

She knew them from Café Papaya, the harbour-side café where all the Egyptian immigrants who worked on the caïques liked to spend their mornings, smoking and drinking the coffee Angie made for them, now and then telling her stories in their heavy accents: they were simple stories about the sea and the fish, told slowly, in a few, tired words, and even on the rare occasion they spoke of the Aegean's black squalls and night-fogs, their eyes remained passive. But in the evenings, those who stayed ashore liked to smoke hashish and go to the café to drink beer and ouzo, and their tales were confusing, dreamlike. Then Angie would see their eyes glisten strangely and she would listen, and listen again as they told her of their fishing village that stands where the Nile becomes the sea, a village with a thousand wooden caïques, marked with symbols and painted with large female eyes with long eyelashes or the eyes of eagles. With beer and hashish inside them, their ramblings rattled of the caïques of Ezbit El Burg, so many that even the great river that used to be a God wasn't wide enough for them. And as night fell on the harbour of Kavala, their money spent, their beer bottles empty on the table, the drunk ones had nothing but threads of memories to hang on to, and they would call out the name of Allah and their hard faces would soften with sweet hope: then the waitress knew that the time had come for them to murmur their caïque-dreams and remember old sea-voyages to Falasteen, and down and beyond the Red Sea, when they first saw the shores of Sudan and Habasha, of Yaman, of Djibouti and Alsomal. The young girl listened to their stories with large, impressionable eyes, she listened and learnt. And it was in one of those waitressing nights that Angie had asked if she could join them on a voyage, to live one of their stories.