

**THE BOUGATSA OF SALONICA* AND THE MURDERER-
A CREAM -PIESH STORY**

To my children
Spyros and Matilda

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Dedicated to my husband, who loves detective stories

*Bougatsa is a traditional Greek cream-pie and the city of Salonica is famous for it's tasty bougatsa.

Salonica is like a tasty, sweet or salty, bougatsa.

If you cut it, with the special knife they use for cutting pieces of bougatsa at the pastry-shops, then you can enjoy itstasty neighborhoods.

But, if instead of a piece of bougatsa or the.... city of Salonica, a man gets cut to pieces with such a knife, then what happens?

Well, in such a case one starts looking for the murderer.

And so our story begins.

The cold is cutting through my bones.

I am having my usual walk along the coast of this beautiful and peaceful city, waiting for the time to pass, for my daughter to finish her class, so we can return home together.

I have only this daughter, who I adore. She is the apple of my eye.

I'm divorced, so I have full responsibility for her.

I haven't been born at Salonica, but I consider it as my second home, because I've been living here for many-many years.

Despite the cold, I sit on a bench, and I look at the sea, eating roasted gourd-seeds from a small paper-bag.

It's one of my favorite habits.

I'm lucky because there's no wind, so I can sit comfortably and enjoy my view.

As I sit there, lost in my thoughts, I don't listen to my cell-phone at once.

It's my daughter calling.

- Mom, I'm going to the movies with some of my fellow-students.

Do you mind?

- Not at all. You go with your friends, my child.

I'll return home, besides I feel rather tired today.

- Thank you mommy, thank you.

- Take care and don't be too late.

That's all I have time to tell her and then she hangs up on me.

Near the bus stop I buy a piece of bougatsa, which I plan to eat later, at my home.

I like bougatsa very much, despite the fact that it's very fattening.

Actually I like everything that's fattening.

On my way home I decide to get off at a stop before my own.

I intend to walk, eating and window-shopping.

Although it's not very late, the streets are empty.

I'm very hungry, so I eat my bougatsa quickly.

So, at the corner of the street that's exactly before my house I open a trashcan to throw away the paper bag....and I take the fright of my life.

A human leg springs up from inside the trashcan.

A body is inside it, pronely, with two big knives stuck at it's back, like the ones they use for cutting the pieces of bougatsa at the pastry shops.

My heart is beating fast and I feel like fainting.

Immediately, with all the courage I have left, I push the leg back inside the trashcan and close the lid.

I throw out, and then I sit on the pavement, trying to get myself together.

I feel giddy and my head feels like its empty.

I get up to leave, with the little strength I've left.

Strangely enough, something stops me from running away.

In a few minutes I regain my self-control, and I reopen the trashcan.

A familiar smell of men's perfume comes out, mixed with the odor of the garbage.

I feel like vomiting again.

With shaking hand I manage to turn over the dead body.

I scream.

He's my lover, a notorious womanizer, dead inside this trashcan, with stabs all over his body.

Of all people, why did it have to be me to discover his body?

Despite the sock, I manage to close the lid when I notice a passer-by coming my way.

Thank God, he pays no attention to me.

I feel relieved.

Once more, I dig my head inside this coffin-trashcan.

' Even though he's dead, he still looks very pretty' I think to myself.

I must be mad to have such thoughts during these tragic moments.

I call the police and then I burst into tears.

The first investigation doesn't last too long, and I leave quickly from the police station, although I'm probably a suspect for them.

I don't care, I've made my decision: I am going to investigate this case all by myself.

After this unexpected and horrible event, I arrive at my place feeling extremely tired.

My daughter is asleep.

She didn't worry at all for my delay, she must've thought that I had gone to a friend to pass my time.

I lie in my bed without taking off my clothes and I start thinking.

Who murdered him?

Who has taken my place?

The time is perfect for some black humor.

Although we had some very bad moments during our last days together, I loved him.

The crime was committed at the street or in a house?

What was the motive?

The policemen had told me that his wallet had been found intact in his pocket.

The truth is that I have never heard of a robbery committed in our neighborhood during all the years I've lived here.

I make a plan for the next day and then I wait impatiently for dawn.

Tomorrow I'm going to ask for a week off my work, I'll meet some people, collect information, search his apartment thoroughly- besides I went there quite often to clean it- and I'll do whatever else I decide is necessary.

I stay awake all night long.

Time passes by very slowly.

I chain smoke, lighting one cigarette after the other.

Slowly the light of dawn comes through my window.

I feel so very awful!

It's a sunny day, but I feel lousy.

I make hot coffee, take two aspirins for my headache and start my first day as a detective.

I arrive at the house of the ex-glamour boy of northern Greece at 7 o'clock.

Very carefully, I climb the stairs to the seventh floor.

I open the door of his apartment, close it behind me without making any noise, and lock it.

Taking a first look around, I notice that everything is at its place.

There's no messiness, and that's curious.

Today is Thursday, and the cleaning lady comes every Monday.

If the murder was committed in here, then the place has been cleaned.

But if the murder hasn't been committed in here, then how come the place is so tidy?

I know that Christoforos never cleaned his place.

Of course, it's possible that he was seeing another woman, since we hadn't been seeing each other for a while.

But I'd better stop jumping to conclusions.

I must hurry, I must search the apartment before the police or someone else arrives here.

And I must do it carefully leaving no fingerprints.

My first search ends quickly.

By the way, I've found no trace of another woman, not a lipstick, nor a g-string or a bra.

But why should I care?

I've smoked three packets of cigarettes all day.

I've eaten nothing; I've only had two cups of coffee.

It's getting dark and I walk towards his house once more.

As I arrive near his building, I don't enter at once.

Instead, I stand at the pavement across the street for about ten minutes, to make certain that everything is quite.

When I feel sure that there's nobody around, I quickly cross the street.

The moment I open the door of his apartment, his telephone rings.

I startle. What shall I do now?

I let it ring, enter the apartment and wait for it to stop.

When it finally stops ringing, I start looking for the clues that are going to help me solve this horrible crime.

A few minutes later the phone rings again.

I take the risk and lift it.

Before I have time to speak, I hear a man's voice.

- Good evening.
- Good evening.
- Is Christoforos there please?

For a few seconds I am confused, I don't know what to answer.

- No, he's not here.
- And who are you?
- I'm the cleaning lady; I answer surprising myself with my boldness.
- How come you're there at this time?
- I came to clean the place, because mister Christoforos is going to have a party here tonight.

I don't know why I said that. I wait for his answer.

Only his heavy breathing is heard through the earphone.

- Are you still there?
- Yes, I'm here...Ok, good night and thank you
- What's your name...?

He hangs up on me.

What a strange telephone call!

I didn't recognize his voice.

I'd better leave as soon as I can.

As go out at the corridor I see the man who leaves next door standing there, waiting for the elevator.

I turn around and go back inside, pretending that I've forgotten something.

The man didn't see me, since his back was turned to me, so when he enters the elevator I quickly go down the stairs and get out of the building.

I must admit that I was puzzled by the telephone call.

For this reason next morning I return to my 'lover's' apartment.

I want to find his phone book, which I know he kept on the small table at the living room.

I had never opened it all the time we were together.

I carefully read one by one the names and the phone numbers.

I find no sign of something peculiar.

If I could find his cell phone, maybe then I could solve this phone-mystery, if of course it exists.

The phone rings again.

This time I don't hesitate to pick it up.

- Yes please.
- Good morning. It's you again? Oh, of course, you must be cleaning the place.

It's the same man on the line.

- Good morning. Yes, you're right it's me again. I am cleaning up the apartment.

Is it possible that he hasn't heard the news?

- Is Christoforos there?
- But he's never here at this time of the day, sir.
- Yes, you're right. Have a good day.
- You haven't told me your name; I've asked you yesterday too...

Click. It's the sound of the phone as he hangs up on me once more.

I feel frightened and worried.

I don't like this conversation at all, and it's suspicious that he calls each time I'm in the apartment.

Can it be only a coincidence?

I go inside the dead man's bedroom to search through the drawers and the closets once more.

This time I search with extreme care.

Of course I really don't know why I'm doing the same thing I've already done yesterday, since I've found nothing suspicious.

Why am I searching in here?

Suddenly I see a jacket and a costume that I've never seen before.

Their size is too big for Christoforos.

I look at the label. It's extra large.

I know very well that Christoforos would never wear such a size, I've bought too many clothes as presents for him, poor me.

I take the clothes out of the closet and I place them on the bed, to have a better look.

Now I'm certain that they don't belong to the dead man.

I search the pockets and I find a pair of black gloves and an expensive man's golden ring, with the initials A.X.

I place the clothes back inside the closet but I keep the ring.

The funeral is held in a tensed atmosphere.

All his friends, colleagues, relatives and neighbors are present.
His parents and his brothers are sorrowful, aggrieved and shocked by the way of his death.
There's uneasiness mixed with grievance and mystification in the air.
As I am of the first to leave the cemetery, I see a stranger standing away from the rest of the crowd.
As I walk by in front of him, our eyes meet.
He's a big man, around 45 years old.
He must be policeman, investigating the crime, I conclude.

It's a sunny morning and the sea is very still.
It's exactly the opposite from the tragic moments and the tension that I'm going through.
My decision to spend hours visiting jewelry shops, trying to find the shop from where the expensive gold ring that I've taken from the pocket of the man's jacket had been bought, is not one my best.
Noon arrives very quickly.
I'm exhausted, after so many hours of walking and so many fruitless efforts.
I sit at a restaurant to have lunch.
I come to the conclusion that my efforts are pointless.
I've spent so much time trying to find something out about the ring, but it's very possible that it wasn't even bought at a jewelry shop of Salonica.
But even if it had been bought in our city, would anyone remember who the buyer was?
I leave my lunch half-finished, pay my bill and walk back home.

All night long I lie awake.
I keep thinking of the suit and the jacket.
But why am I so puzzled by these clothes?
After all, it's possible that a guest of Christoforos has left them there.
Next day I'm once again in his apartment, but to my surprise, the large clothes are missing.
The rational conclusion is that someone has keys to his apartment.

The first possibility is that there is someone who monitors the whole situation, and who also has me under surveillance.

The second possibility is that there is someone who knows about my relationship with the victim, and so he follows every move I make after his murder.

The third possibility is that the police are watching me.

The only thing left for me to do is to shadow the building of the ex-playboy of Salonica, hoping to discover some new evidence.

I had a lot of troubles with Christoforos when we had an affair, and now that we're no longer together, I have even bigger problems.

I spend most hours outside the building, watching, either the people who go in and out, either the windows of the apartment, just in case I see a light in there.

It's already been three days.

Today is the fourth day.

I've been standing here, across the street, for about an hour without any results.

As it looks that I'm not going to have any results with this method, I decide to change it.

I go inside the building and sit on the chairs outside the apartment.

In this way I can monitor only the place that interests me.

Of course, this method is more risky, but I really have no other alternatives left.

I spend two more days sitting there, at the corridor.

Every time I hear a sound, I change my position, because I don't want to be seen.

Today is my sixth day.

I'm very disappointed by the results of my work as a detective, but I won't give up.

At noon, as I sit there feeling a bit sleepy, I jump up by the sound of the opening of the elevator's door.

A man comes out and walks towards the apartment.

I move a little further away, but not too far.

I see a large man unlocking the door of Christoforos' apartment.

But from where I stand I can't discern his face.

For a moment I'm seized with panic.

I want to leave and call the police, but very soon I regain my composure.
I stay there, waiting in anguish.
The stranger doesn't stay inside for too long.
He leaves locking the apartment without taking any precautions, as I
notice to my surprise.
My life has become a nightmare.

It's Monday night, nine o'clock.
The city is very quiet, as it usually is during Monday nights.
The moment I enter into the building, a man comes rushing down the
stairs.
He walks by me very quickly, staring at me intensely.
It's his bad luck, because I recognize the face of the unknown man who
had been standing alone at the funeral, away from the rest of us.
I saw the large man who entered the apartment during that noon, the man
who called every time I was inside the apartment.
I identified the man who owned the clothes I had seen in the closet of the
poor victim.
I run out, and I start to follow him. An unexpected action begins.
I walk carefully along the streets, waiting at the corners, breathing
heavily because of my agony and fear, and, although I sometimes lose
sight of him, I manage to follow him keeping a safe distance.
The fact that the streets are almost empty doesn't help me at all.
If there were even a little traffic, things would be much easier for me.
A little later I realize that he has noticed me, and as soon as we arrive at
the coast, he begins to walk much faster.
The coast spreads endless in front of us, and begins to run along it.
Now we are both running as fast as we can, sweating and breathing
heavily.
I feel the sweat running down my body; I'm tensed and exhausted.
The few people, who are walking along the beach, turn and look at us in
wonder.
When the strange 'guilty-man' arrives at the entrance of the impressive
White Tower of Salonica, he opens it's door and I lose sight of him.
Getting there very quickly, I climb up the stairs as fast as I can, although
I feel I'm going to faint.

When I reach to the top, short of breath and surprised because he's nowhere to be seen, I start looking for him.
I'm afraid that he's hiding somewhere and that he's going to attack me. The pupils of my eyes are dilated because of my fear, but also because of the immense effort I make to look back and forth, to my left and to my right, being extremely careful in the same time.
When my search ends, desperate, I go out at the balcony.
Gusts of cold wind blow up there, so there's nobody around.
Everything is black, frozen and deserted.
I go near the small wall that surrounds the balcony and look towards the vast sea that's hiding so many secrets.
How I wish she would reveal to me who is the murderer!
I bend my head to look downwards, without really thinking, and I see a stirring spectacle:
The body of the mysterious man spread there on the concrete of the pavement that surrounds the coast.
I snap out of my fright by the sirens of the police cars.
The sea is now rougher and the cold seems sharper.
I tumble on a bench and burst into tears.
The information is unexpected and un hoped for:
Police had been watching him for some time because he was the main suspect for the murder of Christoforos.
The victim and the victim-murder had an affair, the same time that I too had an affair with Christoforos.
As I walk away, I throw the ring into the waters of Thermaikos Golf.

THE END