

tracing roots

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In August 2021,

Greece burned.

140 fires.

125,000 hectares.

3 dead.

I do not know them.
They do not know me.

My uncle sits at the edge of the table,
His shirt unbuttoned
revealing the dense cluster of charcoal
black chest hair
and a gold crucifix –
a Mykonos permanence.
I sit across from him,
knitted sweater covering my chest,
which is filled with hair the same,
though it is hidden.
My crucifix hidden –
a Mykonos inversion.

“You don’t speak any Greek?”

The wine pours into the glass,
splashing around the clear paraboloid,
flooding its emptiness with the sharpest of reds.

In 1821,

Greece won its independence.

The establishment of the first Hellenic Republic.

Smyrna, where my ancestors lived.

Subject to massacre.

Blood on both sides.

150,000 dead.

I do not know them.
they do not know me.

“τι θα κάνει με αυτό?” says another at the table.
 (“What’s he going to do with it?”)
“He’s Greek, he should be able to speak Greek.”

 Skin coated in olive oil,
 Hair colour ripped from the blackest bough,
 Curls and tussles of hair only found in mythology.
 Language seems to form the structure of culture,
 petals lining the fragrance of the chrysanthemum.

What is Euboea, Peloponnese, and Attica to me?

What is London, Toronto, and Brantford to them?

What is Sparta, Leonidio, and Tripoli to me?

What is Woodstock, Ingersoll, and Brantford to them?

 Farms, and cities, and lands the same.
 Cattle farmers, olive trees, and metropolis the same.
 Oceans substituted for pastures,
 and vineyards substituted for corn fields.

A question of place, and a question of home.

“They’ll pick you out as a foreigner if you go there.
 Remember – you are Canadian.”

 Canadian,
with a last name containing too many vowels,
 body containing too much hair,
 a prideful energy radiating outward,
 a love for wine,
 celebrating different traditions,
 and holiday times?

 My language may be thinner,
 my accent may be tinged,
 but my blood is
 their blood the same.
My passion is their passion the same.
My life is their life the same.

I do not know them.
They do not know me.
But footprints in the dirt
And waters
And fleeting cities
And calm farmlands
And war-torn deserts
And pandemic-ravaged neighbourhoods
And retirement homes
And mountain homes
And celebrations
And motivations –

I am them.
And they are me.