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Poetry

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Afternoon in Paleó Fáliron

I determine the number of blocks, decide to walk to the kafenion on the coast. I know there I will have the option of crossing the highway, putting my face to the sea. If the gods agree, I will feel a breeze poised with salt and an eagerness to continue. But more than likely, I will choose a table on the corner of town, where the policeman watches as if he expects something to happen. The offhandedness of single women keeps him alert—and newly married women, like me, who don’t know the rules.

Poseidon cracks a wave against the jetty so hard I can hear it shatter like glass, my tiny cup of Greek coffee calm in the concrete village. Chairs screech; the officer approaches once again to ask why I am here, where I live, what time my husband usually comes home.

Up the Mountain

On a steep cobblestone street, a woman who wears winter on her face sweeps her doorstep once again, returning the dirt outside. She cannot straighten from years that have found their home in the sinews of muscle and bending bone. She remains where the shadows fall, in the black part of her house, which cuts into a street in a rush with tourists. Her sons and daughters in Athens. Their pictures dusted
over doilies in each silent room.
Vacation, the domain
of those who can leave.

Sunset’s shadows settle
in the castle ruins, send the
old fishermen out with nets as tourists
sip frappés on pendulous balconies.
Woman of the mountain, how many
mornings have you kneaded
bread? Beneath your
callused fingertips,
years of crocheting unravel.
The sea wild
with white caps.

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