

## *The Village*

Perched in the foothills  
of the forest and the mountain  
wears on its left like a beanie  
the peak of saint Elias  
and views the west.

Before it was split by the wars  
it was divided in the middle  
by the cool stream –  
infant of the forest dryads  
and summer home of the nightingales.  
On its banks, under the plane trees  
women would set up a makeshift laundry  
and barefoot rinse the clothes in the purling water  
shampoo their hair with lye  
as we explored the gully picking daffodils.

In rainstorms the stream flooded.  
We would rush to Meliena  
feelings surging high  
as we watched the rising water  
carrying uprooted trees, huge stones  
betting who would first cross over  
building ephemeral bridges.

Two wells  
were nourished by the earth's naval.  
One under the old plane tree –  
past venue of *kleftes and kapetaneous*.  
Its water cooled the feverish  
foreheads of the sick and in its marble  
trough the animals quenched their thirst.  
The other stood proud in the centre.  
Around them dances were led  
and clarinets blared  
at festivals and fairs.

Five Saints guarded the village.  
The church of the Virgin Mary  
dominated on the hill.  
Langadianoi builders laid  
the foundations with firm pillars  
built it with carved stones  
floored it with slabs.  
The bell hanging from the oak tree  
would peal joyfully  
and sometimes would toll  
or ring eagerly warning of danger.

The one teacher school  
next to the church, threshold of learning.  
Through its wide windows we would gaze  
at flights of birds, the blue of the sky  
the white or grey clouds, the rain  
the storms, the snow flakes.  
On its stage, the magic of theatre –  
youth's amateur performances.  
Six years of tenure, three classes on the left  
and three on the right, progress was marked  
by the successive change of seating at the desks.  
when the playground was extended  
the pickaxes stumbled on relics  
and unearthed a whole cemetery.  
We stared in awe at the anonymous bones.

The Kafeneia, exclusive haunts of men  
some used to forget their homes  
and their conscience was pricked  
by the coming and going of kids  
carrying their mothers' messages.

The sun lingered  
behind the mountain.  
We would wait, counting the hours  
in the shadow's retreat  
until he emerged blazing.

The forest, an envied crown;  
its foliage changed colours  
like a chameleon  
from season to season.

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