

ACTS OF LOVE

A NOVEL

ELIA
KAZAN

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ACTS
OF
LOVE

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one

IN August, on the Gulf coast of Florida, the heat doesn't ease when the sun goes down. It becomes more punishing; there is no shade. People go to bed with their windows closed.

Costa and Noola Avaliotis were asleep in their separate bedrooms when their son, Teddy, called from San Diego.

Costa, a restless sleeper, got to the kitchen, where the phone was, first. "What happened the other one?" he said after hearing why his son had called.

As he listened, he reached for a dish towel and mopped his forehead and neck.

"How I come there?" Costa asked. "Where I find that money?"

He listened again, glancing down the hall to where the lamp his wife had switched on threw a shaft of light under her bedroom door.

"Airplane, so forth, Teddy, that's a big bill. Where you get it?"

His son's response made him chuckle. "All right," he said, "that's your business. O.K., yes, I think it over."

By the time he dropped the phone in its cradle, he was completely awake. He walked down the hall past his wife's bedroom to the front door of their house, unbolted the Segal lock and swung the door open.

The impact of the heat was like walking into a wall.

Overhead the feather tips of the Australian pines didn't stir. If there'd been the least breeze, they would have caught it. Costa had planted these trees more than twenty years before, when he'd bought the place. Through their thinly covered limbs he could see the glint of the Gulf of Mexico on the other side of the shore road, he could hear its gentle tide lift the debris of shells, wash them again and drop them.

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Now he heard his wife's slippers scuffing down the hall.

"What was the phone?" she asked.

"Teddy," Costa said.

"So? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Go to bed. He wants to get married."

"Good."

"Not that one. A new one. This one, she's American. He wants me to come there look her over."

"Oh, Mother of God!"

"He's sending money."

"What happened to the other one?"

Costa shrugged.

"When you going?" she asked.

"I didn't make up my mind, going," Costa said.

"If Teddy is sending money," she said, "it must mean that—"

"Dzidzidzidzidzi," Costa said.

"I'll take care of the store, don't worry."

"Hear those? Summer bugs. Same ones at night in Kalymnos. *Dzidzikia*."

When Costa Avaliotis was a boy of ten his father had brought him to Florida from Kalymnos, an island in the Aegean Sea. Now, at sixty-two, he still spoke of Kalymnos as home.

"If he's sending money," Noola persisted, "he's made up his mind."

"He said it's all settled." Turning, he faced her. "Why don't you go to bed," he said.

"I imagine," Noola said, "he thinks he knows better than you what he wants."

"He pick out other one without showing her first. You see what happen?"

"Oh, Costa, he's a grown man now, twenty-three, what do you want? This time he's asking you to come look her over. Teddy's a good boy. Smart too."

"Smart in other things. Not this."

Costa turned his head away, dismissing her. He heard her slippers scuffing down the hall.

After a moment, he walked slowly through an opening in the hedge that flanked the entrance to their home, and passed over the burned-down grass to where a giant live oak stood. At the base of this ancient tree Costa had built a kind of day bed, and there he

stretched out, looking up to the stars, which were sharp as diamonds. The limbs of the oak, round and heavy like the upper arms of well-fed matrons, were draped with Spanish moss.

Now he turned his head toward the house; Noola's bedroom light had gone out. Costa remembered he'd left the front door open and that field mice would accept the invitation to come in and scout for food. He raised himself up and, as if approaching an adversary, walked into the house, his knees stiff as those of a stalking dog.

A corner of the front room was graced with a soft light. On a high shelf were two wooden icons and, before them, twin oil lamps that burned day and night, their tiny red tongues fixed without a flicker. The holy figures were Saint Nicholas, who protects mariners if they are Greek and of the Orthodox faith, and Mary, holding the body of her crucified son. The paintings were dusky with age and from the smoke of the oil, but they glowed, the tiny lights reflecting off the blood of saintly robes and the gold of divinity around the attendant angels.

Beneath the icons stood the Avaliotis's large TV set. *Gunsmoke* was big that summer and *Kung Fu*. Idly Costa flicked the set on. Only the news, all from Washington. Costa switched the set off, passed by the saints, walking to the opposite corner of the room, where there were two photographs taken against the same landscape. The first was of his father, a captain, to judge from his hat and his posture, at the tiller of a sponge boat—the *Eleni*. By his side was his son, Costa himself, in his prime at twenty-four. A diving suit completely covered Costa's body except for his head. In the crook of his right arm, like a warrior of old, he held the helmet divers use. The mutual regard, the interdependence of father and son, was complete. Behind them, hung to dry, were long strings of sponge, a prize catch. Costa remembered the day.

Edge to edge with this picture was the same scene taken twenty-five years later. Old Captain Theo was gone and Costa stood at the tiller in his place. By his side was a boy of twelve, Teddy. Costa had his arm around the boy's shoulders but the story was different, the spirit changed. Two weeks after that photograph had been made, Costa sold the *Eleni*. The red tide left him no choice.

For some men it's an indignity to ask for help, even from the dead. Costa standing before these photographs looked more like a combatant than a suppliant. His toes were pointed straight ahead, like those of a boxer, his shoulders hunched, his head tensed. But the fact

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remained: he was searching into the face of his father. And what he remembered was what he himself had so often said: "My father always know what's right."

In a kind of reverie, he stood before these monuments from his past, waiting for a sign.

Costa was not a tall man, but his shoulders at the back were heavy, the muscles of his trade. Rounded now and softened, they'd retained some of their swagger. His buttocks came at precisely half his height, his body slimming there to half its width. Costa belted his trousers low.

At sixty-two he had a full stand of black hair. His mustache was that of the warrior of old, shading the heavy lips, then going past their corners to end in a swirl. His eyebrows, equally heavy, plunged to meet over his nose, locking the face into a single expression which was often a kind of warning that the man's patience was being tried, dangerously.

The eyes, which had looked out over the surface of the sea so many hours for so many long years, were black as black ink; not brown, that soft color. They, too, seemed to speak of suspicion or warn that a judgment was being reached which, if unfavorable, might release a great store of anger. Costa was not a friendly man. When he offered friendship, it was as an honor.

He could have been a brigand or a revolutionary, living the life of an exile high on a mountain. But what he'd been, in his prime, was one of a select company of sponge divers working out of the Ancloste River. When the red tide killed the sponge, he'd turned storekeeper. His place, The 3 Bees ("Bait, Boats, Beer") was away from where the sponge fleet had harbored in the good times, on the other side of the river and west toward the edge of the Gulf.

Still, he had never lost the authority which sea captains develop: in his company you felt completely safe. He recognized only one force he couldn't deal with: the mysterious will of God.

"The only thing I ask that boy," he said to his wife the next morning, "he should marry one of us, a clean girl."

"Your eggs are getting cold," Noola said.

Even at breakfast, the kitchen smelled of olive oil and garlic.

Noola didn't eat any meal until her husband was finished. Perched on the edge of the other kitchen chair, a small Greek hen, she kept her eyes fixed on her husband to make sure he had what he wanted

when he wanted it. She'd been brought up in a middle-class Greek ghetto in Astoria, Queens, a section of New York City, and this was the example her mother had set her.

"Good thing you're going," she said.

"I didn't make up my mind I'm going," Costa said, tapping his empty cup with a forefinger, an order. "Do me favor, don't try make up my mind."

"After all these years," Noola said. "Silly!" She scooted to the stove in her bedroom slippers, which she wore all day as well as at night.

"What is the problem over there, I'm wondering," Costa said. "All right, you're a young man, you need a woman. So you go, like we used to go, to Tampa, to Ybor City, you find a woman, you do your business, you come home. What's the problem?"

"If he's sending money," Noola said, "he must be in love."

"Love is in the movies."

"I'm still wondering what happened between them, the other one," Noola said as she filled his cup with coffee.

Teddy had sent them the rejected girl's photograph months before. It was on the sideboard next to the sugar jar. They both turned and looked at the girl, a Greek princess, hair to her waist. They hadn't met her, but Costa had instructed her long-distance on a few essentials. "Teddy quiet boy," he'd told her. "Likes home life, good cooking, so forth, so on. Can you hear me over there? Family life," he'd shouted. "You know what I mean. No nightclub business."

Costa couldn't remember what her response had been, but apparently his advice had not been effective. After a while Teddy was referring to her as "that Greek society bitch" and sometimes as "the pot roast."

"I know what happen," Costa said. "Too many parties! Daughters of Penelope, Philophtocos, Ahepa you, you heppa me, dancing American style, bingo, God knows what kind society business. One look I could have told him, 'Watch out!' Too bad. Her father, I understand, rich man."

"I suppose Teddy didn't really love her," Noola said.

"No, no, no," Costa said. "Many people marry without that. Like me with you. We didn't love each other when we marry. Remember?"

"Sure," Noola said, "we didn't love each other. Not like now."

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"It happen slowly, proper way. You brought me son and I saw what you were, a fine woman, so I learn to love you."

"Well, anyway," Noola said, "I'm glad you're going."

"I tol' you don't make up my mind on that," Costa said. "What's the matter with you today?"

He got up and left the table.

"I only say something," Noola called after him, "because if he send money, it must mean he really—"

Down the hall, Costa had closed a door.

A few minutes later, when she was having her coffee, alone in the kitchen, she heard him call, "Noola, press my suit."

She found him in the bathroom, shaving.

"Since you worrying so much," he said, "I better go. Pack my bag. You got clean shirt?"

When Western Union called to inform Costa that the money had arrived, he was ready, dressed in his black mohair suit, a white shirt, starched at the collar and cuffs, and a maroon tie. He walked, carrying his bag and perspiring heavily, from their home in Mangrove Still, a scatter of stores and houses, to nearby Tarpon Springs, the center of the Greek community in Florida. There he cashed the money order.

He hadn't looked up the planes west, assumed one would be waiting for him when his bus got to Tampa airport. Costa believed in destiny. The plane was there as he'd expected and he wired his son to meet him.

He asked for an aisle seat, sat rigidly erect, head facing forward as if he were in charge of the plane's safe passage. When lunch was offered, he waved the distraction aside. Later the man at the window next to Costa engaged in a long debate with the man across the aisle as to whether or not the President should resign. They couldn't agree, disengaged. Costa had shown no interest. Out of curiosity his neighbor asked, "What do you think of all this, sir?"

"I got my own problems," Costa said.

Teddy Avaliotis was a petty officer third class at the Naval Training Center in San Diego. When he completed his training there, he had decided to stay on, accepting the duty of maintaining and operating the video gear used in the instruction of recruits. He was highly respected by command.

Teddy met his father at San Diego's mission-style airport, waiting for him at the gate, taking his bag and kissing him.

"Got your room all set, Pop," he said, "at the inn across the street from the base. O.K.?"

"Clean place?" Costa asked.

"Wait till you see. You'll like it."

Teddy noticed that his father had aged—or was it the long trip?

"You're looking great, Pop," he said. "Feel O.K.?"

"I hope so," Costa said.

"You'll meet her at dinner. There's a restaurant called the Fish Factory, which features abalone; she loves abalone. And you're going to love her." He threw his arm around his father's shoulders and squeezed him. "I can't wait to see the two of you together."

"I'm sure," Costa said. "But not tonight. No dinner, so forth, tonight."

"She's waiting to see you, Pop, so anxious and all."

"Tonight, you and me talk," Costa said. "Tomorrow, maybe."

"All right, Pop," Teddy said. "So she'll wait a little longer, right?"

It was a ten-minute drive to the base, along the edge of the peninsula. The water of the bay sparkled as though it were carbonated.

"See that big carrier out there, Pop? The *Coral Sea*. See it? San Diego is the most beautiful city in the country; everybody says so."

"Very nice, very nice," Costa said. "Where you get this car?"

"The Navy gave it to me. They give me everything." Teddy laughed. "How's Mom? Tell her I really appreciate those brownies and that halvah she sends me. What a woman! Where'd you find her?"

"She's good woman."

"I got a good one too. Wait till you meet her. I'm going to make a regular Greek out of her, Pop, you'll see."

"She listen to you, boy? Tell me that much. Because American girl sometime . . . This one listen what you say?"

"Like I was the law. Which I am to her. Look! That's the gate of the base. And there's your inn. Tomorrow I'll show you the works."

The corridors of the inn were scented with a heavy commercial perfume. "Smells like a Cuban whorehouse," Costa observed when Teddy showed him to his room; they opened all the windows. While his father was settling in, Teddy called his girl and told her that dinner was off. "Tomorrow," he said.

When she told him how disappointed she was, he explained that

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the old man was tired and would be in a more agreeable mood the next evening. "Like I told you," he said, "it's going to take a while."

"Meeting him?"

"Really getting together. He's very—you know—old-world. You won't believe they're still making that model."

"Well, I sure hope he likes me."

"If I like you, he'll like you. Don't worry. I spent my life studying the instruction manual that came with that old bastard. I can tell you what he's going to do before he knows it himself. Get a lot of sleep so you'll look real pretty tomorrow. He likes good-looking girls."

After Teddy and his father had taken dinner from the enlisted men's chow line, Costa announced, "We talk tomorrow. Now I'm going home, pray God I understand this situation. Then sleep. I need all my strength on this one."

Teddy saw him to his room, then called his girl again.

"Just checking up on you," he said, "make sure you're not out with some other guy." He laughed.

"Is something wrong?" she asked. "I've been worried."

"No, he's gone to bed. Jet lag. He's gotten older. Like now he's praying. Never used to, not that I knew about. All Greeks start as hellers, then as they get older they turn religious and pray their way through every goddamn crisis. Not that this is a crisis."

"He's got me jumpy, Teddy."

"Relax. If he comes on sorta gruff, remember you're with me. I'm not going to let anything bad happen. Go on now—go to bed."

He kissed her good night over the phone, then went back to the base and sat in on a game of Dealer's Choice, walking away after an hour, apologizing, with ninety-one dollars.

In the morning, Teddy fired up his Ampex gear for a class and stood by during the instruction. Then he picked up his father and walked him around the base, showing him the installations. Neither brought up the subject that was on both their minds. They watched a class in marlinspike seamanship. The old man said he wanted to inspect the tuna fleet—he'd seen it on TV—so they did. And came back to the base for a late lunch at La Cantina, service chow with Latino décor.

Teddy wasn't unaware that his father was proud of him; he played up to it. Every time they passed people Teddy knew, he'd speak to them in his command voice, then, after they'd passed, he'd continue with his father in properly deferential tones.

And why shouldn't Costa be proud of his son? Physically Teddy was perfect, combining in some inexplicable way his father's chunky power with his mother's delicacy. He didn't give the impression that he was tall, strong or muscular, although he was all three. Teddy kept himself in perfect shape with daily exercise. And he looked so damned good in his blues.

But his truest attraction was not his appearance, not his fine nose, his deep-set eyes, or the sweep of his forehead under the Mediterranean curls. It was the feeling he gave that he was capable of handling any situation. It's what had made him irresistible to any woman he'd chosen to court.

It was what Costa had, that same assurance. Teddy remembered an incident from his childhood. He'd gone out in his father's boat and a sudden storm had kicked up a heavy sea. The Greek crew, not all of whom could swim, became uneasy. Costa had said, "Remember you're with me." Even the sea had calmed. Teddy was only ten but he'd never forgotten that day and Costa's words. "Remember you're with me."

"Tonight, Pop," he asked when they'd spent another hour watching drills, "can we . . . ?"

"Tonight, I buy you dinner."

"Then I better call her right away," Teddy said. "She's waiting for me to cut her orders for the day. She's a good girl, Pop."

"Tonight, just you and me, we have to talk."

"But, Pop, she's so anxious to meet you."

"The time will come for that," Costa said. "Last night, I pray God I understand this situation. Tonight I pray again. But first I want to talk to you. We didn't talk yet."

"All right," Teddy said. He pointed to a phone booth. "Excuse me."

She wasn't in. "She told me to tell you she'll be back in twenty minutes," her roommate told Teddy. Then added, "She seems a little upset."

"She's very upset," Teddy told his father. "She began to cry on the phone."

"Why, my boy—what's the trouble?"

"She doesn't understand why you don't want to meet her. 'Is something wrong?' she kept asking. It means so much to her, what you think."

"Well, then, what the hell, we take her out tonight."

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"Let's give her a chance to calm down a little, then I'll call again. How about a cup of coffee?"

"No coffee. I buy you drink. Must be bar 'round somewhere."

"What do you mean, somewhere? This is today's Navy, Pop! We'll go to the Ship's Bell, right here on the base."

It was full of sailors getting an early start on their beer. Their Commander-in-Chief had quit office that morning, but his men seemed unaffected, those who were discussing the event at all doing so without sense of loss, even frivolously.

"What this country needs is a Jewish king!" they heard as Teddy found a corner table.

"Now, Pop," Teddy said, after he'd ordered. "You want to talk, let's talk."

"Is she clean girl?" was the first question Costa asked.

"One look at her, you'll have your answer," Teddy said.

Costa felt better when Teddy told him she was a student nurse and her father a doctor. Thinking he might be on to something, Teddy boasted about his sweetheart's intelligence.

"Can she cook?" Costa asked.

"She's damn well going to learn," Teddy said. "I got her keeping a little notebook. Ethnic recipes. She cuts them out of magazines."

"I'm not old-fashion type Greek," Costa said. "If it was my father over here, you wouldn't bring up problem in first place. He say, right away, 'American girl for pleasure, Greek girl for family.' Your grandfather came to this country with no one. When he had money and a boat of his own, he knew it was time to find a wife."

"I know, Pop, I know."

"He went back to Kalymnos, pick out your grandmother. He believe in blood. Me too. But less. For your mother I only go to Astoria, Queens. That is why I pray God last night I understand your problem. Without prayer, my belief on that, I wouldn't come here. Easy to say no long-distance. But now when I say, Can she cook?, you have idea, I hope, that I am father you can talk to. Right?"

"I know all that, Pop. Look, maybe you better shave before we go get her."

"One more thing, Teddy, then we leave. Go 'head, get check."

"What's one more thing?"

"I want grandson my name. Is that possible?"

"Just tell me when you want him delivered," Teddy said.

"You're my only son. I don't forget that. Hope you same."

"How could I forget it, Pop, with you around? Now, is it O.K. if I call her and tell her we'll pick her up for dinner?"

"Why not?" Costa said. "Why you think I come here? I haven't much time. Your mother, poor thing, she's all alone back there in the store."

Teddy had to wait for his girl to come to the phone. On the wall next to the booth was an old-time poster of a lovely young woman. She was quoted: "Gee, I wish I were a man. I'd join the Navy."

"I got him in a great mood," Teddy told his girl. "You know he's a little nervous too. . . . About what? About meeting you. . . . Honest! Tell me what you're going to wear."

She gave him the possibilities.

"Wear your blue," he said, "with the long sleeves."

At sunset, they drove out to the suburban neighborhood where she lived in a big house with six other girls. The old-fashioned living room had almost no furniture. There were large bolsters and pillows all over the floor, and the girls and their boyfriends were sprawled on them.

Costa didn't like the look of the place or the company. Not one of the girls jumped to her feet to offer him a coffee or a glass of cold water. The hifi dropped another record down its spindle, as loud as the one before.

"Mostly nurses here," Teddy said.

Costa was still not impressed.

Then there she was, coming down the stairs, dressed in blue and wearing her best turquoise earrings to match her eyes. Her hair, freshly washed, was unusually fine, and it was golden.

Score one for her. Costa trusted blue. It was the color of heaven, the color of Hellas, the color of feminine purity, the color baby boys wear.

She kissed Teddy, then, blushing, shook hands with Costa. Her hand was small-boned, fragile.

Score one against her: something about her figure disturbed Costa. Her legs were too thin all the way up. A proper Greek wife-candidate should be ample in the hips even before she was pregnant, but full-breasted—which this girl certainly was—only after.

Then Costa looked at her face. It reminded him of—he didn't know what: perhaps certain small sea creatures he'd seen, beings transparent and unshielded, whose way of life was to ride with the tide, whichever way it moved.

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"Pop," Teddy said, "this is Kitten."

"Ethel," she said.

"She doesn't like her nickname." Teddy laughed. "She's only had it for—how many years? Ten?"

"I'm so glad to meet you," she said to the old man. "Finally."

She colored again, as if she'd been too forward or perhaps because Costa was studying her so gravely. In her embarrassment, she turned to Teddy, then back to his father.

"I also glad, miss," he said. "What I call you?"

"My name is Ethel. Ethel Laffey."

"Ethel then."

"I don't like Ethel either. It was my mother's idea. I never found out why."

"Well," Costa said, "which do you—?"

"Dislike least?" Teddy laughed.

"Kit, I guess," Ethel said. "That's what everyone calls me. Kit. Since high school. Or Ethel. I don't care," she said, shaking her head and making little sounds of self-deprecation. "How silly," she said. "So silly! I mean, anything you call me is all right because I am so glad to meet you, Mr. Avaliotis."

Costa smiled at his son. "You teach her say my name very good!"

"She's been practicing," Teddy said.

"Do I say it O.K.?" Ethel asked. "Avaliotis?"

"Very O.K.," the old man rewarded her.

The music, flaring to a climax and making conversation impossible, gave Costa time to warn himself not to be diverted from the careful judgment he was there to make. He could see that Teddy was gone on the girl, but there were certain questions he had to ask and certain answers he had to hear.

He indicated the roaring hifi with a peremptory gesture, warning Ethel that if she didn't do something about it, he would.

Quickly she led the men to a corner as far from the hifi as the room allowed. There was an armchair for Costa. She and Teddy sat on the floor. Costa had his questions ready and wasn't going to waste any time.

"How you meet, Ethel, tell me that much," he asked with a smile to demonstrate his tolerance.

"We met at a dance." Ethel took Teddy's hand.

"What kind—Turn that damn music out!" Costa said.

Ethel jumped up and hurried to the other end of the room.

"Why she walk like that?" Costa whispered to his son.

"She walk like how?" Teddy asked.

"On toes and like this," Costa demonstrated, swaying his shoulders.

Teddy had never noticed Ethel's walk. "You like her, Dad?" he whispered.

Speaking to the girls around the hifi, standing erect and quite still, she seemed to be swaying. The delicately turned feet and ankles, the long slim legs which came together and touched at the knees—a kiss before parting—seemed inadequate support for the torso of a mature, even voluptuous woman. Her head too, since her neck was long, seemed uncertainly balanced. Her whole person suggested a tulip yielding to a breeze.

"What kind color her hair?" the father was asking.

"Sometimes I think it's red," Teddy said. "Then, in another light, it's golden. I honestly don't know. It's pretty, though, isn't it?"

The music was brought to a compromise level and Ethel turned to her men. She was anxious and straining, but her eyes were steady, bits of soft blue velvet, a contrast to her hair and to the flame spots on her cheeks.

"What were you two saying about me?" she asked as she came back.

"He likes your hair," Teddy said.

"Very nice, very nice. Now tell me," Costa said, "what kind dance? Where you meet?"

"Oh!" Ethel offered her best kitten smile. "Where was it, Teddy?" she asked, sitting on the floor next to him and putting her hand in his again.

The veins in Ethel's hand showed like the tracery in a leaf.

"You know where, honey," Teddy answered. "At the enlisted men's hall, Pop, where we had dinner last night. Dime night—we met on dime night."

"Very nice," Costa said. He turned again to the girl on trial. "Why you don't stay with your parents?" he asked. "Where they live?"

Ethel didn't answer immediately. She'd begun to wonder what the old man was really trying to find out.

It was Teddy who said, "They live in Tucson, Arizona, Pop."

"Why she don't live in Arizona over there?" Costa asked his son. "Beautiful. I saw magazine in airplane." He turned back to Ethel. "You fight with your father, mother, maybe?"

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"Nothing like that," Ethel said. "I'm in training here to be a nurse."

"Your father, what he say?" Costa indicated his son.

"He hasn't met Teddy yet. He says it's up to me."

"He don't care who you—?"

"Of course he cares, Mr. Ava—" Ethel stumbled over the name, then righted herself: "Avaliotis."

"After all, Pop," Teddy said, "I'm marrying Ethel, not her old man."

"Everybody must know everybody first," Costa said to his son. "This is family business."

"That's why I've been so anxious to meet you," Ethel said.

"Family important to Greek people." Costa seemed to be scolding Teddy now. "Blood, you understand, boy? Keep family going. Clean blood, you understand?" He looked intently at the girl.

"Teddy and I want a family more than anything," she said.

Costa saw her eyes gleam and he believed her. He went on to the next consideration.

"You had sweetheart before? Other sweethearts?"

Ethel dropped her head as if she were suddenly exhausted. Then she looked up at Teddy and smiled a little.

"Tell him what you told me," Teddy said. "Don't be afraid."

"Yes, I did," she said, the effort visible. "I was sort of engaged before I met Teddy."

"What is that 'engaged sort of' business?" Costa asked.

"Well, I mean . . ." She turned to Teddy. "I don't know what to say."

"Tell him the truth," Teddy said.

Costa waited.

"Excuse me." Ethel got to her feet. "I have a little headache. Been so nervous all day about meeting you, Mr. Avaliotis. I'll run upstairs and get a couple of Bufferins."

After she'd disappeared up the stairs, Costa said, "She's nervous."

"Maybe you better knock it off, Pop," Teddy said. "Enough for now."

"O.K., boy," Costa said. "We go eat." He looked toward the other end of the room. "That damn music make anybody nervous."

Then Ethel was coming back and Teddy saw what his father meant: she tiptoed forward off her heels, the body's expression of her hope that she'd get by without being noticed.

"Feel better, Miss Ethel?" Costa asked.