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Winds come from somewhere

Abstract

did not understand everything the sibyls told me but am susceptible to their words. I was an apprentice to Hermes, who taught me how to listen and interpret their utterances, and to hear their messages beyond the meanings of words, by turning my ear to the earth and my eyes to the stars and the skies, and to sense with my body the movements of the winds. But as I left the island in the Middle Sea too soon, the messages they passed on to me faded yet still echo inside me in enigmas and riddles of tongues I once spoke and now translate with new words as I learnt new riddles from the seers on the island of the northern sea. And with inversions and conversions of the years, their words would move around inside me so that the voices of the sibyls, Elengou and Marikkou, would echo in the voices of the English seers, Alan Alexander Milne and Wystan Hugh Auden – where the wind comes from, where the wind goes – It's flying from somewhere As fast as it can, I couldn't keep up with it, Nor if I ran. I did learn with time that the winds must come from somewhere when they blow, and that time will say nothing but I told you so.

Stephanos Stephanides

WINDS COME FROM SOMEWHERE

The day will come that length of time
shall make my body small,
And little of my withered limbs shall
leave or naught at all.

(Voice of the Cumaean sibyl in Ovid's
Metamorphoses [qtd from the first
English trans. by Arthur Golding])

I did not understand everything the sibyls told me but am susceptible to their words. I was an apprentice to Hermes, who taught me how to listen and interpret their utterances, and to hear their messages beyond the meanings of words, by turning my ear to the earth and my eyes to the stars and the skies, and to sense with my body the movements of the winds. But as I left the island in the Middle Sea too soon, the messages they passed on to me faded yet still echo inside me in enigmas and riddles of tongues I once spoke and now translate with new words as I learnt new riddles from the seers on the island of the northern sea. And with inversions and conversions of the years, their words would move around inside me so that the voices of the sibyls, Elengou and Marikkou, would echo in the voices of the English seers, Alan Alexander Milne and Wystan Hugh Auden — where the wind comes from, where the wind goes — It's flying from somewhere As fast as it can, I couldn't keep up with it, Nor if I ran. I did learn with time that the winds must come from somewhere when they blow, and that time will say nothing but I told you so. So if you are wondering why Demosthenes suddenly bolted with me on a ship... Who knew what he was planning and why? This is all that I can tell you. He had not explained to me why now in mid-life he wanted to leave the island when never before in all his years had he even gone across the surrounding seas to see whatever lay beyond on other shores. He suddenly turned himself inside out or upside down and got up and ran up the sail and put out to sea, carrying me with him. Suppose the lions all get up and go, And all the brooks and soldiers run away; Will Time say nothing but I told you so? Thus spoke the seer Wystan H. Auden.

And so for many a year I would ponder on my last days and months of those boy years in the Middle Sea as the surge of the waves churned, and if they were oblivious to the embarkation before the beginning ended, or before the end began, and how I would come and go and leave with the mystery of how I landed on one island passing the threshold of Katerina's womb and then was borne on a ship to another island and then to another while the question: 'Where are you from?'



acquired new complications and time will say nothing. If the fortunes were told, would the seers tell me something more? How and why I would leave the shade of the aged olive tree to become a wayfarer over the roaring mourning of the sea eternally giving and young, and yet older than the old olive tree whose shade would hover over me like my aura without my knowing.

Before I left the island, the life around me might have been full of turmoil and turbulence yet full of marvel and surprise, taking sudden turns with curious and magical vistas. When events on the island would shake the ground beneath my feet, I would be seized by a quick and deadly deity who dropped me

in the eternity of the moment inside the space of the island's habitat. For I would be suddenly gifted with the intuitive evasiveness and the rooted volatility of the mercurial child who moved through conflict without pondering about it for long.

Some visions of that summer seriously intended to stay. Katerina and Demosthenes had moved irrevocably apart long before the summer of 1957 and I lived with Katerina's parents, Pappou Chrisostomos and Yaya Milia, in the village of Trikomo. On a daily basis I would go to see Yaya Elengou, Demosthenes' mother, whose house was a little way up the road. Apart from family struggles, the island was in the middle of a colonial war that was increasing in violence and intensity. The little town where I was born had become a hotbed of trouble. Some called it the village of the General, referring to the man who was the leader of the armed struggle against the British rulers, fighting for ENOSIS or Union with Greece. EOKA, the organisation to achieve this objective, was formed in 1955, the year I started school. We spent much of our schooldays marching and parading and shouting *enosis-elftheria*. And sometimes the EOKA fighters would raise the Greek flag over our school, and the British would close down the school. The same year I started school, there was a new British governor and a state of emergency was declared that sanctioned the death penalty for use of weapons, illegal imprisonment and exile of political leaders, whipping of adolescents for illegal assembly and disorderly conduct, and curfews. Curfews for me were a cause for celebration and a time to rejoice. I had an innocent's perception of the violence around me. I didn't care if the British closed all the

schools all of the time. When a curfew was declared, it was an opportunity to play another game — zigzag up and down the streets running to each others' houses, timing ourselves carefully between the rounds of circulating British jeeps. Once we mistimed it. The jeep caught us running and we made a scramble to get inside the house when someone inside the jeep shouted 'stay inside your houses' in an awkward Greek. Pappou Chrisostomos went into a rage when he realised the games I played during curfew. I said I was nearly eight and nearly old enough to join the EOKA struggle. 'British go home.' I thought that would please him, but he took off his belt and said if I ever left the house again during curfew, he would beat me black and blue. I was stunned and terrified and began to cry at the thought of it. My grandmother said he loved me and it was better that he whipped me rather than the British soldiers. I didn't go out during curfew after that. One of the boys told me a Turkish boy betrayed us, because they wanted the British to stay in Cyprus and didn't want us to be free. I didn't believe him. Whenever I came back from the sea with Demosthenes, we would pass through the orchards where Demosthenes had many friends among the community of Cypriot Turks and we would often stop at their houses. I remember especially an old sibyl who would call me 'yioka mou' and pinch my cheeks like my great aunts, and I would call her Theia Emine. If my face became enflamed with the scorching sun, she would place cucumber peelings on my face so the membrane would draw out the heat and make my skin cool and fresh. And she would give us fruit to eat before we went on our way. When prickly pears were in season, she peeled them with such skill that barely a thorn would stick in her nourishing and healing hands.

My spirit of play and my pristine imagination were not easily sullied as I hopped in and out of the conflicts of the adult world. Katerina would suddenly turn up in her car sometimes to take me somewhere. She was proud to be the sixth woman on the island to get a driving licence, but it distressed my Pappou Chrisostomos, aka Ottomos, who resisted her putting me in the car and shouted 'You are going to kill my grandson,' as I eagerly jumped in and sat down ready to speed off. Her father in time got used to her driving but another kind of conflict was developing with her mother-in-law Elengou who did not want me to be in Katerina's custody. One day when Katerina came to pick me up and take me to the beach, she found me in the house of the sibyl Elengou who refused to let me go without Demosthenes' permission. A quarrel erupted. I ran into Katerina's car and sat there waiting nonchalantly while Katerina slapped her sister-in-law and pushed her mother-in-law to stop them from trying to grab me and bring me back. Uncle Michalis was chuckling in amusement as he watched his wife and his mother-in-law struggle to fend off Katerina. 'Give them a good slapping,' he yelled with relish. I soon washed the whole story off in the sea and as I bounced with the buoyancy of the waves and didn't give a thought to the struggle that had taken place to get me to the sea for some time to come. I remembered the incident only much later when I was on the other island in the North Sea and I was

wondering where Katerina was. Perhaps she would come and fetch me by surprise as she used to. Years would pass before I would receive a letter. Conflicts move through time like ground waters and assume new forms through densities and transparencies and take new turns and manifestations. Wilson, an old Guyanese sage, told this to me once and I still remember it.

So in 1957 my life became increasingly unpredictable and my movements more haphazard and I flowed through it splashing like a joyful stream, taking unexpected turns. In second grade, the school was closed more than it was open because of curfews. When not house confined by the patrolling soldiers, I gambolled in the fields with whoever was there to take me. At the first sign of spring I joined friends and relatives to bring back baskets full of wild greens and I would beg to ride on a donkey's back with the cargo of wild asparagus, artichokes, mallow and other greens.

Suddenly, one fine morning in May, Demosthenes turned up in the village saying I would remain unlettered if I stayed there with the school closed most of the time. He wanted to take me with him to the capital city. Perhaps he had other reasons for this, but that is how he put it to me. He must have known that I learnt more outside school than inside whether it was letters, numbers, songs or anything else. Everyone was my teacher. Most of the time in school, whenever it was open, we would repeat things I already knew, or parade around waving blue and white flags and shouting slogans about freedom until the British soldiers shut the school down again. Perhaps Demosthenes was concerned for my safety because he heard of the games we played during curfew. He also had a different view of the politics. Some people called him a commie. When I told him that some of the older boys told me that our queen was not in London, but in Athens with the King of Greece, he retorted that both these queens, Elizabeth and Frederica, were really German. He didn't believe in the monarchy and didn't believe that Union with Greece would bring us freedom. But then his reasons for taking me away may have not have had anything to do with education or politics. There could have been another reason why he wanted to take me to the capital that he didn't talk about. I didn't question things too much. I was ready for a new adventure in new surroundings for a day or for a week or for a month. One hour rolled into another. Was I going forever? I didn't understand 'forever'. Chrisostomos and Milia looked on sadly as my soul took wings with the shifting of the winds and in Demosthenes' moves, and wondered if I, their little prince, the first child of their first child, would ever return to live with them. Would they ever again call out my name with their every reflection and affection?

And so I went, off on the road with Demosthenes into the threshold zone for a few weeks to finish second grade. To the south of the old city, quite far from the Venetian walls that enclosed it, to an open wilderness where the building of Terra Santa School stood. It was the old school of the Latin community newly built in a huge open space and inside along its corridors friars roamed in their robes

and I stared in fascination. But it turned out that the primary grades were taught in Greek just as in the public schools and I never spoke to the mysterious friars from Italy. To reach my new temporary abode, I walked through fields haunted by Neolithic underground dwellings and necropolis. I negotiated my path to the house with anxiety and excited exhilaration. I heard ghosts speak to me. Demosthenes laughed and said there was no such thing. I was curious to stop and listen and talk to them but I was afraid and quickened my step to get to the house where we were staying. The house belonged to a distant cousin of Demosthenes. I called him Theios Panos. He had a horde of children, and I was content to be among them and the neighbourhood gang. The eldest son doted on me like my Theios Phoevos and loved to race me around side-saddle on his bicycle. The house was in a new development in this eerie landscape now covered over by what has become a prominent neighbourhood with the Nicosia Hilton and the Central Bank. As I pass through nowadays I wonder if the ghosts I used to hear are muted, covered by concrete and wandering in musty underground car parks. Would they still speak to me if I stopped and listened? Sometimes I think I do hear them speak to me: Do you remember us, Wise one? This is the country of the dead.

And the school year would be over in no time and there was an endless summer ahead of me to spend on the rooftop of the sea in daylight and on the rooftop of the houses from dark till dawn. On the last day of school, the teacher — Kyria Loulla — praised me for my knowledge and performance despite missing so much school because of the curfews declared by the colonisers who did not want us to be free. She attributed my spirit of determination to the indomitable spirit of freedom that prevailed in our village, which she called the village of Digenis — the *nom-de-guerre* of the General who was leading the struggle. I was proud and a little confused. I was used to running around hailing freedom: *chaire chaire eleftheria*, but the indomitable word left me blank. I wondered what kind of freedom indomitable was. For the months ahead, I would be constantly on the move from town to village, sea to mountain, house to house, aunt to uncle, cousin to *koumbaro*, kith and kin. Perhaps that was indomitable freedom. Wherever and whoever claimed me as their child, sibling, cousin, playmate, showed me new ways to play, drew me always into the game, to watch any *karakiozi* show in the square, to play backgammon loud and hard outdoing the men in coffee-shops, always moving swiftly as if to rival Mercury on my feet, ready to sing, dance, speak, mimic all in the world around us. Girl cousins were the best mimics and I was quick to learn from them, impersonating the voices and accents of hoodlums from Piraeus, the rustic speech of villagers, the pompous English rulers speaking Greek. And when we danced no one wanted to dance *kalamatiano* that we learned in school — unless for fun when we parodied the voice of the teacher teaching us the steps. Rock and Roll was the thrilling new dance from America. No fixed steps, just rhythm and movement, my instructor cousin said as we rehearsed and tried to sway our hips like Elvis Presley. And then everybody would cheer when I

would get up and pretend I was my great aunt, Marikkou the Koursarou, dancing *karjilama*. A feast was not a feast if she did not rouse the spirit with her dance even in her old age and widowhood. This old sibyl, older than her sister Elengou, showed me that the world was play, and with the swirling of your body and your hands, you draw it to you and you let it go. Every time Elengou would take me to visit her, she would hop up and down with joy as if she were going to dance and would pinch my cheeks saying *yioka mou* and look for something sweeter than honey for me to eat.

After the summer vacation began, I would often stay with Katerina in her Nicosia apartment overlooking the Venetian walls circling the old city from the inside. I wasn't used to apartment buildings. There were very few. It was not too high but I enjoyed the vertigo of the panoptic as I put my chin on the rail and looked down into the street and my eyes would move deep down into the moat within the City Walls. I loved to go exploring in the park down inside the moats of the walls and I would walk back and forth through the moat from Katerina's apartment to the *Chez Nous*, the bar café that Katerina owned on a corner of Solomos Square. Sometimes I would linger and play down in the moat if I found other children for company and when I got bored I would go to the *Chez Nous*. Demosthenes worked in the Royal British Legion offices close by, but neither he nor Katerina ever gave me explanations about why they never saw each other. The Legion's offices had high ceilings and big ceiling fans whizzing around. His boss, Mr. Armstrong, was British and he spoke Greek like an Athenian — or so said Demosthenes as I only understood the speech of the island and I had to concentrate to understand. Demosthenes told me that Mr. Armstrong had studied Ancient Greek at a famous University called Oxford and he knew Greek better than we did. Mr. Armstrong would smile and talk to me gently, in a very different way from the English soldiers I knew in the village who enforced curfew in the village shouting their orders that we didn't understand. He taught me some English phrases and I would go back to the *Chez Nous* and try them on the American and British clientele to amuse myself as I would get bored and wanted attention when Katerina would give her concentration to chess. She was the only woman in the Nicosia chess club and was a challenge to everyone; people from the club would come to the *Chez Nous* to practice moving the terracotta chessmen in the changing afternoon light. She always seemed one step ahead of the game, exuding the same confidence she did in life, as if she would never make a wrong move. She had already left two husbands and for some this was a wrong move but for others this was a daring move. She was larger than life, and full of grace, even when her tongue was sharp. No one walked by without turning his head to snatch a glimpse — even the statue of the poet Solomos in the square turned his head to look at her as she walked by or so said the English newspaper, which also published her photo sitting in the café and made her father angry. He said mothers should not have their pictures in newspapers showing off their beauty. 'She didn't care,' she said. 'Neither did I,' I said.



I do not recall the last time I saw her that summer of '57. It could have been the day I quarrelled with the boy on the seesaw in the children's play park in the moat across from the *Chez Nous*. I told him that Queen Frederica of Greece was German just like Queen Elizabeth of the English, and he said my father must be a commie if that's what he told you, so I retorted by calling his father a *pesevengis* without really knowing what the word meant. His temper flared and he held his side of the seesaw down and would not let me down unless I first apologised and then shouted *Zeto Enosis*. I proudly and stubbornly refused shouting *OXI* as if I were a Greek resistance fighter saying NO to Mussolini's troops about to invade Greece and he shook me while holding me up on my raised seat threatening to drop me suddenly. Katerina came to the rescue when she heard one long yell but then she made us shake hands and left me nursing my grudge. I would have liked to lunge right into him but he was bigger and a little older, and Katerina was holding me firmly back. I thought Katerina should have slapped him like she did my aunt when she stood in her path to prevent Katerina from taking me to the beach with her a few weeks earlier. I sulked all the way back to her apartment. I sat on the balcony and she placed in front of me a plate of macaroni cooked in chicken broth with a chicken leg on the side. Still sulking, I wouldn't look at the chicken leg let alone touch it unless she got rid of the skin with bumps where the feather had been plucked and took the meat off the bone squeezing lemon juice on it, just like her mother would do for me. She didn't have a lemon. They were scarce in the summer and out of season. And so she called out to the woman on the balcony next door in a tone of characteristic sing-song irony: the little prince wants lemon. Whatever the prince wishes the woman retorted going inside to

fetch one from her fridge and throwing it across from balcony to balcony like a ball. Katerina squeezed the lemon on my chicken after skinning and stripping it into pieces. She promised to take me to the movies that night. She hoped that would appease me.

She knew I loved the cinema like the sea. She would take me to open air cinemas to see the latest films. Especially those that excited my imagination of faraway places. That summer I remember seeing *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *The King and I*. Katerina would intermittently summarise the story for me in Greek, as the subtitles were too quick for me. I kept asking questions as I realised from the action and dialogue that there were many details she would miss out and I wanted to know all the relevant tangential information. Where was Siam and why did the king need to bring a teacher from America with her little son and how long did it take to go around the world today in 1957? That night she took me to see *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. This film also had a little boy in it who is kidnapped in Morocco and in the end when he is being held hostage in a house in London, his mother, played by Doris Day, sings a song to let him know where she is. I wanted to know the words of the song, which I had already heard on the radio and I wondered why Doris Day was hailing Caesar in the song. Katerina told me she was not singing Kaesara, Kaesara, but 'Que sera, sera,' explaining that this is Spanish for 'what will be, will be.' I asked what Will Be meant. 'Ti tha ginei' and adding 'ti tha ginei mazi sou paidi mou?' gesticulating with her hands the rhythm of her sentence, with light-hearted exasperation at my barrage of endless questions. And I stood there perplexed until it dawned on me that she was giving me the translation while jokingly asking what will become of me.

But that night at the movies, I do not recall what went through my head or if I gave any thought to what would become of me. I just took pleasure in the rhythmic melody and foreignness of the words I heard and tried to repeat them like a mantra without understanding what they meant. I doubt that Katerina knew on that night what would become of me, and I never imagined that after that summer, six summers would pass before I would see her again, on another island in a distant sea. She had got there going west and I would get there going east from the island in the northern sea where Demosthenes would take me. The longest journey of my youth. But how long is long, and how do you measure distance compressed into the time of the imagination, if not by the infection of memory. Perhaps the journey was as long as the longing to find my way out of the northern island in the belly of the whale, and hop and leap like a flying fish to the South China Sea and the island of Formosa whose name resonated the word for yellow plum in the tongue of my progenitors and in the tongue of the Portuguese means beautiful and which glowed like Cinnabar in my mind's alchemy. Katerina talked about it as Formosa in her letters — the name by which it was still known in Greek at the time — and only later when she went there and I visited her did I get to know of the island as Taiwan. Yet the vision of Formosa came to stay with me

like a promise of a future-yet-to-come. The sound of the word ‘Formosa’ would echo and reverberate in my spirit and the years to come I would become captive to a song I heard by a Brazilian song thrush strumming a guitar who taught to me the words and their meaning: *Formosa nao faz assim, carinho nao e ruim, a gente nasce, a gente cresce, a gente quer amar, mulher que nega, nega o que nao e para negar, a gente entrega a gente quer morrer, ninguem tem nada de bom sem sofrer* — Formosa mulher.

The Beautiful Isle was revealed to me in the summer of 1963 and I haven’t finished telling you about the summer of 1957 nor what happened in the six long winters in between. But my story is caught in a game of lost and found and given to sudden leaps of the imagination. And for a long time my quest and question was like that of the first line of the narrative game of hopscotch invented by Julio Cortazar the Argentine in his book *Rayuela*: *Encontraria a la Maga? Would I find la Maga? I asked. After losing la Maga on one island, years later I find her on another island and we speak to each other in another language. But with time the fundamental question for me would become, Who might la Maga be? And for that matter what kind of creature was I? Once I was a cicada, a ziziros feeding on dew and air, or so the sibyls told me as I buzzed around breaking the silence of noon and disturbing people in their sleep on the island of the Middle Sea. Was I still a ziziros, I wondered, or was I some other cave-dwelling insect — in a cave shaped into a brick-terraced house in a suburb poking coal fires to keep warm in winter? Perhaps if I had chosen to stay on the Beautiful Island I would have become some kind of Formosan whistling thrush on a *hinoki* tree who spoke Chinese. I did not know what kind of creature I was. At that moment I chose to return to the island in the northern sea, and Katerina accompanied me westward as far as Bangkok. And I thought: here I am in Siam with Katerina la Maga, heavy-heartedly saying farewell. ‘*Fae re zizire*’ she said as she passed me some sushi telling me this is how the Japanese eat fish. If I was still a ziziros, would I eat raw fish? I was neither here nor here — *neti neti* — here, there and elsewhere, belonging to some other place where ’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves/ Did gyre and gimble in the wabe, and my imagination was anticipating stories about different islands where All mimsy were the borogoves, And the mome raths outgrabe. I no longer needed Katerina to translate the English tongue and I could even speak it in ways she would not understand.*

Katerina la Maga might really be Queen Maya invoking suddenly Beautiful Islands and welcoming me with a red carpet like the little lost prince arriving at last. But islands that suddenly appear may disappear again just as suddenly. The thought made me anxious. Exits and entries made for mysterious longings — there is always the release of exit and the promise of new entry. The new forces inside me were stirring energies that had been brooding in silent sedimentation after long winters on the island in the north and my being yearning with my body churning residues metamorphosing with sprouting hairs and spouting

liquids and other signs of being and becoming to translate and comprehend. What strange other creatures were hatching within me and creating chaos I had to now make sense of. But before meandering toward that direction of the story and the dilemmas of puberty, let me get back to the boy in August 1957 and the passion I developed for hopscotch (long before I read Julio) and for sleeping on rooftops.

Soon after that night at the movies with Katerina when I saw Doris Day singing *Que sera*, Demosthenes announced I would be going to the mountain village of Katodrys, just below Lefkara renowned for its lace. Katodrys was the village of my Theios Michalis who was married to Demosthenes' sister. So I was taken up the sinuous dusty mountain roads with splendid vistas to an August meditation to celebrate the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the Holy Mother and Bearer of God. And there in the village, I would stay with my Theia Maroulla and her two daughters Elli and Despina. Up there in those heights day flowed into night into day into night eternally. Glory to the night. I would sleep with my aunt and cousins on the roof terrace among the fruit that was laid out to dry in the sun. People on the island habitually slept under the August skies. This was the first time I slept on a rooftop. Glory to the night. I had always been afraid to climb up on the rooftop with my *Pappou* in the village as the only access was a shaky ladder. Up the solid stone steps and with a wall to touch, I was on surer ground. I went up cautiously at first and then quickened with exhilaration at my ability to reach new heights. My cousins went up nonchalantly to show that they were not scared of heights even though they were girls.

With cooling breeze and in mountain darkness, we waited with excitement and expectation to see the starry showers of Perseus and we waited for stories of how he got up there and about how he rescued Andromeda. Somehow all these stories got mixed up in my mind and I couldn't remember why the golden showers we were going to see were the tears of some Italian saint called Lorenzo or so someone said in the Terra Santa school. As we waited too long for the stars to fall we wanted Theia Maroulla to sing to us. Everyone around said she was a veritable Sophia Vembo and the neighbours the next day would ask if we heard the nightingale singing the night before. I wanted her to sing '*Que sera, sera*' and I began to show off, pretending I could sing in English and I squeaked the words 'Gwotever gwilbee gwilbee'. For me '*Que sera, sera*' had become an obsessive mantra, but it irritated everyone else as I said it at every opportunity ever since that night I heard it in the movies with Katerina. My cousin Elli immediately retorted 'SHATAP' always wanting to show one-upmanship about speaking English since she was born in Liverpool and was nicknamed '*I englezou*' even though whatever English she knew as a young girl when she came to the island from Liverpool, she soon forgot. Elli proposed we sing '*To dikopo mahairi*,' — the double-edged knife — putting on a face as if she were haunted by love as she sang the first lines. It was one of the most popular songs of the time from the film *Stella* and we were all hooked on the song and Melina Mercouri, but I did not want her to have her

way either. I also retorted by saying ‘SHATAP’ and we fell into jousting with the word ‘SHATAP, SHATAP’ until Theia Maroulla interrupted us to tell us how all the stars expire like people and turned to her own choice of song by her beloved Sophia Vembo. Demosthenes and Kassiani had taken her to see her sing live in Famagusta when she was still a schoolgirl. While she sang *mia fora monaha zoume, oloi erhomaste kai grigora pernoume* — we only live once, we quickly come and quickly pass away — I fell into a slumber and did not see any starry showers that night. I was angry in the morning and Maroulla told me to sleep in the afternoon instead of buzzing around like a *ziziros* and I might stay awake long enough the next night. I was determined to try to sleep that afternoon.

In the mornings, gangs of children would gather and play games in the streets, the open spaces between houses, or in the nearby fields. Some of the boys always wanted to play EOKA heroes fighting the English. They had found some empty shells in an abandoned house and wanted us to play there pretending to be EOKA rebels in a hideout. Nobody knew if British soldiers or the EOKA fighters had left the shells there and the boys argued as if they each had access to secret knowledge that no one else had. Whatever the truth, my aunt told me not to play there, but in any case I was seduced by the game of hopscotch and I didn’t care too much about playing with those boys. I preferred to play with the girls. When the boys played, everyone wanted to play Greek EOKA heroes and no one wanted to play the English soldiers as it was a foregone conclusion that they would have to lose in the end. Who played on what side was a result of how assertive or intimidating the self-appointed heroes would be. I remembered my quarrel with the boy on the seesaw in the moat and I shied away from those games. So when the girls called out ‘who is playing Vasilea,’ I would go running to them. The boys taunted me — after all, I was from the village of Digenis yet I only wanted to play hopscotch with the girls. But the ringleader of the girls, Pantelitsa, was a tomboy, and tough as any boy. She stepped out and walked forward as if she were in a cowboy film, stomping on the toes of the biggest boy and putting her hands on her hips as she looked him in the eyes and said: ‘who’s a girl?’ Hopscotch was the best game, I thought — jumping hopping jumping twirling around and then the same again to get back to the starting point. Then there was all the ritual passion that went into smoothing the patch of earth, defining the distances, the space, the boundaries of the squares, finding and choosing a good stone to throw. Sometimes you would share a good stone with another player if you developed a special bond. We played barefoot. This was the greatest pleasure. I loved to feel the soles of my feet blend in with the earth, and grow calloused and hard as the earth in August. I had become unaccustomed to going barefoot the few months I had spent in town. Katerina did not allow me to go barefoot in the way I was used to in the village with my grandparents.

So I savoured the joys of thorn, dust, nettle and stone in daylight and when night time came I cradled in the dark between the drying plums and apricots. I

felt the ground under my feet in the morning, and at night I climbed skyward waiting to see more showers of stars falling, shooting, burning out. Expiring. Every day from earth to sky. Did the stars know or care what my next turn would be, I wondered. Right now I was under the August night sky on a rooftop in the village of Katodrys on the mountain slopes. I did not know where I would go to school in the weeks to come nor did I give it much thought. I did not know nor even imagine that within two months I would be living in another land, but I knew what would happen the day after tomorrow. Demosthenes would come with his mother Elengou in time for the Feast of the Dormition. I waited for Elengou with excited anticipation. She always had much to tell me and there were always details to remember and to fill in so I would ask her often to tell me again this or that story. She was always happy when I said, tell me about how Stephanos came from Alexandria and fell in love with you and tell me about the day he died. She told me more stories than anyone else did and I knew she spoke to me more than any of her other grandchildren as if I had been chosen and ordained custodian of her memory. I had decided to put behind me the quarrel she had with Katerina. I hadn't seen her since I left Triкомо, and in the village I was accustomed to seeing her every day. I would trot by her side like the shadow of her dark widow clothes, keeping step with her brisk sprightly gait. She arrived on the 14th of August and was waiting for me in the house after I came in from the game of hopscotch. I knew she would be on a fast of bread and olives until the next day and I insisted on eating the same. That night I stayed down in the inner courtyard and slept next to her on the bed instead of going up on the rooftop. I alone would wake up with her and the first sunlight and accompany her trudging through the dry dawning golden August fields on the feast day to the little church high above the village to celebrate the Dormition. I would fidget and move from foot to foot when the priest spoke too long and I waited eagerly for the only melodious and dramatic turn in the liturgy that would stir me and intoxicate me with the sounds and smells when I would magically and reverently repeat the incantations, *kyrie eleison, eleison imas*, Lord have mercy, mercy on us, phrases I heard Demosthenes and other people utter in a totally different tone to express their exasperation or incredulity. When the Mother of God was resurrected bodily into heaven, leaving only her intense perfume lingering in the church, I would sway and virtually fall in a trance as if the Theotokou would take me with her. After the church service the summer sun had gotten intense but the walk home was easier down the hill. I would gambol ahead of Elengou then stopping and waiting for her from time to time, or I would turn back and take her hand remembering the mysteries she shared with me.

At the end of that day of feasting, Demosthenes announced with great zeal that the following day he and I would go on an excursion. We would see the rest of the family soon enough he said, but we would spend the rest of August meandering around the island. The final meander I realised only in hindsight,



although perhaps even he was unsure whether he would take me with him at the end of our ‘excursion’. We stopped off in towns and villages, sleeping here and there. He knew people everywhere and sometimes we would take friends and relatives on our drive. We encircled mountains relishing each heavy turn of the steering wheel of his old Hillman in one direction and then the next — chugging up and rolling down endlessly around the sharp mountain bends, digressing at every opportunity saying let’s stop at such-and-such a village and see if so-and-so is in the *kafeneio* or we would sit in the shade of forest glades, lapping up water in mountain streams, and then suddenly deviate to the coast and jump in the sea. We were going everywhere and all at once and he recorded it all in black and white, taking pictures with robed monks living hermetically on mountain tops and with statues who had lost their heads and genitals. If he was saying good-bye it was either silently or not in my presence. Perhaps he was saying goodbye silently to me or perhaps he knew he was taking me with him. Who knows? Did he know? Perhaps he thought he would rescue me from my fate on the island or wanted me to be part of his own fate whatever that would be? I knew nothing at the time.

I was sad for another reason. Golden August was coming to an end. August was singing its own good-bye as it was dying in a crimson haze. Scattered lacy clouds were moving with the changing winds and shepherds were reading the skies day-by-day to predict what rains the coming year would bring month-by-month. And I wanted to sing for August so it would not leave me: Come August don’t go away, don’t ever leave, don’t leave August, don’t. But August would leave. To bid August farewell we went to the sea of Salamis to swim — just ten kilometres south of our village of Trikomo along the coastal road. We walked



Lafatis (Κύαρος) 5/9/57

through the ancient city, which not long before had been covered with sand dunes and wild acacia groves. Demosthenes told me how it used to be the biggest city with the longest history on the whole island and then fell into ruin and was buried under sand until Kyrios Vassos became obsessed with uncovering it layer by layer and he hired villagers from all around to fill wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of sand and move it away to reveal the layers of the city bit by bit. I knew Kyrios Vassos as Theios Vassos because he was a childhood friend of Katerina both from the village and from school. He was there with his team of workers, mostly girls and women of all ages, who were digging and sharing in his fascination of uncovering worlds within worlds. As we wandered around we ran into Demosthenes' *koumbaro* Sotiris. He was a master builder and was there helping the team in their dig, reconstructing fragments with his hands and imagination. They had been *koumbaroi* for years. Sotiris was his *koumbaro* when Demosthenes married Kassiani, and then Demosthenes baptised Sotiris' first son. And then, after Demosthenes married Katerina, Sotiris built a house for Demosthenes and Katerina where the three of us lived before we became three islands. We left so quickly I scarcely remembered the house except for some black and white photographs. It is as if it came and went with the wind.

So with personal and ritual bonding, the two *koumbaroi* went on talking about worlds forgotten and remembered and people who came and went to and from other lands and other worlds. Sotiris talked of the *damnatio memoriae*, a phrase he learnt from Theios Vassos, and what the seas of fortune might swallow and expel. Through the holes of memory I translate what they then spoke of, in the island dialect with the rhythms of speech and gesticulations of the Trikomites, now and again punctuating their words with 're koumbare'.

What houses confiscated
 flailed by the wind
 and love's labours lost
 Ill-fated lovers seized by what
 quirky gods or quirky demons
 whatever winds may bring
 or blow you away
 across the sea
 and what if
 — this island could catch fire
 from a single spark and —
 If from the dryness of the grass
 in the unrelenting summer heat
 Or from the prophesying speeches
 of its Generals and its Priests
 All have staked their claim
 And the season has come if

Hunters catch poems
With sticks
As if song thrushes
For the eating.
And in the island yet-to-come
What poems and what fortunes
And when does longing end —

I slipped through the gap
Cleaved by their breath
When I was hailed by the sea's blue voice
Which filled each of my ears
And I seized the moment
and cried out
with a dashing to the dazzling blue
ΧΑΙΠΕ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΑ, ΧΑΙΠΕ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΑ!

The soft zephyrs gently lowering the light
Darkening a distant gathering of girls
From my village street
Whose cadenced voices were
Calling me to eat
Hot potatoes dug from fiery sand
Come eat, come eat
ela fa'e Stefoulli, ela fa'e
Έλα φάε Στεφουλλή, έλα φάε
yellowy flesh
under burnt skin
laced with dusky olive oil
duskier than our gaze
in summer haze
as August bids farewell
or we to August
will the moment ever be the same
and will August be august again
maybe sometime maybe never

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