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(George Kalogeris, Translator)

*from Mythistorema (Myth of Our
History)*

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One more cave with one more well inside.
Once it was easy to please our friends
with all kinds of adornments and images,
to draw such bright things up from the dark
for those still closely bound to us.

Now the ropes have snapped, and only the grooves
biting into the damp lip of the well
recall the sheer depth of our happiness.
Solomos termed those smooth indentations
“fingertips on the coping” —

as if we might grasp
the poet’s meaning like stops on a stone flute,
and feel something cool and detached coming up,
immune to the feverish pitch of the flesh.

Not a moment goes by when the cave doesn’t make light
of losing its soul, without so much
as a drop of water to shatter the plenitude
of its silence, even for a second.

I woke up holding this marble head in my hands;
its weight exhausts my elbows, and I can't find a place
to set it down safely. The head was falling
into the identical dream that I
was rising out of, and now that its countenance
has merged with mine it will be hard for us
to live our separate lives again.

Staring into the emptiness of eyes so blank
they neither open or close,
I speak to the frozen O of the mouth, and touch
the cheeks of a face that has outgrown its skin.
Now this head makes my whole body go numb,

and I can't feel my hands until I see them
reaching for me like dripping stumps.

Now that you are leaving, take
the child with you, the child who saw the light
in the spreading plane tree's shadow,
on a day when trumpets blared and armor gleamed
as the sweating horses lowered their heads
to the trough, skimming the thick green film
of stagnant water with their snorting nostrils.

Olive trees, the wrinkled bark of our fathers' faces,
ancestral wisdom carved in stone,
and our brother's blood pulsing through the earth
were a vibrant joy, the spirit's priceless mosaic
for those who still knew how to pray.

Now that you are leaving, now that the day
of atonement dawns, and no one knows
whom he will kill and how he will die, take
the child with you, the one who saw the light
in the spreading plane tree's shadow.
Teach him the intricate ways of the trees.

I regret having allowed a wide river
to flow through my fingers
without having tasted a single drop.
Now I seem to be sinking like a stone,
and this small pine tree
rooted in the reddish soil
is the closest thing I have
to a steadfast friend.
Everything I ever loved is gone,
just like those summer rentals
that were built just last summer —
bungalows torn to pieces
once the autumn wind blows.

The wound in my chest has opened again. It happens whenever the stars descend and my body somehow becomes the constellations' closest kin; it happens when human footsteps fade and silent footfalls continue. Its approach is always new.

And these are the stones so heavy they're still plummeting through the centuries: how deep will they drag me down this time? At the break of each day there are hands that beckon the hawk and the vulture, and I watch them, shackled as I am by my own anguish, this rock that never wears down. Thanks to these trees sealed with pitch I can see the black mouths of the peacefully breathing dead; and later, like fruit that ripens no further, the curve of each statue's brightening grin.

Those of us who began this pilgrimage by observing the broken limbs of the statues, forgot ourselves for a moment, and remarked out loud that life never seems to be lost without a trace; that death has roads that still have yet to be mapped, not to mention its own unique system of justice;

and that even while we are dying on our feet, upright, one with our brothers in stone, bound together in both our brittleness and obduracy, the ancient dead have risen again, and smile down at us in the strange silence of those who have somehow managed to escape the circle.