

# 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

## EPISODE TWO

### THE SWINEHERD OR, THE BEGGARS' SONG

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