

Snapshots

Snapshot #1 - Boula II (August 17, 2017)

Boula II has ears that stick straight up, nearly as long as her face. Her tail is blurred, always in motion, even in the photograph. Her black eyes stare straight into the camera, her head tilted, the perfect model. She is standing on a patio in Pangrati, brown paws against white tile, her yaps, unheard, drowned out by the honking horns of Athens traffic.

Before Boula II was Boula I, her predecessor, “Boula,” the generic name given to Greek dogs. I don’t remember much of Boula I; nine years before, I had been too young to keep memories so long in my mind. I return at sixteen, and just as I am no longer seven, Boula I is no longer.

Newness abounds, a nearly new her for a nearly new me, so that Novelty is the name of this place that is part mine.

Snapshot #2 - Santorini, Post-Sunset (August 15, 2017)

Lights brighten the right side of the frame, low white walls standing against the black. To the left is only darkness, though in daylight you would see the trinity of sky and sea and the Santorini Sun.

The Santorini Sun is known for setting—word of mouth, scenes of films, millions of pictures have made it magical. But the most beautiful thing happens after the Santorini Sun slips beneath the sea for the night. Towns and villages and cities give the island light, keeping it lovely long after the setting of the Sun has ended. The island lives on, the sky doesn’t fall, and the sea, unseen, doesn’t dry up before the Santorini Sun can rise again.

Snapshot #3 - Tourist Haven (August 13, 2017)

Red-roofed houses are carved into a dusty green mountainside dotted with shrubs and dirt. In the background, more mountains, and then sky, lazy clouds lazing aimlessly, unrushed, taking a siesta.

When we go to Greece, we stop in Arachova. We shop and eat and shop and eat, surrounded by French and German and English, and sometimes Greek. We go for cheap slippers with pompoms on the top, the Greek key etched into the sides in tacky purples, pinks, and blues. They are purchased from kiosks catering to foreigners, selling tchotchkes and souvenirs, and they won't last long. We buy many pairs.

I'm a tourist and a not-tourist. I have my name, my blood, and my citizenship papers. I also have my pompom slippers.

Snapshot #4 - Family Trees (August 10, 2017)

Tall trees cast taller shadows on the field. It is sunset. Sheep are barely visible beneath the branches, their light wool darkened in the shade. We stop to take the picture while driving back from a family reunion in Milia, the village of my grandmother. She died shortly after the birth of my father, her son, existing long enough to give him life, though not to see him live.

Her village evokes memories of a woman unknown, kept alive by those of us seated around the dinner table—siblings and sons and nieces and nephews and me. Me, the walking breath and blood of She whose name I bear, whose features I wear.

These trees watched her grow.

Snapshot #5 - An Act of Faith (August 10, 2017)

Taken from a video shot while driving along the side of a mountain. Our grunts punctuate sharp turns, a low gray guardrail, likely decades-old, the only thing that protects us from veering over the edge, falling into the valley far (far, far) below. Every so often, we pass shrines erected by particularly precarious turns, all with white walls, blue ceilings, and glass doors protecting the contents—a candle, a cross, a photo. They memorialize the dead, those once on the same road as us, with a different destination than us. Such a warning calls for silence.

And yet our voices carry on, talking and laughing and content. We know what could happen, and we choose to believe it won't.

It is an act of defiance. It is an act of faith.

Snapshot #6 - Eating the Right Way (August 9, 2017)

I'm sitting in an outdoor restaurant in Erateini. A smile on my face, a sunburn on my chest, the pale pink reddened against my navy top, the navy sky. My hands are raised, held away from my body, my fingers, purple polish chipped off the nails, covered in pasta sauce and shrimp shells. I look like a child who has been playing with her food, sweetly happy with the mischief she's made, showing it off to the camera.

In fact, any less of a mess would be the real problem. Shrimp isn't a dish meant to be eaten with dainty fingers in polite company. It's meant to be eaten by a sixteen-year-old girl in a Greek café late at night, so hungry she abandons her fork and pride and napkin, dirties her hands to fill her stomach. Does it with a smile on her face.

Snapshot #7 - View from Pelion (August 7, 2017)

A stone roof, four chimneys protruding from the tiles. It forms a triangle, the tip pointing the eye to the sea, one with the sky, dark blue bleeding into lighter blue. Inlets reach toward the center, long tendrils like fingers, or feet, walking on water.

I don't wonder why this land was the subject of myths. In the minds of the ancient, gods were the only explanation for how such a place could exist.

We made a religion out of nature. It is sacred.