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THE DANCE OF MESALONGOU

A black-mustached man crept down the rocky steep mountain of Mesalongou at midnight to the Turkish camp. "Where is Alipasa, your general?" he asked a soldier.

"Here!" declared a voice behind him. "Who are you? What does a Greek want in my camp?"

"I am Paeleos Gousis of Souli," the man said fearfully. "I am with you Turks, the side that will win. I can help you capture my village. I want roast lamb, wines--not more suffering for 'liberty.'" He spat the word out, then dropped his voice to a whisper. "Souli is so far up this mountain that for four years you could not even reach the city walls, because the men of Souli shot your troops from their vantage point. Although the people of Souli are eating dogs, cats--anything--they will never surrender. Only I can help you, Alipasa."

"How much, traitor?" sneered Alipasa.

"Three thousand drachmas," replied Paeleos Gousis.

"Settled. What is your plan?"

"I will lead you and your ten thousand men inside the walls of Souli through a secret passageway of caves in the mountain," said Gousis. "The Greeks will be on guard on the walls. Attack them from the rear. They will be so surprised that you will easily defeat them."

"We will be ready tomorrow night. Go, traitor." After Gousis had left with his bag of coins, Alipasa turned to the soldiers next to him and laughed. "After we reach Souli

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tomorrow, execute Gousis. He betrayed his own people, he will betray me too."

The next night Alipasa and his army followed Gousis through the caverns of Mesalongou into Souli. The ten thousand crept behind the three hundred Greeks on the wall. Alipasa gave his signal. The Turks rushed to the wall, shot and beheaded most of the unsuspecting Greeks. Seeing the slaughter, the reserve troops of Souli sprang forward to defend the wall.

The Turks soon killed all the men of Souli. By dawn the invaders were at their camp, caring for their wounded and preparing to return to sack the devastated city.

As soon as they saw their enemy depart, the women and children of Souli emerged from their homes and walked stunned to their dead. But at the sight of the corpses, the women became hysterical. Amid the screams and tears, a few were quietly bitter.

"All of the men are dead," a young girl moaned.

An old woman muttered, "Even the traitor Gousis bled with his brothers."

"Listen! Quiet, women! Soon the Turks will come for us," a tall woman cried. "Have we and our daughters suffered four years only to become whores and mistresses of Turks? Those barbarians will take our sons to Turkey. They will return to Greece, their fatherland, as Turkish soldiers and kill their own people. These children will forget their families, their heritage, the civilization of their ancestors."

"Yes, yes," the old woman whispered. "The Turks took my sister's son fifteen years ago. He was one of the enemy soldiers who came to her village to collect taxes ten years later."

My nephew's assignment was to behead all those who could not pay. My sister was one who could not. When she came forward to be executed, she recognized her son from a childhood scar on his left cheek. She ran to him and tried to embrace him. But before she could, he had slain her."

Moaning, a dark-haired woman covered her head.

"Better for us and our children to be dead than to endure such fates," said the tall woman.

The three hundred women thought, discussed softly, and agreed. They clasped hands and danced, with the tall woman leading. As they danced slowly to the highest cliff of Mesalongou, they and their children sang:

Goodbye forever, little stream,
Goodbye forever, beautiful crests and
hills,
Goodbye forever, our poor sad country,
Goodbye forever, sweet life.
Fish do not live on land,
Nor do flowers blossom on sand.
So the women of Souli cannot live with-
out liberty.

As each woman reached the end of the peak of Mesalongou, she threw her children off the cliff and then plunged to her own death.

These events occurred in
the late Eighteenth
Century, during the Turkish
occupation of Greece, 1453-1821.

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