THE FOREST

Poetic Fiction

(in the style of an expressive ballet)

1954
The shape of the forest has
The shape of a jellyfish
That you catch in your hands and it slips through
As a wave
Pushes it out
Perhaps this happens
Because
It moves
Without
Opening seashores
That are white
And
The fresh ones glisten
While the others
Are white all through
You’ll find too the bones of the drowned

Now I’ll push out my heart
But no
Since jellyfish
Have no blood

If I pretended for so long to be writing poems, it was only so I
could speak of the forest.
At night people betray one another
And when the forest
Begins
To smother you
You cry out
As if
You were not in
The forest

The forest is like my nights
Which as dawn comes
Are not at all
The same
The forgotten dead
Whom alone we set aside
Near-dead advance
With startling movements
Or
—We’d like to imagine—
A single
Detail
In daylight it’s green
So the forest
Is a forest
With trees.
EPISODE ONE

MY FATHER’S EYE

My father had a glass eye.

On Sundays when he stayed home he would take other eyes from his pocket, shine them with the cuff of his sleeve and call my mother over to choose. My mother would laugh.

In the mornings my father was pleased. He would roll the eye around in his palm before putting it in and call it a good eye. But I didn’t want to believe him.

I would wrap myself in a dark shawl as if I were cold but really I was keeping watch. Finally one day I saw him cry. It was no different from a real eye.
This poem
Is not for those to read
Who don’t love me
Or even
Those
Who won’t know me
If they don’t believe I existed
As
They did

After the story with my father I was suspicious
even of those whose eyes were real.
They found the bird killed
In the forest
So small
If you compare it
To the space all around
Where the cries of the frightened
Couldn’t penetrate

Short dialogue
That arrives, closely following the circle

—Did you love her?
—Oh, no
Back then
Hats with big feathers
Were all the rage
—Swallows?
—Lord, no
Salamanders

Do you really know whether you’re inside or out
Of the closed spaces that always exist?
It depends entirely
On the slant of the sun
Even at the seaside
On Sunday excursions
In rowboats
While around them
Huge ships steam off
A whole fleet
With us in their wake
Like children’s prams being taken
From the park
At dusk
Leaving our hands
This feeling of our hands grasping
As they rest on benches
The dew painted
Not only
In the forest
When Odysseus on landing moved toward the forest from the shore, he found his comrades seated in a line each with open eyes watching him and singing with a hand outstretched along the seaside road.

*The mice drowned in spring*
*Dragging by the tail*
*The old and the young*
*The blind who didn’t understand*
*And all those who sat on the church steps*
*And begged*
*Good sir a little help please*

*Here where you pass passed they*
*Who will drown*

And they began their chorus again:

When after the encounter Odysseus returned he joined them as the last in line, since he had no more need to be clever, thus moving nearer to the forest than the shore.
The swineherd had sold his pigs
Made a bed from their hides
And slept
Good sir
A little help
Please
Clipping from Kathimerini

In Norway a mass suicide of rodents was observed; during a certain season they cast themselves in herds into the sea.

Leaving behind the dense forests of Scandinavia

But Greece is what I knew
And its landscape
At the moment I committed suicide
Was dawning
As if I were emerging free
From the waters
And the forests shone
Dewdrops falling
As a warm breeze rustled the leaves
Forests full of light
Bodiless
Of lean pines
Blazing
With glints
Of sun on the rocks
That tumble to the shore
Time passes
And the shade in the clearing multiplies
(There are other forests of firs
And chestnuts
On the banks of the Peneus)
Slanted at first
It divides
The trunks on the right side of the circle
If it were two woodcutters sawing
The trees would fall booming
To the earth
Later turning from trunk to trunk
It fleetingly touches the trees on the other side
Before they are all sunk in darkness
Together
During that brief spell is when you hear the birds chirp

So what they say
That in the forests the birds sing all day
Is a lie
The forests are ruled by fear
And the beasts
And birds
Know how to fear
Before they are born