

Luck

By Elisabeth Grigoriadou

It was New Year's Eve and he was planning on relaxing. The previous evening it hadn't stopped snowing and when he opened his front door, he was greeted with a white wall, blocking his path. He grabbed a shovel and started removing the snow when suddenly he heard someone calling him from the road. A customer, whose car wouldn't start, needed anti-freeze. He was pleased that he now lived above the small garage that he ran and could therefore serve him without delay.

They had moved in September. For the first time ever they were living in a new and comfortable home. It wasn't warm, however, as their money hadn't managed to stretch to cover central heating. In addition, the house was located on the outskirts of the village and was totally exposed to the icy winds. From the moment his first customer had left he hadn't stopped serving customers.

"And there I was thinking of staying home today" he thought, as it started to snow again.

He was self-taught, or rather he had learnt to repair tractors and cars by watching others do so. He hadn't even finished Primary School. He had worked his way to sixth grade but he hadn't graduated. His neighbor, who had the Ironmongers next door, arrived a little later. After a short while, he abandoned what he was fixing. He wasn't really in the mood to be working on New Year's Eve so he got out a bottle of Tsipouro instead. He called his neighbor over and treated him to a drink. After the second glass he felt the alcohol going to his head so he called up to his wife to bring them a meze. She obliged with a

plate of stuffed vine leaves (dolmadakia), cheese, olives and pickled peppers.

The kids from the neighborhood came past to sing the traditional New Year's songs and they ended up with no coins left in their pockets. They both became nostalgic, remembering singing the same songs when they were young. After the end of the war, hardly anyone could give more than the coins with the holes in them – 10 and 20 cents. They would carry around a shoe lace and thread the 10 cent pieces onto it, fashioning something resembling 'worry beads' and with their own personal set of 'worry beads' they would buy one or two chocolates. People also gave them walnuts, almonds and chestnuts and sometimes even 'Turkish Delight' which if they were lucky was fresh and not saved from the year before.

It was nearly lunchtime when a lottery ticket seller approached them, they could hardly make him out under all the thick clothes he was wearing. He had come by bus, got off on the main road and walked 500 meters to arrive at the first building of the village which was theirs. The Ironmonger bought 5 lottery tickets.

"One for me and one for each of the girls" he said.

He, who had bought from all the lottery-ticket sellers that had passed by on previous days, refused.

"I have already bought some from other sellers. I am not lucky when it comes to lottery tickets."

Indeed, he had never won anything on lottery tickets. Not even one drachma. He had only won small amounts with the game "Propo" and on the day his daughter was born he won a slightly larger amount, enough to pay for the private maternity clinic where his wife had given birth.

The lottery ticket seller left and had better luck down the road. He managed to sell to passers-by who couldn't resist buying

from someone who had come out in so much snow to sell his lottery tickets.

After lunch, his daughters insisted on playing cards. Black Jack. Like every year he gave 100 Drachmas to each one and the three of them started playing against him. At some point his wife left her New Year's Cake mixture to rise and came to watch their game for a bit.

"Oh my God! You are cheating against them and they are just small children!"

His daughters started to complain but that was the way it always went. He had the cheek to say he had won with 22, 23 and even 25 and would then get rid of the cards without them having had the chance to check them. That way he always managed to get back all the money he had given them. In the end they would call it a truce, he would return all their money and everyone was happy. It was a way of playing without winners and losers. Even with the New Year's Cake their father had various tricks up his sleeve. He would always ensure the lucky coin ended up with the person who was in most need of it.

In the evening he watched the New Year lottery draw on TV, having spread out all the lottery tickets in front of him. Nothing! Yet again nothing! He believed in luck because it was the only way he could improve his life. To pay off his debts, which were not many but which weighed heavily on his shoulders. To change the old banger that was his car. To install radiators in their house as now they only had heaters. To not have to worry about the expenses of his daughter who was studying. To go on holiday by the sea in the summer – something they had never done. To not be worrying all the time about how he was going to make ends meet.

That was when the phone rang. It was his neighbour, the Ironmonger. He could hardly hear him because of the voices which could be heard in the background. He told him that the lottery tickets that he had bought that morning, the last minute lottery tickets, had won. Everyone who had bought from the same lottery ticket seller had won. Seven or eight people in total. The neighbor had won five million. He put down the phone and remained silent.

“It’s not possible,” he thought. He would carefully fill in ‘Propo’ cards where he had to follow the progress of each team. He liked it better because the result of each match wasn’t just a matter of luck. He himself also did something. He would make a prediction. However, he still bought lottery tickets and would never miss one for the New Year Lottery Draw. Nobody from the village had ever won such amounts before. And now they had. His wife tried to make him feel better.

“It’s not like we lost anything!” she told him. She never bought lottery tickets and didn’t believe in luck but instead in hard work and making an effort.

“But he passed by, right in front of me, don’t you get it? I could have so easily bought a ticket. Why didn’t I? Why oh why oh why?” he carried on talking to himself.

The melancholy gave his life a bitter taste for a long time. He never again bought a lottery ticket or filled in a “Propo” card. The bitterness didn’t even subside when he saw how the lucky lottery tickets had caused such arguments and disagreements in his neighbour’s family. It had literally destroyed it. And not even then did his sadness let up! Not even then!