



M. Iordanidou

LOXANDRA

Let us drift back through time, in spirit: to New Year's Day of 1874, in the home of Loxandra in Constantinople. 150,000 Greeks (known as Romioi) live in Constantinople (the capital of the Ottoman Empire), forming the largest Orthodox Christian community in the city, with a strong presence in trade, shipping, education, and the arts. The city, with around 900,000 inhabitants, is multiethnic and multireligious. It is exactly this atmosphere that Loxandra's festive table reflects...

When they stepped into the dining room, the table was laid wide and long across the room, and the white linen tablecloth was barely visible beneath all the meze¹ dishes.

The walnut sideboard was loaded with the traditional St. Basil's Day fruits: apples and pears, pomegranates and oranges, walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, chestnuts, pistachios, raisins, figs.

Loxandra stood and said the prayer:

– “Bless the food and drink of your servants...”

Loxandra had seated Camille next to her so she could tend to her with care. Loxandra ate, but her mind was on Camille. From the corner of her eye, she watched to see if her daughter-in-law was eating. Loxandra took advantage of the fact that no one was looking and slipped a piece of pastourma into Camille's mouth.

– “Eat it, eat it,” she whispered.

Camille turned bright red and tried to smile. She even said “merci.”

The men began a conversation.

– These days, Europeans decorate their homes with mistletoe, said Theodoros, and translated it into French for Camille.

She replied something in French.

– Curious thing, said Dimitris. Mistletoe is considered a cursed plant according to Saxon mythology. With a mistletoe twig, Loki killed the beautiful god of light – Balder.

– And yet, said Theodoros, in Greece, on New Year's Day, people hang an asphodel bulb² above their door. Isn't that also a flower of the dead?” [...]

At that moment, Tarnanas entered, holding up high a large platter with the turkey.

The new dinnerware that Theodoros had brought from England was set on the table: thick porcelain decorated with forests, meadows, country houses, mountain slopes, and fairytale castles.

The turkey was carved and served. Tarnanas popped open a bottle of French wine and began to fill the glasses. Kotkotos stood up to make a toast. The wall clock struck four.

They had been at the table for three hours. But what was the rush? Everyone would sleep there that night. Thank God, wasn't the house full of mattresses? And quilts too?

And so the feast carried on till the very end. And when it was finally over, each guest came, one by one, to kiss Loxandra's hand.



¹ Meze dishes: are small (hot or cold) dishes with a wide variety of flavors and ingredients served as appetizers in Greek cuisine..

² In three passages of the *Odyssey*, Homer describes the underworld as a meadow of *asphodel*. The ancient Greeks planted it near graves, believing that the dead fed on its bulbs.