

Feature Film – The Pebble

- Treatment

The artist was the only one who understood the mysterious secret of the captain's mind. It took that creative daring to walk the edge between divine vision and madness. The artist was obsessed with beauty. He painted the Aegean Sea, the sky, the loosely strewn ribbons of lavender the citizens called Pelleponises. He painted them in the passionate belief they were the key to unlock the meaning of his soul. As he wiped his brush and breathed deeply, he turned his head over his shoulder to view the solitary figure of the captain standing at the top of the mountain. Tears streamed down the stubbled cheeks of Captain Yourga as he turned the pebble over between his fingers. It was so beautiful, it might have been painted by God. He polished the stone with the wetness of his tears, rubbed it on his forehead, kissed it, spoke lovingly to it. He said, "Blessed witness of sacrificial madness, take my pain down with you." He kissed it again, loosened his fingers holding his other hand up to the sky beckoning the angel to see the perfection of this deed.

The pebble fell. As it fell the captain saw angels descend from heaven. Time seemed to stand still. The sun shone down on him triumphantly. The angels rode the shafts of light. Golden light emanated a hum of music. They came to see the great event created by the captain. The voyage of his pebble was made noble by his passion. It was Homeric in scope because the captain saw all of creation illuminated by it. His tears were joyful tears. He felt that he was so blessed, to be allowed this gift. The angels came to rest. Time regained its momentum. The stone kissed hard off the first rock. It bounced and bounced again. It carved a path down the mountain. Making a new road. This road was shared by other stones. They all traveled the widening path together, colliding with larger and larger stones until the largest were set free. The artist also watched. From his place of painting the far vista, he watched the captain's art. The artist called the largest stones "The Ancient Ones", as if they had endured an eternal vigil. And now they were free. The artist did not see the angels. Just as the threat of madness held the artist in bondage, this same madness set the captain free. Free like the Ancient Ones. The smaller stones coaxing them loose to become traveling companions down the path, skittering, and sliding and in a final rushing parade of new companions and followers. The pebble dropped off the edge into the sea. The sea welcomed the newcomers. In their swift descent, the water moved aside to let them pass. Below a statue of Jesus's arms out stretched welcomed them to their new resting-place. The statue had once welcomed sailors to the port. Now it rested, watching over the tides, the Ancient Ones, and the pebble.

The artist's blue gray eyes were spheres resonating with the vibrant fabric of creation. His thoughts were dancers striving to express the poetry of the Great Author's Ballet. God asks us to dance. Our lives, like dancers, are expected to improvise. To see into the meaning of the Great Ballet and contribute our inspiration. The captain knew this. The only difference between the artist and the captain was that the artist was a man while the captain was an angel trapped in a man's body. An angel forever enraptured by the awesome beauty of divine light, a man writhing in the confusion of emotion driven by glimpsing God. The artist could retreat into the solitude of nothingness, the darkness of the abyss, the empty illusions of the ego where selfish fantasy could relieve him of the burden of serving creation. Here at the edge of being where men dwell, the artist could rest. He could gather his courage and view existence through reflected meaning. So here on this rock planted in the Aegean sea, Captain Yourga and the gifted artist lost themselves together in a moment of serene splendor as the sun spread its last breath across the canvas of the sky. This sunset was the ebb tide of creation. The end of the days breath. The stillness faded into indigo dark. The sounds of night slowly emerged. With the night came the sounds of the sea. These sounds are richer in darkness. At the bottom of the sea, the pebble nestled between the Ancient Ones, and Jesus.

Morning on the water seems fresh and new. With the tide, the boat coming from Athens brought an incredible variety of travelers. Like the fisherman's nets from the sea, the boat brought people from the world over. They

spilled onto the port. Like the fishermen, the citizens traded on their human catch for a living. Agents from the hotels and bed & breakfast greeted the tourists. Most of these human fish never wandered off the tourist walk. Sometimes a rare breed of fish would arrive. Boulina was a beautiful woman. Unlike her companions from the boat, she brushed aside the agents and disappeared off the port into the heart of the native community. She had a fondness for creative types such as gathered on the island. Authors, painters, poets and displaced free spirits searching for meaning not found in their points of origin. While talent was the usual passport, Boulina traveled on her beauty, intuitive introspection and a willingness to listen. Taverna life offered dining, drinking and a place to meet friends and acquaintances. Having secured a small room, she settled herself at a small taverna favored by artists and expatriates. She had long black hair framing an elegant neck where hoop earrings danced. Her earrings, like twin sisters, kept time with her bracelets. On her arms and wrists, the bracelets also danced with her every gesture. Long lashed dark brown eyes playfully surveyed the brightly lit room. Amid the men looking for an excuse to be closer to Boulina, the taverna owner announced his identity. He welcomed her to his fully equipped modern taverna. Having grown up in dimly lit corridors, he was proud of his electricity. Several clownish men, hoping to win her attention, flattered her. Her black dress was attractive but not obviously evocative. Her beauty needed no help.

When the artist entered, she ushered out the clowns. He ordered his customary uzo. The uneven tassels of hair fell back as he turned. Once dark brown, the sun-bleached, gray flecked strands made oblong loping shapes. His eyes crinkled at the sides like someone who laughed a lot. They darted back for a closer look at Boulina. Then he turned back to the bar ordering another drink. He was comfortable with his weathered features. Vanity is an obvious joke to a painter. He had long ago taught desire to heel. It was a question of stature. A man had none if he was a slave to desire. He was about to pay for his third drink and was feeling pleased at being the only man there who could forget about the woman in black, when she put her hand across his. "Let me buy." She tilted her head a little to the side letting her hair fall in a curtain of black, blocking his view of the waiter. She intently expressed, "So, you are the gifted artist with all those colors in your mind? Or is it your heart?" She straightened her head. The waiter was gone. "Where do those colors come from?" Her smile sent a shower of warmth the artist hadn't known for a long time. He glanced through the window-pain at the darkness outside. As the warmth enveloped him, his last thought was of the captain waiting somewhere in the dark.

Captain Yourga watched from the stone wall. He had been chased by drunken revelers and knew to stay in the shadows. His friend would be coming home soon. The stars! Oh God, the stars were so close. He'd tried so many times to grab them. They made him dizzy. After a long while they would steady. Then it seemed that he could see all of them at one time. He would fix his gaze on one bright star. Fixing on one was just a trick to make them steady. He stood like a scarecrow in the dark, staring. There was a time when he had only spoken to cats and donkeys. Now he could answer the stars. He left his body behind. It stood a mute statue, as he sailed the galaxies. His heart filled with the un-ending-ness of the night's visions. He returned to a serene calm. After a long wait he saw his friend coming home. His friend was not alone. He followed as the artist and Boulina leaned on each other.

While the captain could dwell among the stars, the artist had to earn a living. He had to deal with men. Athens is the metropolis where east meets west. In Philliouppou, underneath the Acropolis, small art galleries finesse a living for artists who some day will be known. In one such gallery, the dealer Andraiuos Dimiponopolu, set down the phone and lit one of his English Ovals. He was going to be rich. He was going to be very, very, rich. It was a done deal. One of the artists he represented had finally become popular in New York. "Ne York-e," he repeated it sullenly. He hated New York. He hated Paris and London too. Most of all he hated artists. He would be rid of all of them soon.

When the sun broke through the window, it was like the artist was remembering a dream. The roosters, the donkeys, the old women shouting to each other were like a lullaby. It was the light that brought him to his senses. He opened his eyes. It was no dream. The woman was there, in his bed, with one arm draped around

him. She was smiling. What a night! She loved art. She loved his art. She loved him! She said it over and over. A beautiful woman! What a night! They made quite a pair. Life had become a celebration. It went on this way for many days. One night she drank him under the table. She asked, "What means, drank you under the table?" He explained it was a heavy drinker's expression. Like having a hollow leg. She had the stamina to keep going when he was falling down. The admiration shone in his eyes. She was one hell of a woman.

There were many taverna nights. Through them all, the captain kept a lonely vigil. He didn't understand why his friend was spending so much time in the taverna and so little with his art. The artist was the only living connection to this terrifying beauty that racked his emotion. The only being in creation who understood was slipping away. It seemed to the captain that there were fewer sunsets these days. Sunsets were a special event. They were the understanding of death and rebirth. They were something the captain and the artist could experience together in silence. This silence was not empty. It was heavy with the certainty of a fully shared comprehension. Now the artist was to share a knowing silence with someone else. He and Boulina were to be married. Captain Yourga had seen weddings before. He didn't understand exactly what they were for, but he did understand that it meant that a man and woman would live together. He was sure that there was some special mystical meaning he had missed. All these marriages were confusing. The Holy Sisters married Jesus, the Papas were married to the Church, what he couldn't reconcile was why the artist would marry. It seemed to the captain he was already married to life and God through his art. He knew this by the paintings. They were like beautiful children borne out of the understanding that God had blessed the artist. Blessed him with that gift through which those beautiful children came into being. They had soothed the captain's restless heart. They were proof he was not alone. They were like the captain's pebbles who took his pain down to the sea. It was not long after the marriage, when like so many times before, the artist and his wife made their moon lit procession toward their home. This evening the artist had drunk more heavily than usual. They wandered their way along the lonely path till Boulina wanted to rest at Hermit's Gorge. Pondering his existence, the artist knew it was wrong to have been away from his work for so long.

The swirling images in his mind steadied as he focused on the moon glinting off the waves. They came and disappeared like so many lives casually flung across the fabric of creation. It was all so desperately beautiful. They were so far beyond the scope of a single pair of eyes, so complete and totally fulfilled while remote from human grasp. It was true. He was gifted. The gift was God's consent that he might handle a perfect fragment of creation briefly. He looked back at Boulina who was backing away oddly, as if a serpent were at his side. Suddenly from the dark of the shadows a small man darted forward and with surprising force toppled the artist over the low stone wall. It was Andraious, the artist's gallery director. Andraious watched intently. Like one of the mad man's pebbles, the artist careened down the gorge, and like a glint from the moon on a wave, his life flickered and was gone.

From the top of the mountain an unearthly scream rolled down across the rocks shattering across Boulina's ears. "The madman knows," she gasped. Seeing the panic flicker across her face, Andraious shook her to get her attention. "Don't be a fool. He's just a crazy wild man. Keep your grip. You are now the widow of an unknown who has become a star in New York. It's finally over and done. No one will listen to insane ravings. Next week we will gather up the paintings and be away from this rock forever." Boulina was shaken, but her life long ambitions of wealth seemed to be within her grasp. She steadied her nerves. Andraious sent her on her way to bring news of the tragic accident to the port. By the time they heard the news, Andraious was back in his rented boat headed for Athens. No one would suspect.

Andraious was right. No one listened to the mad man. Boulina produced a masquerade of grief which had the clowns falling all over themselves to console her. The captain had gone from hysteria to a hopeless quiet. Like a sailor in the eye of a storm who knew that soon his crippled ship would be re-engulfed and splintered, he stared darkly into the face of doom.

At the end of the week, Andraious returned from Athens. He and Boulina packed two donkeys with the paintings. They were like perfect fragments of the universe the artist left behind. A whirlwind of greed swirled around the two burros. This was clearly seen from the top of the mountain. A stab of regret shot through the captain. He had known those two donkeys all their lives. He had seen them born. It was vile that they should be caught up in this evil task. As they followed the narrow trail leading to the port, the captain frantically begged the donkeys for forgiveness. He twitched with a torrent of conflicting emotions. Feverishly, he groped in the dirt. Finally standing alone, a perfect pebble seemed to sing to him. He washed it with his tears, polished it against his shirt, and held it to the light. Here fate had delivered new meaning for his obsession. He kissed the stone, held it to his forehead and said, "Take my pain down to the sea." While his left hand was still reaching to the sky for the heavens to witness his deed, his right hand let go of the pebble. Then he covered his eyes. This was a crime. A crime to answer a crime. The captain knew he would be damned. There was no host of angels to marvel at his excellence. There were no golden shafts of light. No music. Time did not stand still. He gasped as the pebble gathered stones, rocks, and debris. The parade, rallied by his pebble, became an angry mob. The Ancient Ones joined the final charge. The roar rose above his sobs, mixing with screams, braying, shattered bits of perfection all twisted in a frightened, angry desperate rush to end in the tranquility of the sea. The sea embraced all. The fragments of perfection, the broken bodies of innocent beasts, the empty vessels who only moments ago were so filled with greed, everything was equal in the quiet of the sea. Like the last dance in a Great Ballet, the dancers made their final movements. In elegant choreography, orchestrated by tides and currents, conducted by the invisible will of the stars, creation came to rest ... led by the pebble.