean, they might think that you're a cop."

rapist, and then they might kill you and decide to rape me. God, I'm so sick to even think . . .

"Forget it," Jimmy said, "Don't explain. I can't stay here all night anyway, you know?"
"I know."

There was a birdcall in the distance and Jimmy took off, not thinking a thing at all. Paraskevi laughed at the idea of a birdcall at night. The gulls were god-knows-where. "Embros," she said, not knowing that her own grandmother wasn't saying "Hello" when she picked up the phone, not knowing that this illegal didn't have a phone—hell, Andoni had never even seen one except for once, in the Navy—but he heard Greek and a woman's smoky voice so he emerged out of the dark. Paraskevi waved at the time, hunched over, worried about her chest and a man long at sea. Andoni had a cap and he took it off and said, "Hi." Paraskevi didn't smile, not for them. She heard the clinking of glass bottles in his bag. He didn't smell of sweat and ouzo like so many of these guys did, though.

No. Sensitivity was attuned to lab tests; bored psychology students thinking of apples

Of course, there were gypsies in the woods, some of the time. Not too many in November, when the ice was slick over carpets of red-brown leaves, when the ramshackle homes and shacks in which they squatted for a season were too hard to heat with small bonfires and thick blankets. We got along with them, or I did. I'd pay for their meals at the Lobster House, they'd give me tips at the quarter horse track out East, since a lot of them got some work out there fixing horses with their Old World stuff. I had no idea what they did, but it probably involved ramming something up the horse's asses. That's where the conversation so often turned, when I'd meet them out back with coffees and sandwiches anyway.

Think in Greek,
Think in Greek,
Ellinika, me logia
Ellinika. Stupid
random words
mylo skylo, oraya
kalispera gamo to
panayia

Good!
That's
my
smile.
How
she'd
smile
at
me . . .

There were other things in the woods too. Ghosts of the settlers, long dead. The old Indians were so dead they didn't even have ghosts, except for when we'd fire up the machines. Always at night to avoid brownouts and power outages. But the feds always wanted more. Not better, just more. More results, more miles of tape, more pallets worth of punch cards, so many results nobody could hope to read them all, to assign thoughts to thinkers, before all our equipment went obsolete.

It's illegal to threaten the president, but it ain't illegal to think about strangling him, is it? *Is this thing on? *tap* *tap**

"Don't associate with the *yifti*, they're dirty. You'll turn into one. They'll rob you blind. Be kind to them, but don't be friends. Worse than *mavro*, they are." Whatever happened to that \$500? It was so much back then . . . "Oh they give tips, eh? What did they say for tomorrow's races, *Georgi*?"

Paraskevi almost never thought of me, even though I loved her. That's how I ended up involved in the events of November 9. I was at Stony Brook, in the basement of the brand new building, the one far away from G-Quad, my pants all muddy and wet. In the woods, she called out to me with her mind. I had to go to her. Andoni tried his English. "Is far?" he asked. Paraskevi shook her head no in the Greek way; a sharp nod and a click of the tongue. "Not far, but in circles," she said, waving her arms around.

GEORGE!

It is far. Why does America smell like this?

"*Kalo, kalo*, it's okay."
"Yifti, eh?" Andoni said.

He clutched his bag, tightly, then let out a stream of nervous-sounding Greek

Paraskevi barely understood. *Gypsies* and *America* and finally the punctuation of so many sentences: *Katalaves*? You understand. No, she didn't. She even thought in

...

Then they stopped in a clearing. Andoni had to tie his shoes and had to urinate as well. He knew the words toilet and please and didn't point at his crotch, but he did go into his

this guy will make a *great* husband for someone, yah

bag and dig out his bottle of ouzo to drink even as he started to piss.

Lose some gain some!

Then, gunfire and seventy-two columns of punch cards punched hard. Fight or flight, or in this case, a freeze.

hehehe

What was that poem about miles of walking? I hate school; I wish I could just drop out and just work at the store. It's so friggin' cold; my glasses are gonna fog up again the second I get back home. I always forget that they fog up until I walk into a warm room again. I wonder what Tommy is up to? I wonder if this Andoni guy can tell that I'm not looking at him on purpose . . .

Immigration prowled the docks whenever a ship came in. Too many marriage licenses being issued too quickly. Some complaints from the spoiled richie-rich brats up on the hills of Belle Terre. But it was still only Port Jefferson and the pier wasn't that busy, so the INS only had a couple of guys working the beat. They were go-getters, or has-beens, and that night they trudged right after Paraskevi and her three new boys, following them in to the old woods between downtown and the highway. Paraskevi knew the land like she her knew her own face—where the tree lines stopped and into which backyards she could spill without a dog barking or an automatic backyard security light flipping on. Where the little streams would crack under the weight of two men but not one. Where the disused rail spurs and the fairly active Long Island Railroad tracks lay. Where the sandpit and the semi-secret Fairchild HQ was. The INS stooges didn't know anything at all, except how to crack branches under their feet, wave flashlights and badges and guns, threaten and bully.

Like I knew her face. Oh, her face.

From what I was able to piece together from the punch cards and the frantic whirls and pulses on the screens of the supercomputer: The sheriff got a call about Jimmy the *mavro* hanging out in the marina, by one of the houseboats owned by one of the people made a little too nervous by a Negro. The two im-

Meatloaf, is there a more perfect dish in all the . . .

If they didn't want me to fire my sidearm, they wouldn't have issued me one. We have rules in this country. Get in line, like everyone else. And the defense contractors; what if one of these guys gets a job there and is a Commie? If they didn't want me to fire my sidearm, they wouldn't have issued me one. If they didn't want me to fire my sidearm, they wouldn't have issued me one. If they didn't want me to fire my sidearm, they wouldn't have issued me one.

migration officers happened to be in the sheriff's office at the time, getting some coffee and playing penny poker. They knew Jimmy worked at the restaurant. They knew about Paraskevi's grandmother, and decided to check it out. There was a boat in the harbor, after all. Not quite a tanker, they'd never fit, but a decent-sized ship capable of transatlantic. They went to the Lobster House, which was just beginning to get its dinner crowd in, and saw that the only waitresses on duty looked normal and decided that Paraskevi was a person of interest. A waitress who doesn't serve burgers and fries is as interesting as a dog that doesn't bark.

It was still a bit light in the sky, and she was easy to spot on the edge of the woods. She was dark, had the long hair and boy's jeans. She wouldn't stop. She ran hard. They went barreling after her. They opened fire. She fell. It wasn't Paraskevi, it was one of the *yifti* kids, a twelve-year-old girl too shy to even think her own name, even as she died.

Paraskevi heard the gunshot and thought my name.

It was no coincidence that I was monitoring her thoughts at the time. It was even part of the experimental protocol. Parapsychological research never fetishized the idea of the double-blind study, and you know what they say about computer science: "Any field with the word 'science' in its name isn't one." But she thought my name, at the moment I happened to be there, in the lab, to receive it. I knew it was her, as I'd been observing her for weeks—yes, that's fine. There's a hypothesis in parapsychology, the hypothesis of Directional Intention—I was able to read the cards and know it was Paraskevi, know that that screamed my name in her head—because of *my* intention, directed toward her. The machines would have picked it up anyway, of course, but it would have been lost amidst all the grocery lists and frantic burning desire for new shoes or a warm kiss or the pain of a scar to finally fade. If another researcher had been on duty that evening, none of what happened next would have ever happened, because

That's what her brother said to call her, anyway.

I know I know I know
mama don't be mad
I know Imsorry I know I know
owow my shirt so wet owow
it will be okay I can sew it
have to go home to mama
Imsorry Imsorry

L
E
N
A

could have only been read in that instant, by me.

GEORGE!

Stupid backfiring
carscarcar . . . no!

GUN!

I had to know what was going on, and I had the means. The college had an agreement with LILCO. All the power we needed, whenever we needed it. In return—well, what they got in return is beyond my pay grade, but as LILCO is long gone they didn't get much out of it. Something about predicting power outages during hurricane season.

and all *Stelyo's*
preferred stock
along with it. Good,
that fucker . . .

Yeah, and speaking of power outages, where were you when the lights went out?

Paraskevi couldn't tell that the lights had gone out, not out in the woods. There was a different feel in the air, a different feel *to* the air. A streak of ozone; a tingle on the skin. A few horns honked in the distance, but that could just be the usual evening traffic up the long twisting road of Main Street. It was twilight, but the streetlamps of town hadn't yet started to burn orange. Something was different, but she didn't know what. There was gunfire, there was immigration. She could only think one word: *Georgi!*

"Pame!" she said to Andoni, because she didn't know how to tell him what she really needed them to do. Run, run in different directions. "I'll wait here!" she said, but then she said "Pame!"—let's go—so they followed her into a clearing.

"Comrade," she said. "It behooves y'all to hit the road. The devil!"

Two men in suits, one with a pistol in his hand, his knuckles and face both white as flour, the other taller and huffing, stumbled into the clearing. "INS," the taller one said. "Hands up."

Andoni looked to Paraskevi. She put her hands up, her chest out. He followed suit, sacks and suitcase hit the ground. The sky turned purple.

"Who did you shoot?" Paraskevi asked.

"No talking," said the man without the gun. "You're under—" he stopped talking. The sky sizzled.

I can't believe I shot that girl. God, god, she's dead. We can't call for help, we can't. I'll be—

Donaldson's so fucked. I should have shot him myself. Let these people go, arrest that motherfucker for murder at least. No, can't do that. I need someone to have my back. I've done so many bad things. The drugs, the girl from Colombia, she was so tight. Don's got a wife, kids. They need him. Why did I even get out of bed

Oh God oh God. Get the bottle. Get smoke. *Think in Greek!*

*Kyrie eleison.
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison
Kyrie eleison*

Paraskevi saw it first. Usually, it takes a sensitive, someone attuned to the "vibe," like the hippies used to say. The girl, Lena, bleached white, smaller than even short, squad Andoni. A little more than like ball lightning in human form, she walked through them all.

Paraskevi, my girl, she was so

Lost lost. Never be buried. Lost lost. Never be buried . . .

tough back then. That's how we grew 'em. No shrinking violets back then, no big-haired bimbos. She dove to the ground, grabbed a bottle of ouzo by the neck and swung it against a tree in a single wide arc from the sack it was in to Donaldson's face. Donaldson raised his hands and then his partner grabbed the gun so he wouldn't shoot. Paraskevi took a cigarette from her apron pocket, lit it, and after a puff held the lit cherry up to Donaldson's *Metaxa*-soaked face. "Don't shoot," she said. "Might spark."

Andoni fell back, crossing himself and twitching. It was hard to breathe for a few moments, or it probably was anyway. I remember the feeling from the lab experiments. Hair on end, sinuses tingling; the face of the ghost like an old brown negative held up to the sun and blazing. Poor Lena.

I always felt like a homing pigeon, head buzzing from unseen stimuli—it's a primitive thing, to see a ghost.

You know, I gave her brothers a reel of 1" tape—the recording of the output. She's on there somewhere. Like ashes in an urn, but with a little charge of magnetism. Software with no hardware left to play her on.

The ghost wandered out of the woods and faded. Paraskevi looked at the other INS agent, his hand still clenched around Donaldson's gun. "Thanks. Do you want to put a ghost in your report?"

“Not a murder either,” he said.

The woods were black. The whole East Coast was dark, except for my little lab in the basement of the college.

That’s what these cards and reels mean to me, okay? A dead girl, her ghost made from static electricity, secret government psi experiments, my crazy family of scoff-laws and badasses, an inappropriate attraction to my cousin, and the big blackout of 1965. She thought of me once. I have proof. She lives in Florida now. Two kids, nice husband. A *xeni*. At first we thought she did it on purpose but he’s a nice guy. Jeff, the blond one.

You think I care whether you believe it or not? I know what happened. I’m the only one who knows. Even Paraskevi, your Aunt Friday, only knows about . . .

So that’s why I keep these old cases around. I’m still looking for an auction, eBay or something, that might sell one of the old machines, so I can read these results. I see the whole story spread out before me, but to prove it to anyone else I’d need a computer antique enough to handle a dead medium.

Heh, there’s a pun in there somewhere—a dead

Ask Andoni. You’ve seen him around. Your father’s friend—you used to play with his daughter Kelly. Yeah, same guy. He was illegal. A lot of people owe *yiyia* a lot around here. That’s why he wears the *mati* all the time—because he saw a ghost. Why he crosses himself when your father talks about going down to the track, or OTB.

Don’t call them *yifti* anymore. They settled. Got houses. Just mind your business about certain things. Immigration tried to deport the family because they were going to sue, but in the end I think we all managed to get them married quick, or prove they were born here. You don’t even know who, or what, has been born here. Lots of secrets, you understand? Not just these.

This stuff won’t be classified forever. The truth will come out one day. You know the feds are still reading our minds. I’m sure that they’re a lot better at it now too, with the Muslims and 9/11. Hell, your iPhone is a million times smarter than my old Cray.

Are you listening?

Can you hear me?

I bet those guys just knew to think in Arabic or Farsi. ○

Aren’t you paying attention any more?

Katalaves? Did you hire another Greek? If so, help me . . . you know how it is.

