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The Kafenion



The excerpt is a part of Victoria Hislop's tale "The kafenion" which is included in a collection of tales under the general title *The Last Dance and Other Stories*. In the tale, two brothers who live in the island of Crete **inherit** their father's "kafenion" after his death. The two brothers do not **come along** well, so their mother decides to **divide** the place in two parts, two separate kafenia, one for each. However, this action **enhances** their antagonism as one tries to **surpass** the other in new ideas and **originality**. In the excerpt that follows something unexpected happens which **reunites** the two brothers.



View of Crete from above.

When April came, it was a whole year since the twins had spoken. The two-year **memorial service** was held for their father, and Maria watched her beloved sons stand side by side in silence. If her husband's death had not already broken her heart, the **acrimony** between her sons would have done so.

May arrived and, with it, warmer nights. It was the perfect month that came and went before the arrival of tourists.

One evening, the first of the year, when everyone was outside, a visitor to the village sat himself down on one of Petros' **freshly painted** mint-green seats. Soon he was chatting and laughing with some of the regular **customers**.

Propped up against his seat was a small case.

"You play?" asked one of the customers.

"Yes," he replied. "It's my **livelihood**. That's what I never **let her out of my sight**."

The stranger opened the case and removed his lyra, **adjusted** one of the **pegs** by a semitone and began to play.

Every customer in the entire place stopped talking, leaned back in his seat and listened, **spellbound** by the sound. For nearly thirty minutes the player's bow **glided** from one melody to another and when he stopped for a brief pause he saw that two other men had joined him: one with a bouzouki and another with a drum. He smiled and led them immediately into a traditional **tune** that was known to them all.

People began to clap. Then chairs and tables were **pulled back** to create a space around the musicians and some of the younger men got up to dance, forming a circle that began to **spin**, slowly at first and then with **increasing speed**. The music knew no **boundaries**.

Manos stood, arms folded, **observing** the stranger.

When he had arrived, the visitor had been a customer in Petros' *kafenion*, but now Manos was not so sure. He seemed to have **drifted into** his own.

Petros watched too.

Though **entirely immersed in** the music, the player **surveyed** the scene and smiled. He noted the

similitude of the two **proprietors**, who were only **distinguishable** by the colour of their shirts. Hair and moustache were identically **trimmed**.

In the **breath** between two tunes, he raised his glass, first to Petros and then to Manos.

On this **balmy** evening, the music drifted upwards and the circle of dancers drifted outwards **beyond the confines** of the *kafenions* and into the street. Icy beers and carafes of chilled raki flowed through the night and, from an open window upstairs, Maria Papadenos watched.

By morning, when the party was over, and the lyra player had gone on his way, there was a **confusion** of chairs. The blue one seemed to be where the green had been, and green had **mingled** with blue. Within a week the wall was down.

Vocabulary

inherit: κληρονομώ	pull back: τραβώ προς τα πίσω
come along: προχωρώ, προοδεύω, πάω (καλά)	spin: στριφογυρίζω
divide: χωρίζω, διαιρώ	increase: αυξάνω
enhance: επαυξάνω	speed: ταχύτητα
surpass: ξεπερνάω, υπερέρχω	boundary: όριο, σύνορο
originality: πρωτοτυπία	observe: παρατηρώ
reunite: ξανασμίγω	drift into: παρασύρω/-ομαι, κινούμαι προς
memorial service: μνημόσυνο	entirely: ολοκληρωτικά
acrimony: πικρία, βιαιότητα	be immersed in: απορροφημένος/-η από
freshly painted: φρεσκοβαμμένος, -η, -ο	survey: κοιτάζω εξεταστικά, επιθεωρώ
customer: πελάτης, -ισσα	similitude: ομοιότητα
prop up: στηρίζω, υποστηλώνω	proprietor: κάτοχος, ιδιοκτήτης, -τρια
livelihood: πόροι ζωής, τα προς το ζην	distinguishable: ευδιάκριτος, -η, -ο
let (her) out of (my) sight: (την) αφήνω από τα μάτια (μου)	trim: περιποιούμαι, φτιάχνω
adjust: προσαρμόζω	breath: ανάσα
peg: κλειδί (βιολιού)	balmy: μυρωμένος, -η, -ο
spellbound: μαγεμένος, -η, -ο	beyond the confines: πέρα από τα όρια
glide: γλιστρώ, κυλώ αθόρυβα	confusion: σύγχυση, μπλέξιμο
tune: μελωδία, τόνος (μουσικός)	mingle: ανακατεύω, αναμειγνύω

Comprehension questions

1. How are the relations between the two brothers described in the text?
2. Why does their mother, Maria, decide to divide the *kafenion* in two smaller ones? How would this division help?

Questions for further discussion/speculation

1. How are the two brothers reunited? What does the writer mean when she says “The music knew no boundaries”?

2. Maria Papadenos watches the dancing scene from the window. How do you think she feels?
3. The two brothers are antagonizing one another. How are your relations with your brother or sister? Give some reasons that may provoke antagonism between the members of a family.

Activities

1. Describe a feast/celebration where you enjoyed a lot. Talk about the ways Greek people celebrate.
2. *Raki* is the traditional drink of Crete and *lira* is the traditional musical instrument of the island. Find out about food, drink, music or other customs that we meet in other Greek islands.



Victoria Hislop (1959 –): She is an English writer, journalist and novelist. Her first novel, *The Island* (2005), is her most famous work and it has sold over two million copies worldwide. Other works of hers are *The Return* (2008), *The Thread* (2011) and the most recent one *The Last Dance and Other Stories* (2013). Her books have been translated into more than 25 languages.

word “apparitions” also might reveal the poet’s feelings of shock, admiration or fear as he bumps into the faces surprisingly the moment he steps into the station.

2. The image of petals is an optimistic one because it reminds of flowers and the spring. It contrasts the image of apparition, which means something strange and unusual which suddenly comes into view. The poem brings together the two similes conveying the poet’s impression of the faces: the mysterious faces (apparitions) are a positive vision (flowers) in the eyes of the poet.
3. To be discussed in the class based on students’ opinion.

VICTORIA HISLOP *The Kafenion*

Comprehension questions

1. The twin brothers don’t talk to each other and even in the memorial service held for their dead father they “stand side by side in silence” (par. 1). The writer uses the word “acrimony” (par. 1) to characterize the relation between them.
2. Watching her two sons being in competition with each other, their mother, Maria, decides to divide their fortune in two, so each one of them would have his own kafenion. The woman would probably have thought that in this way the rivalry between the siblings would stop.

Questions for further discussion/speculation

1. When the lyre-player who sits in one of the brothers’ kafenia starts playing his lyre, the customers of the two shops intermingle and start dancing, eating and drinking all together. The power of music is the joy and happiness that brings to the people’s soul. Thanks to the melodious sound of the lyre and the atmosphere of euphoria that the music created, the two brothers forget their rivalry and join again not only their kafenia but also their hearts.
2. She probably feels released and happy that her two sons finally reconcile.
3. To be discussed in the class based on students’ opinion.

GIORGOS SEFERIS *Just a Little More*

Comprehension questions

1. “The almond trees” (verse 2), “the marbles” (verse 3), “the sea...the waves” (verse 4) remind us of a Greek landscape and they are clear references to the beauty of the Greek nature.
2. The poem is written in the future tense (“We shall see”) and it is actually an exhortation (let us rise...) and encouragement to the Greek people to be patient and try harder for the good times to come.

Questions for further discussion/speculation

1. The style of the poem is unadorned and plain. The poet uses no similes or metaphors but a few (two)