

Translated by J. K. Mabin

HYENAS

Chapters 1, 4, 20

Chapter 1

Whatever your impression of her may be – and I'm referring to her alleged 'criminal' activities, not her looks – whatever you've heard or read about her, whatever words you may have used to describe her, you must know that none of what she did was planned ahead. Not a single thing.

It all began by chance.

Totally by chance.

It was August – not that it matters much what time of the year it was, I only mention it to let you see that it was really a very short time between the beginning of her 'criminal career' and the day you first heard about it. It was August then, a hot, humid, lazy August in the city.

I'm sure you've got a mental image of a young girl alone in the city in August. Well, forget about it. It was nothing like that. Anyway, everything changed after the Crash, as you very well know. The city had been emptied of most of its inhabitants; the immigrants were the first to go – and only then was it obvious how much life they had brought to the city – and then the affluent people went too, taking away most of what they could carry. Which wasn't much, as you can't be a refugee carrying loads of your stuff around.

But some had stayed behind. The old, because nobody needed them; and the young, teenagers and young adults who had willingly stayed behind as they didn't fancy abandoning their lives just like that; and the poor – by that I mean those who weren't rich enough to have the means to leave; and those who didn't realize there had been a Crash – and for them I've got no sympathy. You can - and you have to – be in the loop about everything that goes on 24/7, and that's a fact. But they were quite a crowd, those who didn't know and didn't go. I can see that now.

Martha belonged to the last group. Obviously, she belonged to the second one as well, I mean, she was only seventeen. At any rate, she didn't stay behind through any choice of her own, though I find it hard to believe she would have chosen to go with her parents. They had always been strangers to her, Stamatis and Katerina, her father and mother. They had given her everything, as long as this didn't involve their physical presence. She called them by their first names. She mostly talked to them on her mobile. Theirs was a relationship of chance; they happened to have brought her into the world, and she happened to share their luxurious home. And that was that.

But all this matters very little when you find yourself all alone, totally on your own, in that city which was transformed overnight into a disgusting animal, covered in ulcers and cancer growths.

What matters is this: the very morning of the day she would begin to live her real life, Martha was sleeping in her room, unsuspecting of all that was to follow. Her door was locked, of course. She had returned home at dawn as usual, though nobody knew and nobody cared. It doesn't really matter where she had been or with whom, as it all belongs to the irretrievable past now.

What matters is this: she was woken up by soft, insistent knocks on her door. On the other side of the door, Stamatis was whispering: "Martha ... Martha ... are you in? ... Martha..."

"What can they possibly want so fucking early in the morning?" she wondered, looking at the desktop clock. It was only 10.03. The knocking stopped.

Katerina said, in a voice louder and more anxious than her usual fretful tones: "Isn't there a way to find out if she's in? She could be fast asleep."

"If she's in, she'd open the door. Surely she must know what's happened! She probably stayed with a friend. Anyway, she's sixteen, she can take care of herself," said Stamatis in his usual steady and calming tone.

And that was all.

Martha drifted off again. She didn't overhear Katerina begging Stamatis to try the door one more time; she didn't hear the ringing of Stamatis' mobile which made both her parents freeze. And obviously she didn't see the desperate look on Stamatis' face as he listened to the voice in his mobile phone or the terror on Katerina's face. She didn't feel the buzzing silence that followed, she didn't hear the desperate tone in Katerina's voice as she said: "What are we to do?" and she didn't see Stamatis make up his mind suddenly as he took his wife by the hand and almost dragged her out of the house. She didn't hear him telling her, as she was seized by a panic attack, "Don't worry. We'll make it," and she didn't hear the car start, taking them both away.

She didn't realize that her relationship with her parents was just ending with a parting gift from them to her: freedom.

When she goes downstairs – it is early afternoon already – she finds a note on the kitchen table, written hastily by Stamatis on the back of an old electricity bill.

Looking for you, can't find you. Where are you? We have to go. You understand we can't tell you where. We'll be back when things get better. Look after the house, it's all we've got left here. Stamatis, Katerina.

She goes straight to the biscuit tin. Is it a reflex or is she panicking? I'm not sure, though what she does next is an indication she isn't freaking at all.

Anyway. She goes to the biscuit tin, like I said, and opens it. That's where they usually leave money for her. But the tin is empty.

She makes herself some coffee: a level spoonful of coffee, a dash of milk. She takes the cup and makes for her room, like she does every day. But there is no need for her to hide into her room anymore; there is nobody there to disturb her. She goes to the sitting room. She opens the curtains and sits on the sofa, legs on the coffee table in front of her – a strictly forbidden pleasure till only yesterday.

Total silence. All she can hear is the sound of herself breathing and the purring fridge from the kitchen.

She gets up and opens the french doors. It is silent outside too, except for the crickets. No sound is coming from the direction of the city.

It's hot.

She picks up the note signed *Stamatis, Katerina* and goes back to the sofa. She reads it again. Then she flips it on the other side and reads:

*Can't find you **Your energy bill** where are you? **Meter number 0847** have to go **Balance after payment** understand **VAT at 13%** can't tell you **standard tariff** get better **please pay by** look after the house, it's all we've got left here.*

A fly buzzes by her ear. She shakes it off and it lands on her coffee cup. She flicks her hand to chase it away and the cup falls onto the floor, shattering into a million pieces, its content spilt all over the place.

"Fuck!"

She picks up the broken bits with the electricity bill-cum-note and throws the lot into the dustbin. She makes a fresh cup of coffee and takes it upstairs to her room. She switches on her laptop, googles a few words, then looks up some especially interesting webpages. She prints off one of them. She takes her backpack, makes sure her i-pod and mobile phone are inside, and crams in a few clothes from the chest of drawers together with her sleeping bag. She picks up a CD and the printout from her desk and goes back downstairs to the kitchen. Placing the backpack on a chair, she looks inside the cupboard for a packet of biscuits, finds one, opens it and returns to the sitting room munching a biscuit and reading the printout. She puts the CD on the state of the art sound system – a fetish of Stamatis. Until yesterday, nobody was allowed to use it except Stamatis himself.

Prodigy. *Smack my bitch up*. 5'43"

Just about right, if she is accurate in her moves.

"Here goes!"

Two half-filled bottles of gin - Stamatis' favourite drink -, cotton, insulating tape, gasoline, a lighter. Puts everything on the table.

Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up.

She fills one plastic bottle up to the base of the neck taking care not to spill one drop, wipes it dry with a tea towel, then fills the neck with cotton and tapes it over. She stops.

2'51": unearthly, oriental sounding vocals - a girl's voice.

She looks around, gauging the best spot to throw the bottle with no danger to herself. Doorway.

Vocals ride on to a crescendo. Return to the beat. End. 4'08".

One and a half minute to go.

Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up.

Hoists backpack; grabs bottle and gasoline; opens door.

Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up.

Soaks cotton wool with gasoline, throws open bottle onto sofa, switches on lighter, lights up cotton wool.

Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up.

Aims for wall between sitting room and kitchen -nearest sofa; throws gin bottle; runs down the stairs.

Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up.

Explosion; fire.

Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up.

Runs to the door leading to the garden; opens it; runs outside. Standing on the road she watches the spectacle.

"Beautiful houses beautifully burn," she thinks.

The flames are swallowing sitting room and kitchen; soon they'll be climbing upstairs; she'd better get out of there fast.

She ran through the little wood just across the road, hoping someone would call the fire brigade - she didn't know there wasn't one any more - and got to the main street. She stopped the first car she saw.

Fuck. It was Harry, the annoying son of a friend of her mother's. He'd been pestering her for the last nine months.

"What are you up to, doll?"

She wanted to puke, but she needed him.

“Can you take me downtown?”

“What do you want to go downtown for?”

“That’s my business. Are you taking me, yes or no?”

“It’s dangerous out there.”

“Yes or no?”

“Yeah, hop in.”

And that’s it, more or less. A bottle of gin in flames thrown at the house where she had lived all her life, rather like a guest; a fat boy who couldn’t take his eyes off her bare legs; an empty street leading her straight to the heart of the city – that’s how Martha’s real life began..

Chapter 4

It was the persistent chirping of birds that woke her up. She tentatively raised her head out of the sleeping bag and looked around. Not a soul. She sat up and stretched. Ouch! Hard stones were digging into various parts of her body. The silence was overwhelming. It was as if the city had been deserted overnight. The fires were out, at least in the vicinity, as far as she could tell. Raising herself slowly, she looked towards the flanks of Mt. Lycabettus. All she could see was a hazy mist. The sun was a white disc high above Mt. Hymettus. She sat on a broken column and gazed at the city, a cement fossil deep in sleep. No buses, no trains, no trams. Only two days, and everything had been completely changed. For a start, she would have never been allowed to spend the night in an archaeological site. Chaos had its good sides too.

She craved coffee; she needed to drink some water. Stupid of her not to think of getting a bottle of water somewhere. Those biscuits she'd left behind... Her stomach ached with hunger. What to eat today? That was a permanent worry now. When she was little she used to ask Mitsiko, their housemaid, first thing in the morning: "What's for tea?" But now there was no housemaid, no home and no food. Where would she find something to eat today, some drinking water?

A return to the basic instincts; food, drink, sleep. Self-preservation. Is this how it was going to be from now on? She shivered at the thought.

There were screams and the sound of running feet somewhere towards the Monastiraki side of the hill. "Gerroff me!" A woman's voice; a scream; a smash; a man's agonized snarl. "FUCKING SLUT!" Martha hid behind the column. She didn't want to be seen. Her heart was beating fast. How would she survive in such a world of unleashed sexual instincts? For the second time during the last 24 hours she cursed her choice of dress. How would she manage to pass unnoticed? How would she avoid the hunters? She picked up a rather large, sharp stone and hid it in her backpack. It might offer some protection. She hoped she wouldn't have to use it. But you never knew...

"Crowds," she thinks. "A crowd, that's what I need. Lots of people. Only way to go unnoticed, blend in a large crowd." But where is everybody? All those people who used to mill about in the streets like ants, all those people she and her friend Alkeste used to watch every afternoon in Syntagma Square, all those people she hates, and those she likes – her own kind of people, her friends, the skaters, the rockers, the hip hop crowd, the punks - Agnes, Kostas, Apostolos,

Eleni, Matina - where are they now? Where are they hiding? They can't have all left! They just can't!

Later. Martha is leaving the Acropolis. She is going to look for her friends, and for the crowds - those crowds she used to hate till only a couple of days ago. She intends to walk all the way down from the Acropolis to Syntagma Square and the streets off it, Ermou, Panepistimiou, then to Omonoia Square, it doesn't matter where, as long as she can be near other people. What she cannot imagine is that this won't be the crowd of men and women she used to laugh at until recently; no, these are packs of wolves - wolves wearing human masks, destructive in their unholy rage; and hyenas, scavengers waiting patiently for the wolves to leave so they can finish off their work.

That's what the city has come to. It has surrendered to basic instincts; humanity has left town. The weak are devoured; the different, the lonely, the feeble are alienated and destroyed. Those who cannot play this ferocious game shut themselves up in their homes. The world is getting too wild for those who have no teeth and no claws. But Martha does.

This she is destined to find out this very morning, outside the church of Kapnikarea, and later in the day as she steps over injured, abandoned Tanya, just before the storm which will save her from the nightmare - that is, from her own self.

Chapter 20

Mikhailis was passing by Syntagma Square just as the riots were beginning. He hadn't been in time to hear Tanya's war cries "Kill them!" "Skin them alive!" "Tear them up!" If he had, he might have not rushed so readily into a battle that had nothing to do with demanding equality or justice but was only about wild survival. But he thought that the riots were part of a spontaneous movement by young people – his own age - who only wanted to defend themselves from persecution.

He followed the rioters into the Grande Bretagne hotel. Armed with large slabs of broken marble, they overran the building, chasing away the last few customers and staff. Soon they had total control of the hotel; it was all theirs to do with it as they pleased. There was not a single person in there over twenty-five. "An island of freedom in the heart of Athens," Mikhailis thought ecstatically.

Spread in an armchair in the lounge, eyes closed, he cherished the first moments of freedom. This was only the beginning. Obviously hard times were ahead; this crowd had to be tamed, guided in the direction of peaceful cooperation. There was a lot to be done, committees to be set up, tasks to be assigned, guarding the premises, providing food, cleaning, and –

There was a deafening sound. He opened his eyes: an enormous chandelier had crashed onto the floor. Three boys were monkeying around, rejoicing at the sight.

He jumped off his chair.

"What are you doing there?" he shouted. "Why did you do that?"

"What's it to you, pal? It's not yours, is it?" a skinny boy shouted back.

"But we can't live here with all this shattered glass around!"

"Live here? Who's gonna live here? We only want to get some stuff out of here. Have you any idea how much that's worth?"

Mikhailis didn't say anything. He knew that in all those cases there was of necessity a number of looters who would get into occupied building and squats for the opportunities offered. "Let them take whatever they want," he thought. "They'll soon go away and leave the rest of us – the true freedom fighters – alone."

The skinny boy and his friends meant business; soon the chandelier, shards and all, was cleared off the floor. Another five or six people were taking down mirrors and pictures; a task force in the restaurant was putting crockery and cutlery in crates, and in the barroom bottles and cigars were being packed

away, while some people were opening beer kegs and others were tasting the nibbles prepared earlier for customers. The lounges were already being divested of chairs and sofas; there was a constant traffic on the stairs, as youths were removing bedside tables, lamps, chairs, bed linen, towels, large bags of toilet paper and napkins, even the handles off doors. The hotel was being dismantled, at the mercy of looters.

Mikhailis began to feel a little lost. Who would stop all these people? It was about time to set up a steering committee, to –

He jumped on a table.

“Comrades!” he cried.

Nobody paid him any attention.

“Comrades! Let’s get organized here, shall we?”

A man passed in front of him carrying an armchair.

“Comrades, stop looting right now! Let us get organized for the common good!”

The man with the armchair took a good look at him, shook his head in a way that clearly said “the man’s unhinged” and went on with his business.

“Comrades!” Mikhailis persevered. “The occupation of the hotel was only the beginning. Let’s get organized before it’s too late. The enemy is recouping as we speak. Soon they’ll start the counter attack and...”

Someone tapped him on the shin: he looked down and saw a pimply youth, about fifteen years old.

“Beat it, mate, I want the table,” the boy said, totally unfazed by Mikhailis’s revolutionary flame.

A flashlight blinded him. When he regained his vision, he saw the photographer, Martha’s friend; he was standing by the reception desk, camera snapping non-stop. He tried to remember the man’s name but he just couldn’t. Jumping off the table, he ran towards him. It was like meeting someone he’d known for a long time.

“Photographer!” he cried.

The man lowered his camera and put it behind his back, as if frightened. But he relaxed when he saw Mikhailis, who obviously didn’t look the kind of person one should fear.

“What’s up?” he said in a rather lukewarm tone.

“Is Martha with you?”

Mikhailis didn't really know why he asked that; was it human interest? Jealousy? He couldn't tell.

The photographer looked at his shoes uncomfortably. He mumbled a negative.

"Did she find you? She said she might be looking for you. She knew all about you. What do you want from her?"

The photographer still looked at his shoes; he seemed lost for words, probably was considering how he could walk away, when they heard a raspy voice behind the reception desk. It was Tanya.

"Yo, photographer," she said. "So you're here alright. I've been looking for you. Still on about the girl – Martha, right? I almost got her but the little bitch ran for it. I saw her a couple days ago near St. Denis, Kolonaki, you know. She saved my life too. There was this loser who tried to play tricks. You know where she lives? She must be somewhere near, I bet. Any ideas?"

The photographer clammed like an oyster, kept looking at his shoes.

"Are you Tanya?" Mikhailis asked.

Tanya gave him the once over. There was a hint of flirting in her voice when she answered:

"Maybe I am. How would you know my name?"

"I've got my sources."

"Oooh! You're the polis then!"

Some hangers on looked at him suspiciously.

"Do I look like a policeman?" he asked her, looking grave.

"Then how come you know my name?"

"Martha told me. If you're who you say you are..."

"And how do you know Martha then?"

"She stayed at my place for a while."

"Ahh... a boyfriend!"

"No," he mumbled. "She just needed a place to stay."

"Don't tell me you never touched her? She's a goddess, she is. She could tempt a dead man. Unless you're leaning another way. You're a poof, right?"

Now it was Mikhailis's turn to look as uncomfortable as the photographer – who didn't look at all surprised that Martha had stayed at his house. Perhaps he knew already? Perhaps Martha had gone to him after she left?

"I thought you were looking for her, too, weren't you?" he suddenly asked the photographer, who mumbled something that sounded like "Not now, OK?" But they both were distracted when Tanya sprung out from behind the reception desk and pounced on a boy with long oily hair and arms full of tattoos.

"Hey you, that's my backpack. Where'd you get it, eh?"

He made as if to grab it off her hands but she was stronger; she would rip his arm off if he didn't let go.

"OK, OK, I didn't know it was yours, did I? It's empty anyway."

"That belongs to Martha!" cried the photographer.

Tanya and Mikhailis looked at him, baffled.

"Yeah, so it was hers," Tanya said defensively. "So what? She gave it to me. She found me on the street. There I was lying on the street, all black and blue, I'd been beaten, see, and the missy never helped. She just left me her fucking backpack and fucked off. What's your problem?"

The photographer said nothing. He pretended he was busy examining his camera.

Mikhailis turned to Tanya. "When did you last see her?" he asked.

"Why, what's it to you. Oooh, the lovebirds must have had a fight then..." she said mockingly.

"Are you going to tell me?"

She told him.

"Well, then?"

"Don't tell me you're looking for her too?"

Mikhailis was about to answer when a nasal voice behind him interrupted:

"He's not the only one. Everyone is looking for her."

They all turned. The man who spoke was older than they, fat and sleek and dapper. He stood there, smiling at them as if he had been a long lost friend. He nodded at the photographer.

"Simo! What's up? Are you with them?" he said, his eyes sweeping the room where all the scavengers were stripping the last pieces off the hotel.

Simos, the photographer, shook his head no. He indicated his camera.

"So, who else is looking for her, pal?" Tanya asked. She didn't like the man's face at all.

"I'm Harry," he said, extending his hand as if they were being introduced at a dinner party.

Mikhailis pierced him with his eyes. He was trying to remember where he had met him before.

“Okey, Harry,” Tanya said, ignoring the extended hand. “Who else is looking for her then?”

“The police,” Harry said calmly. “She’s wanted for breaking and entering, theft and arson.”

Tanya cackled. Simos, astonished, took one step back. It finally clicked in Mikhailis’s mind where he had seen the guy: during various demonstrations, always against the protesters, always with the police crowd. He was a fascist, the son of an immensely wealthy businessman. One of Mikhailis’s old comrades, Miltos, had sworn he’d get him one day; but Harry and his fascist pals got Miltos first. After a demonstration they cornered him in a dead-end street and beat him black and blue. The cops were guarding the entrance to the dead-end. That Harry was a dangerous man; extremely well connected, he had friends in very high places. What was he doing there?

Mikhailis peered out through the shutters, trying to see what was going on in the street, but it was dark outside, and the throng carrying what remained from the looted and vandalized hotel blocked the view from the door. He made up his mind. He touched Harry on the shoulder.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

Harry jumped. “I saw light and I came in,” he snapped. He sounded annoyed.

“Are there others like you in here?”

Harry turned and peered into Mikhailis’s face. He hadn’t thought that anyone among the riffraff could recognize him. Attack was the best defense, he decided.

“What do you mean – others like me,” he replied aggressively.

“Fascists!” Mikhailis was spitting out each syllable. “Police informers.”

Harry laughed an ugly, spiteful laugh. He took a few steps back.

“Hey! There’s a cop in here, look!” Mikhailis cried to the room at large and began to move towards Harry.

The people who stood nearest to them saw Harry push Mikhailis and dash outside. Nobody ran after him, nobody tried to stop him. When he was out in the street at a safe distance, he yelled at Mikhailis:

“You’re on my list, loser!”

Mikhailis made as if to go after him but he thought better of it: the bastard wouldn't have come on his own; his henchmen were probably round the corner. You can't fight alone against a pack of wild dogs.

"Who's the creep?" Tanya asked.

He told her.

She shrugged and went behind the reception desk.

"Who cares! At any rate the hotel will be empty soon. We'll get the hell out of here and let them go looking."

Mikhailis stared at her. She was trying to wrestle a drawer open in the reception desk.

"Any idea how to open this fucking thing? There must be quite a bit of cash in here. Help me and we split it. What do you say?"

Mikhailis shook his head.

"Well then, I'll do it myself," Tanya said, and began to whack the desk with the leg of a chair.

Mikhailis looked around for the photographer but he was nowhere to be seen. He shrugged. It was time to go. He didn't want to have anything to do with vandalism and looting. He was better off home, as far away from this jungle as possible. Fucking animals; hyenas, the lot of them, he thought bitterly.

He squeezed his way past heaped sofas and armchairs. There was a line of trucks outside the hotel, loading the lot. "When did this happen?" he wondered vaguely. Forlorn, he began to walk down Panepistimiou Street. But his bleak thoughts were interrupted by a sudden hit on the head. All he had time to hear before feeling the sharp pain was a voice: "It's him. Don't hit too hard, we need him alive."

Two days later, his unsmiling, battered face - a noticeable bruise under one eye - made the front page of newspapers and news websites right next to a photo of Martha from her ID card; parts of the official state seal were discernible on the bottom right corner. Mikhailis was named as the ringleader in the looting of two hotels. He was described as "an anarchist and anti-establishment activist, well-known to the police and a major threat to public order." Martha was wanted for arson, breaking and entering, theft and vandalism. She was described as his "right hand and accomplice", "number one threat to public safety," "possibly mentally unstable." The fact he had offered her shelter in his house for ten days although he knew she was a fugitive had been very incriminating. There was a reward of seventy thousand euros for her capture; the sum had been raised by contributions from a long list of businessmen, their names published right below the "Wanted" poster. If anyone had seen her or knew of her whereabouts, they

were to contact the Ministry of Public Order or their local police station. Some phone numbers were listed as well.

So, that bastard Harry was much more powerful than Mikhalis could ever imagine. And it was obvious that his vengeful fury towards Martha would not be easily appeased.