

Flight of the Century

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Πτήση του Αιώνα

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“You may live to see man-made horrors beyond your comprehension.”

Nikola Tesla, probably

Hotels all the way down, and down-town way above: Kallithea sits still against the Aegean Sea, with most of its festivities situated above. There is a narrow path of paved stone, dividing the silky beach of Kallithea from those perfectly aligned hotels. It was right there that a chapter had just unfolded: two chummy friends, Klio and Xenofon, have paved their way to one such hotel, inside a yellowish van of little luxury. Xenofon's navigation system led them to the hotel, but only a hundred metres or so has it actually appeared before them. They reversed out of the street, a little upwards, along rows of other stationary cars, until they reached a gate of blue, conveniently open and with one available seat. They lined up with the rest of the vehicles in the yard.

Not wasting any more time, Klio and Xenofon sprung out of their van, the former carrying an invoice and the latter his own belongings. Plenty of shade was to be found in the courtyard, with a passage leading into the tavern, and beyond stony walls sat an elderly lady of blonde hair in mostly white clothing, as the sun has shown to be merciless.

“Right, if you please,” said the lady at the reception upon a warm welcome, naturally referring to payment. “Just a reminder, we do not accept cards, only cash.”

Xenofon was about to pull out his wallet from the bag when Klio quickly shoved it back inside.

“Wait now, Xylophono¹,” she said, “you've already paid your part.”

The woman processed Klio's payment of three hundred and eighty Euros, and an additional twenty cents, which the lady at first took, but then dropped back into Klio's purse. Letting out a relieved sigh, Klio followed the lady, as did Xenofon, to their room. They both had high hopes for the hotel—close to the beach, has its own restaurant, and its

1 Xυλόφωνο, meaning “xylophone” in Greek.

rooms seemed relatively novel, and the price reasonable enough. Once the doors swung open, and they peeked in, Klio's smile dissipated. Not entirely was it gone from her face, but she gazed into the room with a little confusion.

"Here are your beds," the lady pointed to them; "between them is one drawer, across each bed is one, wardrobe is straight ahead, and on the right is the bathroom. We do cleaning service on all days except Sundays, and breakfast is served between nine and ten. Have a nice stay in Kallithea!"

She further mentioned that the tavern served as the reception, and that they should pay her or her sons a visit for assistance. As Xenofon meticulously closed the door, Klio threw herself onto the nearest bed.

"What!" She began. "We paid seven hundred Euros for this! It makes sense if the beach is close, or if the food is superb, but this?"

She grumbled.

"This *sucks*! Don't you agree, Xylophono?"

The mellow fellow nodded.

"Well, you should! But I guess it can't be helped. We'll spend more time outside, anyway."

He responded with two more nods.

"Let's hope the beds are at least dependable. Ah, it's comfortable, actually. You should take the other bed, Xylophono."

Xenofon pointed at the exit.

"You want to take our stuff inside? Sure, go on. I think I'll take a nap for now."

While she shut her eyeballs, Xenofon spent his next fifteen minutes transferring their items from the van to the room. He was told not to move any toolkits out of the van: they would clutter the room, and they were not paramount at the moment.

Klio and Xenofon were no car mechanics, nor were they builders. And yet, their tools had a purpose: technology was their game, and they seized any opportunity to play with it, matter of fact being, them settling in Kallithea was not purely for vacation reasons.

A week before, Klio had been watching television news, when the weather-caster had announced that heavy wind was expected to blow on Halkidiki. Klio investigated further and came to find that Kallithea will be most heavily affected. It would be an ideal opportunity for her next big experiment, “the human bird”. Many drafts were wasted, but one blueprint has emerged as “the one”. Naturally, her guinea pig was Xenofon, a boy of little words, whom she encountered at the university campus in the faraway city of Athens. She preferred not to call him a “guinea pig”, instead choosing “QT pi” given that her experiments are often quite innocuous. For other interactions, Xylophono was the nickname: it was too tempting with a rare name like that, and she liked music.

Klio woke up to a room with items all over, as well as a xylophone rendition of Zorba’s Dance, her phone’s default alarm tone. Xenofon was in bed, his face turned away from hers. She stood up, walked up to his bed, and covered him with a blanket. Taking the keys, Klio went to the van where she unravelled her “human bird” blueprint in peace.

“My QT pi is going to enjoy this,” she whispered; “and if all goes well, then I too can become a human bird...!”

Klio is concerned with machinery, and almost has a diploma to show for it. Xenofon studies in another faculty, namely linguistics. Indeed, the man does utter words—just not as often as his peers.

A tranquil night had passed, yet no sunshine has entered through their sole window the following morning. Klio almost did not want to rise and shine, but seeing as Xenofon rolled out of bed before her, she did so pretty much instantaneously. Their breakfast was wholesome: some bread, fig jam, some butter, a slice of vegetable pie, three nectarines, two omelette plates, ham, cheese, and tea of their choosing. They could also pick coffee instead of tea, though neither of them were too fond of coffee.

Klio and Xenofon returned to their little seaside abode, at which terrace they were seated to discuss their plan. It was mainly Klio who spoke, while Xenofon either shook his head, nodded, or used his hands. Klio was eager to scavenge for resources needed for her experiment, while Xenofon wanted their first day of so-called holiday to be spent bathing, both in the sun and the sea, citing the arduous trip from Athens they had

taken. Ultimately, as that day was Saturday, and Sundays were quite unpredictable in a new town, Xenofon acquiesced to accompany his friend in retrieving all they needed for their build. Thus, they hopped into their van and slowly ascended into the town centre, not forgetting to lock their room. Klio could absolutely not shift into a gear higher than the first.

After driving through an underpass, they wound up near the centre, and Klio had to lower her speed even further. There has been very little parking to be found, but they succeeded in aligning between two vehicles along the church yard. With caps on their heads, Klio and Xenofon stormed into the first store, a souvenir shop, after noticing a wide range of paragliders. Klio pulled them one by one, measuring their length with some tape, whereas Xenofon placed two cylindrical styrofoams where the propellers were to be built in. She has found two out of twenty-something paragliders to be perfect for the job, and, through a game of rock-paper-scissors, decided on the blue one with pink stripes. Following this was a visit to a hardware store, of which were two in the entire town. Hardware which they required were two propellers, an engine to power them, a steering wheel, and something to make it functional. They swung by both stores and got nearly everything, except...

“Nobody here really asks for a steering wheel and things that help them work,” a middle-aged man said, wearing sunglasses in a store lacking illumination; “but if you’re still looking for one, I recommend paying a visit to the junk yard. Go straight at the roundabout, drive through Kassandria, and a sign that says ‘σκουπίδια²’ will show up. Last I’ve heard, their collection of steering wheels in particular is around thirty in number, but I forgot the exact amount. What do you need those for, anyway?”

“We’re doing a science project,” Klio answered, like usual, and Xenofon agreed with his head.

“Science project, eh?” He then replied. “Well, since traffic is slow and I have time to spare, tell me—what exactly have you made, if anything?”

“Let’s see... We have a fishing net whose handle extends away from the caster, not to forget the net itself... We’ve created a pizza factory,

2 Skoupidia, meaning “trash”.

where you just add ingredients to assigned slots and the machine does the rest. And I can't forget the time we made a chocolate fountain!"

"Doesn't that already exist?" The shopkeeper said.

"Yes, but we—"

"Took it a step further, eh? That sounds like a messy job, and I'm working with grease of all kinds."

Having purchased most of their parts, Klio and Xenofon rode off in their van. They burnt some rubber after the roundabout, a Lidl market, into and out of Kassandria, after which they pursued the sign they were told. They pulled in and parked right behind a gate to the junk yard.

"Visitors? In MY junk yard?" A hunched-up grey-haired woman acted a little surprised.

"Hello to you too," said Klio irritably. "We're looking for steering wheels. Do you have them?"

"Right, let me see... Dimitris!" Her voice echoed like a screeching bird.

Being gestured to enter, Klio and Xenofon trod along junk, none of which smelled particularly foul. After all, this place was dedicated to technological scrap, among which were things like pneumatics and engine bits, although one could also lay their hands upon broken virtual reality headsets, overheated motherboards, and fake made-in-China cell phones—ones which try so hard to copy the original, and flop anyway.

"Steering wheels are this way," a man the same age as his wife at the entrance said, eventually having led the two to a pile.

"Wow!" Klio marvelled. "Is there any reason why these are lumped separately?"

"We lump all garbage separately."

"But didn't I see tyres and gaming chairs in a pile of lightbulbs, air conditioners, and..."

"Most our scraps are essentially free of charge," the man ignored her inquest. "That said, there are some exceptions. For example, take a look here. You said you wanted steering wheels?"

Klio and Xenofon both nodded.

"Right, all of these are free. But this one..."

The man tapped on a nearly intact steering wheel, and something about it seemed special, which the man went on to explain:

“We had the privilege of storing most of the parts from a well-known aeroplane, Artemis 55000. This maiden used to carry tens of thousands of our people all over the republic—though obviously tourists took a hike as well. A famous plane that served its purpose, no doubt, but was eventually retired some two years ago. She peacefully rests in our junk yard, though the engine was salvaged by the owner himself. Now, this steering wheel is quite extraordinary. It is in near perfect condition, and I feel like you can make it work. The price? Let me pull out my phone... Ah, it’s... five Euros!”

“Five!” She shouted. “I thought it’d be worth more than that! Is it really as good as it sounds?”

“I should know that, right?”

“What do you mean?”

As she said that, before her laid a card with the man’s face and information on it, and it twinkled in the sun, proving that it was an official document despite it having expired long ago. The name of the plane was also listed. He was a copilot of the Artemis.

“That makes a lot more sense,” Klio said after gazing into the card. “But still, are you sure it’s not five *thousand* Euros instead of just five?”

“You think I’m some sort of scalper? In fact, I’d be glad to have something taken off my back, and I’m willing to charge a small fee for something that once used to be so dear to me.”

“Hm, I dunno... Hey Xylophono, you’ve been quiet. What do you think?”

Xenofon, standing next to her, grabbed the steering wheel upon the man’s approval. He steered in all general directions: left, right, straight, backwards, and even up and down, doing so with relative ease. He raised his hand: it was a thumbs-up.

“Well, he’s not too difficult to convince!”

Klio laughed, but finding herself controlling the wheel after him, she was impressed by how nimbly the controller moved. She, too, was

convinced. For five Euros, one could feast upon a medium-price gyro, while Klio and Xenofon, in its place, took possession of a plane accessory.

Thanking the two for their business transaction, the man escorted the pair out of the junk yard and wished them a farewell. They drove through Kassandria anew and back into their humble abode, where they had their blueprint unravelled and all parts placed on two tables which they stuck together. Again, Klio was getting restless, but then she noticed Xenofon's sweaty face. The weather outside was at its peak—scorching hot. She thought, she could not leave him be like that; they had to take a swim at the beach. After all, it was within punching distance.

“Put on your swimsuit, boy,” Klio suggested with a smile. “The human bird can wait.”

In five minutes, both were dressed for the sea. Both Klio and Xenofon showed the least skin, wearing a one-piece swimsuit. Their colours complemented each other: hers was orange while his was green. They ran into the water and splashed one another, eventually going for a swim. Sometime later, Klio retreated under the parasol and watched as Xenofon played with the sand in the shallows. He was like a little kid, she thought, but could not help but be amused by him. Their first encounter came to mind. He had always been easy to approach, but striking a conversation was a whole separate deal. He had tried to say his name through his hands, but Klio never learned that language. He had whispered to her ear.

“Xylophono?”

“No, Xenofon.”

And still, she kept calling him otherwise. Later, she had asked if he was okay with being called that, and he agreed to it. Thus, the name stuck. Klio hardly had any nicknames, but whenever Xenofon pronounced her name, she squealed at the pure innocence behind the man. It was going to be a beautiful companionship.

Just then, their first experiment occurred. They wanted to prove that no bottled water tastes the same. They were both eighteen at the time. So they purchased any water bottle they could find—even though, unlike their once-ancient counterpart, their country had mostly potable tap water. As weird as that would sound, and considering the common fact that water is

without taste, their experiment was successful, and they ended up cementing their bond even more over it.

The sun was far from setting, but the clock displayed six. Klio and Xenofon were both on shore and decided to depart from the beach. At their so-called hotel, they began to assemble their contraption. They were neither amateurs in the matter since they have built a machine or two before, one of which they brought up in the conversation with the shopkeeper. Klio led the way, applying screws and machine components, and letting Xenofon screw them firmly in place. They placed some bars which would hold a seat, although one had to lie on their stomach, and not exactly sit down. They applied the steering wheel and linked it up with some sails so that it had a purpose instead of merely being a decoration. The propellers were attached from both sides, and those were powered by a battery from under the seat. The build did not take long, but they constantly checked all screws to ensure stability. At last, their build was exactly like the blueprint, which itself looked like a regular paraglider, but with extra five or so steps.

“Good job, us!” Klio cheered after Xenofon set down the screwdriver. “If everything goes according to my calculations, we will have ourselves a little plane which could traverse the Aegean Sea, all the way to Athens! That is, if the weather serves us well... For now, it’s all about Kallithea and the surrounding towns.”

Xenofon nodded, and they cordially shook hands. The build may have been complete, but for the experiment to be a success, it needed to first be male-certified, and then, and most importantly, female-certified. This is where a guinea pig, or a “QT pi”, came into play. Unlike the expression “ladies first”, he was to give it a test drive before her.

After building, Klio and Xenofon took turns in the shower cabin before a night out. They put their best clothes and headed into town when the sky was dark. The squares intertwined, and people were found around every corner, either selling souvenirs, observing them, or at the counter paying for them. Some, of course, had already purchased one or two summer mementos and were presently sitting in a nearby bar, consuming some alcohol. The weather was amiable, not too hot from a few hours before.

Klio and Xenofon sat around the corner and ordered a burger each. Then, they took into the arcade, with many machines and games to choose from. They both miserably failed at a classic point-and-shoot game from Namco; they kept the score at a draw during a game of air hockey, but Klio took the trophy in the end through luck; they spent two Euros attempting to win a watch from a claw machine, only for both watches to fall flat on their faces; and they even had their palms read for two Euros each. Their love, sex, and money stats were quite high, but when it came to luck, Klio's was low while Xenofon's was high enough. Both their psyche stats were a solid five out of ten. Above their stats, their prophecies were written, and they boiled down to Klio's financial success and hard work which preceded, and Xenofon's charm that is bound to get him just as good a lifelong partner. Their outing was concluded with some branded ice cream, costing them three-thirty each. As they descended into their so-called hotel, the breeze tickled some of their exposed skin, but by no means was it freezing cold. At half past eleven, they put themselves to bed.

It was quite windy, this following day, but the sun was out and about. Their experiment was about to take flight. They had their standard breakfast at nine, with some toast, and they put on the same swimwear from the day before. A minor addition to the attire, however, was lab coats, and they were, in terms of colours, nearly inverted versions of their swimsuits. Klio's lab coat was much longer than Xenofon's. With some snacks and beverages in place, not forgetting their powered paraglider, they withdrew from their so-called hotel room. There was a little pier not too far away from the beach, and it was a perfect path for take-off.

"Looks like the wind is blowing away from the pier," Klio said. "You shouldn't have any troubles building up speed!"

Klio walked Xenofon through basic controls, when he was told how to take off, how to get seated, and how to control the paraglider. Most importantly, he needed to know in what way he was to start the engine. He was all but anxious, and he trusted her plenty. Still, he had to wait until Klio prepared a camera to capture their experiment.

“Today, we are standing at a pier in slightly windy Kallithea,” she began, “where we are going to take to the skies with the ‘human bird’ project! Once again, it is me, Klio, and the experiment’s QT pi, Xylophono!”

He waved in front of the camera.

“Now, boy,” she said anew, “on the count of three, you’ll tug on those two threads as hard as you can, run down the pier, and take the leap of faith. You think you can do it!?”

Both his thumbs were up, and a smile flashed on his face.

“Oh, he’s ready, alright! Here we go, then. One...”

He stretched his arms from side to side.

“Two...”

He held the two strings with both his hands, ready to tug.

“Two and a half...”

Xenofon turned his face to her, gazing at her impatiently.

“Three!”

At last, the count was over. The propellers began to swirl. The battery underneath supplied them with power, and Xenofon felt a little force driving him towards the sea. He started running down the pier, faster and faster, before reaching the edge where he bent his knees a little to spring into the air, his stomach placed on the seat. He was with the birds, ascending further into the sky. Klio did not forget to capture his take-off, nor his gradual climb into stardom.

“Look at my boy go! Oh, what accomplishments we mere humans can achieve if only we had wings!”

Xenofon steered to the left, and the little sails moved to the right. The opposite would occur if he steered right, and for the times he needed to lower his altitude, he instinctively steered towards the ground but also tilted his body slightly. With a little bit of practice and some momentum, he had succeeded in performing a barrel roll. Thankfully, Klio had witnessed the manoeuvre herself.

“Holy tzatziki, it’s like he already has some experience! Even I haven’t stepped into those waters yet...”

After five minutes of a mostly successful flight (Xenofon had some struggles regarding ascending again, but nothing that would require more attention in the lab), Klio waved with all her might, calling him to land back on the pier. With the help of the steering wheel and his body weight, Xenofon carefully positioned himself along the pier, and gently came back on the ground, running away from the sea and pulling the two strings the second time to shut off the propellers. The paraglider was still in one piece, and Xenofon found himself in Klio's arms which supported him until he ceased shivering.

"That looked like a lot of fun!" Klio greeted the pilot. "What do you think?"

Xenofon replied with a frantic nod, two thumbs up, and a few muffled yet joyful sounds coming from him.

"Why, you're *speechless!*" Klio joked. "That's how good it was, eh? Ohh, look at you nod again! Then... we can say that this experiment is male-certified! But can a woman handle the adrenalin!? Find out in an upcoming blogpost on our website! You know the one!"

After the cut, Xenofon came to his senses, still carrying the paraglider, and walked alongside his friend.

"You should speak up sometimes," Klio said. "The way you say my name is especially endearing, but I want to hear your voice in full! Can you promise me that you'll at least give me a countdown tomorrow?"

He kept quiet while gazing all around, after which his eyes met hers as he said:

"O... okay."

Klio was satisfied with this answer, so much so that she was the first to arrive back at the so-called hotel, while Xenofon took a minute longer to get there. Once their paraglider was secured inside, they took a walk together into the down-town (up-town would be more appropriate for a town like Kallithea). They returned to the arcade and gave Namco's light gun game another try, and were even assisted by a kind stranger who showed them the ropes of the game. By no means were they among the "greatest marksmen", but they both enjoyed the game far longer than their first time. Back then, lack of spare change may have prevented them from

giving it another shot. Xenofon had to treat her to some pizza nearby as a result of her apparent victory.

What they both noticed on their second night, however, was that it was a little more barren. Not many people showed up in the squares, and the wind blew substantially heavier than last night. As Xenofon's jacket occasionally flopped in the wind, Klio took an opportunity to make a few photographs of him. They sat down for an inexpensive drink, throwing glances at each other. Seeing Xenofon yawn, Klio asked for the receipt a little early, and they descended back into their so-called hotel.

When the sun came up, Klio and Xenofon had their usual breakfast, and immediately departed for the pier. It was then that they realised the forecast was true: the wind—nay, the hurricane—tempted their paraglider to take off without them. They successfully resisted its calls.

“Hey... Klio,” Xenofon said, “when you told me it was... going to be windy in Kallithea, I imagined it would be... at least ten knots weaker than this.”

“Ehh? But this is such a perfect weather for a flight experiment!” She replied.

“Perfect? Nearly all of the clouds are dark!”

“So what? Remember that even then, the sun is still lurking somewhere!”

“And... where is it?”

Klio looked up into the sky—he was right. And yet...

“Ah, who cares? You only live once, right!?”

“Klio... please, reconsider—”

“Are you going to count to three? I'm born ready, though!”

“You're not actually—”

“Well, if you won't, then I will! One...”

“Hold up—!”

“Two... three!”

Having rushed the countdown, Klio tug on the two threads and began running down the pier before the propellers began properly spinning. Before he could stop her, she had already flown to the sky. And thus far, it seemed that she had the same experience as Xenofon the previous day.

“See? What did I tell him? Everything will be...”

“Just fine” was supposed to have come out of her mouth when the paraglider suddenly jolted downwards, then upwards again, nearly throwing Klio off of it. She tightened her grip and climbed back onto the seat. Then, the paraglider began to swerve, and Klio could barely keep up with the wind’s sudden changes in direction. The sea underneath her was anything but calm, as if it were commanded by Poseidon himself. The red flag was flown atop the lifeguard cabin. And, more obviously, no beachgoers in sight.

Xenofon was petrified at the pier. He could not move from sheer worry. What were she thinking? How would she come down? There were no signs of the wind stopping or slowing down anytime soon. He clasped his hands. Klio was in danger. What if the battery runs out? What if the paraglider gets slapped by the wind, and she plummets into the cold, merciless sea? He flinched at this thought. But, he knew of a way he could save her.

He delayed no further. Xenofon left the pier and ran towards an elderly man tending to his boat. Evidently, he had just returned from a fishing trip of sorts. A surge of confidence ran through Xenofon’s body.

“Sir!” He greeted. “Can you please sail your boat for me?”

“But I just came back!” The man said. “And besides, there’s no way I’m sailing during such terrible weather!”

“Oh, please, this is very important! My friend is in danger!”

“Friend? That person in the sky over there?” He pointed upwards where Klio was still wrestling with the increasingly strong wind current.

“Yes, I believe I can reach her if I use a paraglider myself, but I need the build-up from your boat, sir!”

“Gah, I’m not so sure about that...”

Xenofon took out his wallet, and sixty Euros out of it.

“You charge for one parasailing session, right? Please, I will pay you double your rate—scratch that, *triple* the rate!”

The man cast a gaze at the exorbitant amount of money the boy was offering to him. Xenofon nodded at him frantically. He shrugged his

shoulders at last, stuffed the money into his jacket, and gestured towards the boat.

“Alright, alright... Let’s get you equipped,” he said.

Xenofon put on a parachute which was to assist in his rescue mission. After all, for him to be able to reach Klio, he had to be airborne, too. Xenofon helped pushed the boat into the water, while the other man ignited the engine. Once the boat was afloat, the boy boarded it and they sailed back into the turbulent sea. This action prompted a few curious spectators to observe how it unfolded. At the man’s gesture, Xenofon opened his parachute and allowed himself to be slowly but surely picked up by the wind. The man even chucked at him a megaphone to try and reach out to Klio via voice. In about five minutes, Xenofon was high enough in the sky to have seen the watch she was wearing at the moment. He took out his megaphone which he had first strapped to his belt.

“Klio!” He shouted. “Come on, try to get down somehow! Damn it,” he said to himself, “this rope isn’t long enough for me to get to her...”

Klio was trying—but it bore no fruit. The wind was keeping her and the paraglider glued to the upper layers of the atmosphere. She tried again, but nothing. Xenofon made note of that, but what was she to do now? Perhaps such a risky undertaking required an even riskier solution...

“Jump!” He shouted.

“Huh!?” Klio shouted back, though he could just barely hear her. “I can’t! I’m too scared, Xenofon!”

That was the second time she said his name as it was—first time was during their first contact.

“Can I really trust you on this!?” She yelled again.

“Well, do you?” He asked.

That was a good question indeed, she thought. Had it not been for Xenofon, Klio’s prior experiments would have been fruitless, if not entirely baloney. And, her assistant could have been someone other than Xenofon—but God knew what kind of help they would turn out to be. He may have been reserved, but he was certainly no dunce. And now, he was risking his own life simply because Klio refused to let go of the idea of parasailing during a heavy storm.

“We’re not that far!” Xenofon said again. “Just take the leap! I’m right under you!”

“But... the battery... all our hard work...”

Xenofon did not hear this ramble. “You can do it! I’m as ready as you’ll ever be!”

There was no helping this situation. It was either to be thrashed around by the storm, or to take the leap into Xenofon’s presently closed arms, but which he was prepared to extend just for her. She looked once more into the pretty pattern of the paraglider, the propellers which made the flight possible, and the battery which had not given up quite yet. Drawing some air into her lungs, she cast a look below. She was exactly above him. This was it. A farewell to the sky’s charms. She let go of the paraglider, slid off the seat, and plunged towards the below. Even though he promised to catch her, she could not help but be afraid. She could have at the very least brought a parachute. Why was she so frantic about everything? Why did she bring plenty of warm clothes but not a parachute in cases like this? She closed her eyes and hoped to survive the fall.

In reality, the fall did not last that long—five seconds, perhaps—for Xenofon reached for both Klio’s hands, which caused the parachute to slightly shudder. The old man looked up and, having seen that the woman was safe now, turned the boat around, and the three headed for the beach. Klio held dearly to Xenofon while the man announced that they would be arriving shortly. Spectators which observed the entire procedure were cheering them on. There was even a cameraman who recorded most of what played out in the heavens. Soon, Klio and Xenofon gradually descended from the sky, and just barely landed on the pier: first Klio, then the boy. She trembled as soon as she touched the ground, so Xenofon was her support until she came to her senses. The cameraman approached the two so he could ask some questions, but all Xenofon said was their names, their age, and the fact they came to Kallithea all the way from Athens for a flight experiment which, evidently, had gone quite wrong. He carried Klio in his arms all the way to the hotel since she was still in shock after the madness she had gone through.

Back in their so-called hotel, he laid her on the bed she had slept in previously, and covered her with a kind of blanket. Then, he took into the bathroom for a shower. He decided to leave the so-called hotel room unlocked just in case, and he headed upwards to purchase some drinks for him and her. Klio was still sleeping when he was around, but while he was shopping, she opened her eyes again. Safe and sound. She moved her limbs; they were intact. Her heartbeat had slowed down considerably. The paraglider was probably on its way to Sithonia, or most likely deep in the sea, since all the weight had been lifted from it. In the sea, she thought, with the battery and everything.

She was sitting in silence when Xenofon made a return to the so-called hotel room.

“Oh, you’re awake?” Xenofon greeted before handing her a can of ice tea. He sat next to her after letting out a sigh verging between both relief and worry. “Are you doing okay?”

“Yep, just fine!” Klio replied, smiling at him.

There was a little bit of silence between them, but then Klio stood up and headed for the shower herself, though not before telling him to go to the beach. So he did. Klio came to the shore ten minutes later, still sipping on the ice tea he had bought her. They watched as the waves kept getting bigger and bigger—it was a good thing that they settled well away from the sea.

“Hey, Xylophono.”

“What is it, Klio?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

“For putting both our lives in danger. I was afraid that my first flight could have as well been my last...”

“I told you to reconsider conducting this experiment during a storm like this. I was seriously worried for you, you know?”

“You... you were?”

“Why did you think I had to bribe some man so he could sail his way to you?”

“How much did you give him?”

“Sixty Euros.”

“Really!? That’s so much money!”

“Well, he sells parasailing sessions for twenty per hour... Wait,” he shoved Klio’s wallet back into her purse; “you don’t have to pay me back. Your safety is more than enough.”

“...modest.”

“Hm?”

“I said... you’re too modest. Let me at least treat you to a souvenir.”

“Postcards are cheap.”

“A drink, then.”

“You already did that.”

“Then... what about a kiss?”

“No, I think... Hold on, what did you say?”

“A kiss, silly. Don’t you know what a kiss is?”

“Of course, but... that’s... kind of... sudden, y’know?”

“Not at all.”

“You think so?”

“Look—we’ve known each other for two years, despite different faculties. It’s only fair that we commemorate that with a kiss.”

“But... where?”

“Oh, you’ll see. Close your eyes for a moment, will you?”

Having heard such an ironic pair of sentences, Xenofon did as he was told. At first, he felt Klio’s warm breath falling upon his lips. Though his eyes were still closed, he could not help but blush. After letting out a few sighs, Klio gently kissed both his lips. It was a quick kiss. She backed away and told him to open his eyes again.

“So... did you like that? Actually, that was a rhetorical question. Your cheeks tell me everything!”

Xenofon pouted.

“I... wanted that kiss to last.”

“Any particular reason for that, you needy boy?”

“Well...”

“Are you by chance in love with me, my QT pi?”

“In love!?”

Klio smiled while saying, "I know I am."

"Really?"

"Really! Actually, been like that for at least half a year. Couldn't figure out when to tell you. I guess today's that day, eh?"

"In love? With me?"

"Yes, you, Xylo—"

Actually, such a heartfelt moment required Klio to use his proper name.

"I mean... Xenofon. I like you a lot, Xenofon."

Xenofon was looking at her from the word go, but now his eyes were set on hers.

"Aha... well... I..."

"Yes?"

"I... too..."

"Hm?"

"I... like you... as well. Actually, I'm in the same boat as you."

"Regarding what?"

"Not knowing... when to tell you."

"I see... well, today's your day too, isn't it?"

Another pause ensued, and Xenofon wanted to break it with another kiss, but right before their lips touched, he stopped at the sound of Klio's phone ringing. She pecked his lips again before turning her attention to her phone. It was a call from a seemingly unknown number. She picked up the dial. When she heard the words behind the phone call, her smile turned sour. Without any explanation, the caller hung up the phone.

"What happened?" Xenofon asked.

"...We have to go back."

"Where?"

"To Athens."

"Why?"

"I have no idea! They first asked, 'is this Klio?' and then I said yes, and they said, 'you're no longer entitled to your week-long holiday for research purposes', and then they hung up!"

"Wait... you're on holiday?"

“But you are as well, remember? Ahh, never mind! We have to pack our bags tonight!”

“What are we waiting for, then!?”

Xenofon got up first and left the beach by climbing its sandy stairs, and Klio followed. Packing one’s bags is not a particularly eventful endeavour—though they had to make sure, multiple times over, that some of their stuff did not wind up under their beds.

On the day that followed, they dared not appear even during breakfast. They stealthily packed all their items into their yellow van, not forgetting to leave a brief message in their room, in the form of a letter, lest the personnel would not be aware of their sudden departure. And suddenly departed they have, once they cast another look under the beds and elsewhere. As always, they delayed no further in leaving the now relatively quiet settlement of Kallithea, and had already entered the expressway to Thessaloniki. Just as they were picking up some speed, the sun came through the clouds.

“Really? Now it’s sunny?” Klio said while covering her face with a single palm.

“Oh well, such is nature,” Xenofon replied, “unpredictable and... quite cruel at times... By the way, what happened to that experiment we did?” He then asked.

“What experiment?”

“The uh... ‘the human bird’.”

“Oh, that! Well... it’s a fluke.”

“A fluke!?”

“Of course, it lacks female certification, right?”

“Right... you said how important it was.”

“Very important! Because women know best.”

“They do, indeed!”

“And speaking of which,” she continued, “did you know that women are more capable of multitasking than men?”

“You made that up, haven’t you?”

“Maybe, maybe not. But I certainly believe it!”

“Really? Well, let me see it for myself.”

“Oh yeah? Watch this!”

Klio pulled Xenofon’s T-shirt towards herself and drew his lips towards hers, while simultaneously keeping her eyes on the road. Seemingly no cars were behind them, so she had plenty of time to keep the kiss going. A single minute had barely passed when they were interrupted by the sound of someone’s horn. Their mouths separated, and Klio steered to the right so that the angry chauffeur proceeded further.

“That’s the kind of kiss you wanted last night, eh?” Klio teased the blushing mess that was Xenofon.

“Y... yes,” he muttered.

“Again, that was a rhetorical question, but... I appreciate the honest answer. That’s my Xylophono.”

It was a sunny Tuesday morning, and Klio’s officially last day of research-oriented holiday. They decided not to spend it in an aqua park like they had planned, but in a shopping mall near Thessaloniki. After all, they were not even an eighth of the way home, let alone a half, and they needed to arrive in Athens just before the sun were to set.

Once they purchased some clothes and ate at a fast food place, they agreed it was time to leave at last. And for their next experiment, they will be requiring a parachute, which Klio went through the trouble of buying within the mall itself, even if that new experiment had nothing to do with being airborne, at least right off the bat. And, despite the failure that was ‘the human bird’, Klio refused to let go of that idea.

Besides, she would be lying if she said that the time they spent together in slightly windy Kallithea had been in vain.

END

Flight of the Century

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