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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