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Makis Tsitas – Greece

Μάρτυς μου ο Θεός (2013)

God is my witness

Publishing House **Kichli Publishing**

Biography

Makis Tsitas was born in 1971 in Giannitsa, Greece. He studied journalism in Thessaloniki and worked in radio. Since 1994 he has lived in Athens and works in publishing. He is the director of *diastixo.gr*, a literary and cultural internet journal.

His work (stories, plays and poems) has been included in anthologies and published in journals and newspapers in Greece and abroad. His one-act plays, *On the Square* and *Television*, were performed at the Theatro ton Kairon in Athens. His short stories have been translated into German, Spanish, English, Hebrew, Swedish and Finnish.

His published work includes a novel (*God is my witness*, 2013), a collection of short stories (*Patty from Petroula*, 1996) and many books for children.

Synopsis

In this humorous, moving, and perceptive novel, an anti-hero of our time who wants nothing more than to live with dignity – having reached his fifties with no job and uncertain health – narrates the trials and betrayals he has suffered from employers, from the women he meets, and from his own family.

Through his torrential monologue, replete with everyday occurrences and ebullient fantasies, we follow a simple man's struggle to remain upstanding. As his story veers from wildly humorous to unconsciously self-mocking or even disturbing, Makis Tsitas' hero becomes representative of the enmity a human being must withstand. His child-like naivety becomes the deformed and deforming mirror of a cynical and vicious society which, despite its apparent tolerance and prosperity, is fading towards decadence, intolerance and racism. The novel's anti-hero comes to reflect the monstrosity of a society that must inevitably exclude him.

Μάρτυς μου ο Θεός

Makis Tsitas

(pp. 11-15)

Υπάρχουν τεσσάρων ειδών αφεντικά: οί πετυχημένοι, οί χρεωμένοι, τὰ καθίκια και οί τρελοί. Ἐγώ ἔπεσα στοῦ τέταρτο.

Πολλές φορές μουμίλαγε και σκεφτόμουνα ὅτι δὲν ἤξερε ἂν εἶχε ἀπέναντί του ἐμένα ἢ κάποιον πού μου ἔμοιαζε. Δηλαδή ἂν ἤμουνα ὁ Χρυσοβαλάντης — ὁ ὑπάλληλος και φίλος— ἢ ὁ δίδυμος ἀδερφός μου. Μόνο πού δὲν ἔχω δίδυμο ἀδερφό, δύο ἀδερφές ἔχω.

Ἔτσι και τύχαινε νὰ συναντηθοῦμε στην εἴσοδο τῆς ἐταιρείας, μου ἔλεγε «τρέχα νὰ μὲ προλάβεις!» και ὁρμούσε στοῦ ἀσανσέρ, και ὅπως ἀνέβαινε μου φώναζε «μὴν κλέβεις!» και μ' ἔβαζε ν' ἀνεβαίνω τρέχοντας ὀχτῶ ὀρόφους, μετρώντας δυνατὰ τὰ ἑκατὸν σαράντα τέσσερα σκαλιά, και οὔρλιαζε μέσα ἀπ' τὸ ἀσανσέρ: «Πιὸ δυνατὰ, ρὲ χοντρέ! Δὲν ἔχεις ψυχὴ μέσα σου;».

Ἡ ἐταιρεία του ἔκλεισε τέλος τοῦ '80 και ἔμεινα ἀνεργος στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα. Δούλευα κοντὰ του ἔντεκα χρόνια, ἀλλὰ δυστυχῶς πιάστηκα ἀπροετοιμαστος, ἐνῶ οἱ ὑπόλοιποι συνάδελφοί μου ἔκαναν ἐργασιακὸ μάρκετινγκ γιὰ μῆνες και πῆγαν σὲ ἄλλα ἀτελιὲ γραφικῶν τεχνῶν ἀμέσως. Ἐβλεπα βέβαια ὅτι βούλιαζε τὸ καράβι, ὅτι τὸ πρᾶγμα πῆγαινε ἀπ' τὸ κακὸ στοῦ χειρότερο, ὅτι δὲν ὑπῆρχε πλέον μέλλον, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἤθελα νὰ τὸ πιστέψω. Γιατὶ εἶχα φάει τὸ παραμῦθι τοῦ Ἐξαποδῶ: «Και ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ φύγουν, ἐσὺ δὲν ὑπάρχει περίπτωση νὰ μείνεις χωρὶς δουλειά». Ἔτσι τὴν πάτησα.

Είδα τὸν ἑαυτό μου νὰ παλεύει μὲ τὸν ἑαυτό μου στὴ λάσπη. Ἔβριζε ὁ ἕνας τὸν ἄλλο καὶ προσπαθοῦσε νὰ τὸν πνίξει. Ταυτοχρόνως ἔψαλλαν μὲ κατάνυξη τὸ τροπάριο τῆς Κασσιανῆς. Ὑστερα οἱ δύο γίνανε ἕνας ἄλλος Χρυσοβαλάντης, πού τὸν ἔλεγαν Ψυχοβαλάντη, καὶ φώναξε τρίς «μὲ πνίγει αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνεμος». Ἀπὸ κάπου ἀπροσδιόριστα ἀκουγόταν μιὰ ἄρια ἀπὸ τὴν Τόσκα.

Περίεργο ὄνειρο.

Δὲν μπορῶ νὰ φανταστῶ τὸν ἑαυτό μου ζητιάνο ἢ παιδὶ τῶν φαναριῶν. Ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ τοὺς γονεῖς μου μπορῶ νὰ τοὺς φανταστῶ νὰ πέφτουν θύματα ἐκμετάλλευσης ἀπὸ τρίτους, καὶ εἰδικὰ ἀπὸ μιὰ μέλλουσα νύφη.

Ὁ πατέρας μου τώρα εἶναι ὀγδόντα ἕξι ἐτῶν, ἀπόστρατος ἀξιωματικός, ἄνθρωπος τῆς οἰκογένειας, τῆς μελέτης καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἦσυχη ζωὴ. Πάντα μὲ φρόντιζε, μοῦ δάνειζε καὶ μὲ ἐξυπηρετοῦσε.

Μοῦ ἔλεγε «πρόσεχε, πρόσεχε, πρόσεχε!» ἀλλὰ ἐγὼ ἤμουνα τέντζερης ξεγάνωτος χωρὶς καπάκι κι ὅ, τι ἤθελε ἔμπαινε μέσα. Αὐστηρὸς ὁ πατέρας μου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑποχωρητικός. Δηλαδή, ὅταν ἐγὼ πῆζα, αὐτὸς ἔκανε πίσω. Ναί.

«Μπαμπά, θὰ πάω στὸ Λονδίνο, δῶσε μου ἑκατὸ χιλιάδες». Μοῦ τίς ἔδωσε.

«Μπαμπά, ἔχω ἕνα μικρὸ χρέος στὴν τράπεζα». Τὸ ξόφλησε ἀμέσως.

«Μπαμπά, ἔχω πρόβλημα, μπορεῖς νὰ μοῦ κάνεις μιὰ ἐξυπηρέτηση;» Ἔτρεξε.

«Μπαμπά, πρέπει νὰ κάνω εἰσαγωγή στὸ νοσοκομεῖο». Μὲ βροήθησε.

Δέ μοῦ εἶχε πεί σέ κανένα θέμα «ὄχι». Τώρα πού τὸ φιλοσοφῶ, ἦταν ἓνα σκυλί πού γάβγιζε μὰ δὲ δάγκωνε — ἐγὼ δὲν τὸ εἶχα καταλάβει. Τὸν σέβομαι καὶ τὸν ἐκτιμῶ. Μέχρι τὰ εἴκοσί μου τὸν φοβόμουν πολὺ. Μετὰ ἀπλῶς τὸν σεβόμουν, γιατί πέρασε πάρα πολλά. Εἶναι ἓνας ἄνθρωπος μὲ πείρα στὴ ζωὴ. Ἕνας πατέρας δὲ θέλει ποτὲ τὸ κακὸ τοῦ παιδιοῦ του. Χαιρόταν πού εἶχα πάντα σχέσεις μὲ μοναστήρια καὶ ἐκκλησίες, εἶναι κι αὐτὸς θεοσεβούμενος ἄνθρωπος. Ὅλη ἡ οἰκογένεια ἔτσι εἴμαστε.

Ὅταν στὰ δεκαοχτώ μου πέρασα στὴ σχολὴ ὑπαξιωματικῶν στὰ Τρίκαλα, μοῦ εἶπε «μπράβο», ἀλλὰ κι ὅταν τὰ παράτησα κι ἔφυγα, γιατί δὲν ἄντεχα ἄλλο, δὲ μοῦ ἔφερε καμία ἀντίρρηση. Δὲ μοῦ ἔκοψε ποτὲ τὸ δρόμο. Ναί.

Ἴσως, σκέφτομαι, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν ἔχω φύγει ἀκόμη ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι, παρόλο πού πενηντάρισα. Ἐπειδὴ αἰσθάνομαι ἀσφάλεια καὶ θαλπωρὴ.

Τηλεφώνησα σὲ μιὰ παλιὰ συνάδελφο γιὰ νὰ τῆς πῶ «χρόνια πολλά» καὶ νὰ τῆς ζητήσω καὶ καμιά συνεργασία κι αὐτὴ μοῦ τὸ ἔκλεισε λέγοντας: «Χρυσοβαλάντη, μὲ πέτυχες στὴν πόρτα, τὰ λέμε ἄλλη φορά».

Βλέπεις, ἡ κυρία δὲ μὲ ἔχει πιά ἀνάγκη, εἶναι βολεμένη στὸν «Ἀθήνα 2004» καὶ παίρνει δύο χιλιάδες εὐρῶ τὸ μῆνα σὺν τὰ μπόνους, ἀλλὰ θὰ τελειώσει κάποια στιγμή τὸ πανηγύρι καὶ τότε νὰ δοῦμε...

Πολλοί, ἄλλωστε, παλιοί μου συνάδελφοι πού εὐεργετήθηκαν πολλαπλῶς ἀπὸ μένα, τώρα πού τοὺς ζήτησα βοήθεια, μοῦ φέρθηκαν κυνικά. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ κάποιοι ἐπιχειρηματίες μὲ μικρὲς ἐταιρεῖες, πού ὅταν ἤμουν στὸν Ἐξαποδῶ μὲ εἶχαν στὰ ὄπα ὄπα γιὰ νὰ τοὺς πηγαίνω δουλειὲς καὶ τώρα πού τοὺς κόψαμε τὴ σαντιγὶ κάνουν πῶς δὲ μὲ γνωρίζουν. Δὲν πειράζει,

ἔχει ὁ Θεός. Ἄς εἶναι ὅλοι τους καλά. Αὐτὸ εἶναι εὐλογία ἀπὸ τὸ γέροντά μου, νὰ λέω «ἔχει ὁ Θεός» καὶ νὰ λέω ἀκόμα καὶ σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ μὲ ἀδίκησαν «εὐχαριστῶ», γιὰ νὰ ἔχω καθαρὴ συνείδηση. Ὅσο μπορῶ τὸν ἀκούω τὸ γέροντά μου. Μοῦ ἔχει πεῖ τί πρέπει νὰ κάνω στὴ ζωὴ μου, πῶς νὰ τὴν κοντρολάρω γιὰ νὰ μὴν καταλήξω στὸ τρελάδικο.

Ὅταν κάποιος ἔχει πτωχεύσει, κοιτάει πῶς νὰ τὴ βγάλει χωρὶς λεφτά. Θέλει νὰ πιεῖ κάπου ἕναν καφὲ δωρεάν. Θέλει νὰ καθίσει κάπου καὶ νὰ μιλήσει. Ἐχω κάνει μεγάλη ἔρευνα ἐπὶ τῆς ἀφραγκίας.

Γι' αὐτὸν τὸ λόγο κάθε Κυριακὴ πρωί, μετὰ τὴ λειτουργία στὴν Ἁγία Εἰρήνη, στὴν Αἰόλου, περνᾶω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀγγλικανικὴ Ἐκκλησία, ὅπου προσφέρουν καφέ. Κι ἂν μάλιστα μπεῖς μέσα καὶ παρακολουθήσεις τὴ λειτουργία τους, σοῦ κάνουν δῶρο κι ἕνα θρησκευτικὸ βιβλίο. Στὰ ἀγγλικά βέβαια. (Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴ μιλάω τὴ γλώσσα, ἀλλὰ κανένα βιβλίο δὲν πάει στράφι μαζί μου.)

Προσπαθῶ νὰ τὴ βγάλω λάθρα. Ναί.

...

(pp. 16-17)

Ἀλλὰ ἔχω μετανιώσει. Μάρτυς μου ὁ Θεός. Ἐχω μετανιώσει πικρὰ γιὰ ὅλα ὅσα ἔχω κάνει. Θέλω νὰ τὰ ἀφήσω πίσω μου καὶ νὰ ἀποτολμήσω ἕνα νέο ξεκίνημα.

Δὲ θέλω οὔτε ἐρωμένες οὔτε ἐλαφρὲς γυναῖκες οὔτε πορνείες. Θέλω νὰ εἶμαι κοντὰ στὸ Θεό. Κι ἂν Ἐκεῖνος μοῦ χαρίσει γυναῖκα σοβαρὴ, τότε ἐντάξει, εὐχαρίστως νὰ ἔλθω μαζί της εἰς γάμου κοινωνίαν. Ἄν δὲ μοῦ χαρίσει καὶ θέλει γενῶ καλόγερος, πάλι ἐντάξει.

Πολύ κόσμο ἔχω κάνει πέρα, γιατί εἶδα πὼς αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι δὲν ἔχουν τίποτα νὰ μοῦ δώσουν. Εἶναι τρύπιοι κουβάδες. Ἄπατοι.

Θέλω νὰ μ' ἀκούει ὅταν προσεύχομαι σ' Αὐτόν. Μακριὰ ἀπὸ ἔμένα οἱ πειρασμοί, Κύριε.

Καὶ λιγότερους φίλους θέλω ἐπίσης. Λίγους καὶ καλοὺς. Ἡρεμοὺς, τίμιους, νὰ μὴ μὲ πνίγουν. Νὰ μὴ μοῦ δίνουν μὲ τὸ ἓνα χέρι ἀντιασφυξιογόνο μάσκα ἐνῶ μὲ τὸ ἄλλο ρίχνουν διοξειδίου τοῦ ἄνθρακος. Τί περιμένουν, νὰ χαλάσει ἡ μάσκα γιὰ νὰ σκάσω; Ἔτσι ἔχουμε γίνει. Αὐτὴ εἶναι δυστυχῶς ἡ σύγχρονη ἀθηναϊκὴ νοοτροπία, πού δὲ μᾶς ἀφήνει νὰ παλαντζάρομε οὔτε τὰ χρέη μας οὔτε τίς δουλειές μας. Ἀπὸ πόνου ψυχῆς μιλάω αὐτὴ τὴ στιγμή.

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(pp. 18-17)

Ὁ κύριος Ἰ. καὶ ὁ κύριος Τ., ὅταν μὲ βλέπουν, μὲ φωνάζουν πάντα στὴν παρέα τους καὶ μὲ κερνᾶνε. Αὐτοὶ ἔχουν γερὸ πορτοφόλι, παίρνουν παχυλὲς συντάξεις, εἰσπράττουν κι ἔξι-ἑφτὰ νοίκια ὁ καθένας. Βλέπουν ἔμένα πού εἶμαι χωρὶς λεφτὰ καὶ μὲ κερνᾶνε. Τὶς προάλλες πού μοῦ εἶπαν «ἔλα, Χρυσοβαλάντη, νὰ πιεῖς κάτι», ἔβαλα τὰ κλάματα — δὲν ξέρω γιατί. Πιθανὸν ἀπὸ ἀγάπη.

Προχθὲς, πού μὲ εἶδαν πάλι καὶ μὲ φώναξαν, δὲν κάθισα μαζί τους, μὲ πιάσαν οἱ ντροπές. Νὰ εἶμαι πενήντα χρονῶν καὶ νὰ μὲ κερνᾶνε οἱ ἄλλοι. Ποῦ μὲ κατάντησε ὁ Ἐξαποδῶ...

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(pp. 90-92)

Θέλω, ἂν γίνεται, σ' ἓνα χρόνο νὰ ἔχω παντρευτεῖ καὶ νὰ ἔχω ἀφήσει ἔγκυο τῆ γυναῖκα μου, νὰ γίνω σύντομα πατέρας. Νὰ δώσω στὸν ἑαυτό μου μιὰ καταξίωση, καὶ πιστεύω πῶς τὸ αἰδοῖο θὰ μπορέσει νὰ μοῦ τὴν προσφέρει. Ἐλπίζω νὰ μὴν κάνω λάθος. Θέλω ἐπίσης ἓνα σπίτι δικό μου γιὰ νὰ ζῶ μὲ τὴ γυναῖκα καὶ τὸ παιδί μου. (Δὲ γίνεται νὰ ζήσουμε μὲ τοὺς γονεῖς μου καὶ τὶς ἀδερφές μου, δὲν εἶναι πρέπον.) Ἕνα σπίτι μικρὸ καὶ ταπεινὸ, κάπου παραλιακά, μεταξὺ Ἀθήνας καὶ Κορίνθου, ἢ ἓνα διαμερισμάκι, τῶν πενήντα ἔστω τετραγωνικῶν, στὸ Λονδίνο.

Θέλω μέσα σ' αὐτὰ τὰ λίγα τετραγωνικά νὰ στεγάσουμε τὴ ζωὴ μας, τὸν ἔρωτά μας, τὰ ὄνειρά μας. Ἄν τώρα διαπιστώσω ὅτι, ὅσο ἔλειπα στὴ δουλειά, αὐτὴ πῆγε καὶ μοῦ ξενοπηδήχτηκε, τότε ἔχω δύο ἐπιλογές: ἢ νὰ τρέξω νὰ κλειστῶ σὲ μοναστήρι ἢ νὰ πάω ντουγρὸ στὸ ψυχιατεῖο. Καὶ τότε ἴσως νὰ τὴν κάνω νὰ μετανιώσει γιὰ τὴν ἀμαρτωλὴ τῆς πράξη. Νὰ τῆς δημιουργήσω, μὲ τὴν ἀξιοπρεπή μου στάση, τεράστιες ἐνοχές.

Ἡ ζωὴ μου ὅλη εἶναι μιὰ κυρία
μιὰ μὲ ρίχνει στὰ ζεστὰ
καὶ μιὰ μὲ πάει στὰ κρύα.

Τὸ νὰ ὑποπέσει μιὰ γυναῖκα στὸ ἀμάρτημα τῆς μοιχείας σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχει προσπεράσει ὅλα τὰ στάδια τῆς μεταμέλειας κι ἔχει φτάσει στὴν πώρωση. Ἀπὸ τὴ μοιχεία ὁ ἄντρας παίρνει ἡδονή, ἐνῶ ἡ γυναῖκα τὸ μετάλλιο τῆς διαφθορᾶς. Στὸ ψυχιατεῖο θὰ πῆγαινα γιὰ ἐκδίκηση, γιὰ νὰ τῆς λένε ὅλοι: «Φτού σου, ξεφτιλισμένη γυναῖκα, τὸν τρέλανε τὸν ἄνθρωπο». Ἐνῶ στὸ μοναστήρι θὰ πῆγαινα πιὸ πολὺ γιὰ τὴ δική μου ἡρεμία, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσω νὰ τὴν ξεχάσω. Γιατὶ πιστεύω πῶς ὅταν καθίσεις καὶ πεῖς σὲ ἓνα γεροντάκι μὲ τριμμένα ράσα τὸν πόνο σου, τότε ὁ Θεὸς θὰ σοῦ προσφέρει ἡρεμία ψυχῆς.

Στὸ θέμα τῆς ἡλικίας δὲν ἔχω ξεπεράσει κάποια ταμπού. Θέλω δηλαδή ἢ γυναίκα μου νὰ εἶναι τουλάχιστον δέκα-δεκαπέντε χρόνια μικρότερή μου. Καὶ μεγαλύτερη διαφορά δὲ θὰ μὲ πείραζε, κι ἄς ἔλεγαν ὅλοι «ὄ παππούς μὲ τὸ μανούλι». Πάντως τὸ Μαρινάκι ἦταν ὄντως μανούλι — σκέτο μοντέλο. Ἐνῶ ἢ Ρωρῶ δὲν ἦτανε τόσο ὡραία, ἀλλὰ ἦταν καυλοπρεπής. Ἀπὸ μακριὰ φαινόταν ἢ γυναίκα, ἔστελνε σινιάλα. Αὐτὸ δὲ σημαίνει ὅτι ὄσες ντύνονται κάπως εἶναι πουτάνες καὶ οἱ ἄλλες εἶναι οἱ καλές. Γιὰ νὰ ἐξηγούμεθα: Καὶ ἢ Μέγαιρα, παρόλο πὺν φοροῦσε συντηρητικὰ ταγεράκια, ἦταν στὴν ψυχὴ πουτάνα. Καὶ ἢ γυναίκα τοῦ Ἐξαποδῶ ντυνόταν σεμνά, ἀλλὰ στὴν καρδιά εἶχε φίδια. Ὅποτε ἐδῶ δὲν κρίνουμε τὸ ντύσιμο ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀπομέσα.

Μοῦ εἶπε ὁ φίλος μου ὁ Ξ. ὅτι εἶδε τὴ Ρωρῶ μὲ τὸν καινούργιο της γκόμενο, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι τόσο ἄχαρος, πὺν ἀπορεῖ πῶς τὸν κυκλοφορεῖ. Δυὸ μέτρα ψηλὸς καὶ πολὺ ἀδύνατος, σὰν τηλεγραφόξυλο. Πιστεύω λοιπὸν ὅτι οἱ περισσότερες γυναῖκες ἔχουν τὰ σκατὰ μέσα τους. Θεωρεῖ τώρα αὐτὴ ἢ βλαμμένη ὅτι τὸ ξυλάγγουρο πὺν ἔχει κοντὰ της, αὐτὸς ὁ ἄχαρος, εἶναι ὁ τύπος ὁ ἐξτρίμ;

Σκέφτομαι στὴν αὐτοβιογραφία μου νὰ βάλω τὸν τίτλο «Ἀναμνήσεις μιᾶς κακόγουστης ζωῆς». Γιατὶ ἀλλιῶς ξεκίνησα τὴ ζωὴ μου• πίστεψα σὲ ιδέες, σὲ μεγαλεῖα, σὲ ἀνθρώπους, καὶ στὸ τέλος κατάντησα ἀσθενῶν ἐπαίτης.

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(p. 101)

Ἐρευνῶ τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς κάθε γυναίκας συστηματικῶς. Εἶναι προβληματισμένο; Εἶναι χαμογελαστό; Εἶναι περιποιημένο; Ἔχει μιὰ ἔξαψη ἢ ἴσως μιὰ ἀλλοπρόσαλλη θλίψη; Μήπως ἡ λεγάμενη τὸ ἔχει πετάξει τελικὰ τὸ καπίστρι; Ἄμα τὴ βλέπεις ξυρισμένη στὰ φρύδια, νὰ ξέρεις ὅτι θὰ σὲ ξυρίσει. Ἐγγυημένα. Καταλαβαίνω πὰ μὲ τὴν πρώτη ἂν ἡ γυναίκα μὲ πλησιάζει γιὰ λεφτά, ἂν πραγματικὰ μὲ γουστάρει ἢ ἂν μὲ δουλεύει. Τὸ ξέρω. Εἶμαι περπατημένος.

...

(p. 234)

Χρόνο προσωπικὸ δὲν ἔχω καθόλου• τρέχω ὅλη μέρα, καὶ παρακαλῶ τὸ Θεὸ νὰ βρῶ μιὰ δουλειὰ νὰ στεριώσω, νὰ ξαλαφρώσω λίγο τὰ χρέη μου. Καὶ θέλω κάποια στιγμή, πρὶν κλείσω τὰ μάτια μου, νὰ φορέσω τὸ μοναχικὸ σχῆμα καὶ νὰ πάω στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος, σὲ μιὰ ὁμορφὴ καὶ ἡσυχὴ σκῆτη. Σὰν λύτρωση βλέπω τὸ μοναχικὸ ράσο, νὰ ἀπαλλαγῶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ ὀνομάζονται οἰκογένειά μου. Νὰ ἔχω τὸ κελάκι μου, τὴν ἡσυχία μου, γιὰ νὰ ζήσω ἐπιτέλους σὰν ἄνθρωπος. Γιατί ὁ ἄντρας, ὡς γνωστόν, μετὰ τὰ ἐξήντα θέλει τὴν ἡσυχία του. Ἐγώ, δυστυχῶς, ἔχω χάσει ἀρκετὰ χρόνια — βρέθηκα ὑπὸ τὴν ἐκμετάλλευση πορνιδίων καὶ στυγνῶν ἐργοδοτῶν. Ἦμουν κακορίζικος.

...

(p. 250)

Ἦ γιαγιά Χρυσοβαλαντία τὰ εἶχε χάσει στὸ τέλος.

Ὅποιος ἐρχόταν στὸ σπίτι μας τὸν ρωτοῦσε: «Νὰ σοῦ βγάλω μιὰ φωτογραφία;». Καὶ πρὶν προλάβει νὰ τῆς ἀπαντήσει, σήκωνε τὴ φούστα της καὶ τοῦ ἔδειχνε τὸ βρακί της.

Τὸ ἔκανε σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἐπισκέπτες μας ἀνεξαιρέτως. Γινόμασταν ρεζίλι. Εἰδικὰ ἂν εἶχε προλάβει, κρυφὰ ἀπ' τὴ μάνα μου, νὰ ξεβρακωθεῖ. Καὶ νὰ σκεφτεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι μᾶς ἐπισκέπτονταν τότε ἱερεῖς, ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ἐπίτροποι, στρατιωτικοὶ μὲ τὶς κυρίες τους. (Βέβαια, τὰ παιδιά τους κάναν πανηγύρι μὲ τὴ γιαγιά.)

Στὸ τέλος δὲ βάζαμε κανέναν στὸ σπίτι. Ὁ πατέρας ντρεπόταν γιὰ τὴ μάνα του καὶ ξέσπαγε στὴ μαμά. Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τὴν ἀναπαύσει, μᾶς δημιούργησε μεγάλο πρόβλημα στὰ τελευταῖα της.

Μ' ἔχουν πιάσει πάλι οἱ φοβίες μου. Ἄν πάρω κι ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴ γιαγιά μου; Ἄν τὸ ἔχω κι ἐγὼ στὰ γονιδιά μου; Τρέμω στὴν ἰδέα.

God is my witness

Makis Tsitas

Translated from the Greek by Irene Noel-Baker

(pp. 11-15)

There are four kinds of employer: successful ones, debtors, losers, and the insane. I got the fourth.

Often he spoke to me and I wondered if he knew it was me standing there or someone like me. Was I actually Chrysovalantis – his employee and friend – or my twin brother? Except I have no twin brother, just two sisters.

If ever we met in the lobby at work, he would tell me to “run up and get there first!”, then he would make a dash for the lift and shout “no cheating!” as it went up, and force me to run up eight floors counting the 144 steps out loud, while he yelled at me from inside the lift: “Run faster fatty! Where’s your get-up-and-go?”

His company closed at the end of 1980, and out of the blue I was jobless. I had been with him for 11 years, but sadly I was caught unawares, though my colleagues had been busy doing their own marketing for months and went straight on to work for other graphic designers. Naturally, I saw that the ship was going down, that things were going from bad to worse, that there was no future anymore, but I didn’t want to believe it. Old Nick was telling tales and I fell for it: “Let them all go, there’s no way you’ll be out of work.” That’s where I screwed up.

I saw myself grappling with myself in the mud. The two of us were swearing and trying to strangle one another. While simultaneously chanting the *Hymn of Kassiani*.

Then the two of us became another Chrysovalantis, a different one, whose name was Psychovalantis, and he shouted thrice, “this wind is choking me.” While from somewhere in the distance could be heard an aria from *Tosca*.

A peculiar dream.

I don't see myself as a beggar or a down-and-out. But neither do I see my parents being exploited by a third party, and in particular a bride-to-be.

My father is now 86-years-old, a retired officer, a family man, well read, a churchgoer. He leads a quiet life. He has always taken care of me, lent me money and helped me out.

He would always tell me to “be careful, be careful, be careful!” but I was a battered old pot without a lid. Anything that wanted to, got in. He was strict, my father, but not unyielding. Meaning that when I insisted, he would give in. Yes he would.

“Dad, I'm going to London, give me 100,000.” He gave it to me.

“Dad, I have a small overdraft at the bank.” He paid it off at once.

“Dad, I have to be admitted to hospital.” He rushed to sort it out.

He never said “no” to me about anything. Now that I think about it, he was all bark and no bite – I hadn't realised. I honour and respect him. Until I was 20, I was extremely afraid of him. Then I simply respected him, because he's been through such a lot. He's a man with experience of life. A father never wishes his child ill. He liked it that I was always in and out of monasteries and churches, he's a god-fearing man too.

All our family are.

When I was 18, and I got into the academy for non-commissioned officers in Trikala, he said, “Well done.” But when I chucked it in and left, because I couldn’t stand it anymore, he made no objection.

He never stood in my way. No he didn’t.

Maybe, I think, that’s why I haven’t left home yet, although I’m 50 now. Because I feel safe and secure.

I phoned a former colleague to wish her well on her Name Day, and ask if we might put a project together. She put the phone down on me, saying, “Chrysovalantis, you’ve caught me at the door, let’s talk another time.”

You see, the lady no longer has any need of me. She’s got a job for ‘Athens 2004’, earning 2,000 euros a month plus bonuses. But the party will be over soon and then we’ll see...

So many of them, old colleagues who’ve benefitted frequently from me in the past, are turning nasty now when I ask them for help. It’s the same with the small businesses. When I was with Nick, they were all over me to bring them work and now it’s dried up they pretend not to recognise me. Never mind, God will provide. I wish them well. That’s a saying I’ve got from my old man, I say “God will provide” and I even say “thank you” to people who have behaved badly to me, so that my conscience is clear. I try to listen to my old man as much as possible. He has told me what to do in life, how I should handle things so I don’t end up in an asylum.

When you fall on hard times, you find ways to get by without money. You want to get a free cup of coffee somewhere. You want to sit down somewhere and talk. I have done major research into penury.

Which is why every Sunday morning, after the service at Agia Eirini in Aiolou, I pass by the Anglican Church where they give out coffee. And if you go inside and follow their service, they present you with a religious book. In English, naturally (I may not speak the language, but no book is wasted on me).

I try to get by on the cheap. Yes I do.

...

(pp. 16-17)

But I regret it. God is my witness. I bitterly regret everything I have done. I want to leave it all behind me and start again.

I don't want lovers or tarts or prostitutes. I want to be close to God. And if He grants me a serious woman, then fine, I will happily join with her in holy matrimony. If he does not grant it so, and wants me to be a monk, that's fine too.

I've pushed away a lot of people, because I saw they have nothing to offer me. They are leaky buckets. Swindlers.

I want Him to hear me when I pray. Keep me away from temptation, Lord.

I would actually prefer to have fewer friends. Few but good. Calm, honest, I don't want to be smothered. I don't want them to give me an oxygen mask with one hand and spray me with tear gas with the other. What's the point, as soon as the mask breaks I'll suffocate. Which is where we've ended up. This, unfortunately, is the current Athenian mentality, that will not let us juggle our debts and our jobs. It pains my heart to say so.

...

(pp. 17-18)

Mr I and Mr T always call me over when they see me and offer me a drink. They have full wallets, they get big fat pensions, and they each take in five-six rental incomes. They know I have no money so they buy me drinks. The other day when they said “Come on over, Chrysovalantis, have a drink,” I started crying – I don’t know why. Most likely out of love.

They saw me again recently and called me over but I didn’t sit with them. I felt ashamed. To be 50 and have my drinks paid for by others. That’s what I’ve been reduced to by old Nick...

...

(pp. 90-92)

I would like, if possible, to be married within the year and have made my wife pregnant, to become a father soon. To have a sense of achievement, and I think the pudenda may be able to offer me that. I hope I’m not mistaken. I also want a home of my own to live in with my wife and child. It’s no good living with my parents and my sisters, it wouldn’t be proper. A home, small and humble, somewhere by the sea, between Athens and Corinth, or a little flat, even if it is only 50 square metres, in London.

I would like within those few square metres to build our life, our love, our dreams. If I found out that while I was away at work she had gone and had it off with someone else, I would have two choices: either to shut myself away in a monastery, or to go directly to a psychiatric hospital. And then maybe I’d make her regret her sinful deed. And generate in her, with my dignified attitude, a massive sense of guilt.

My whole life is one woman
one moment she's hotter than hot
the next she freezes me out.

When a woman falls into the sin of adultery, it means that she has gone past all the stages of repentance and arrived at corruption. In adultery, a man takes delight, whereas a woman sets the seal upon her vice. I would go to the psychiatric hospital for the sake of revenge, so that everyone would say: "I spit on you, worthless woman, you have driven the man mad." To the monastery I would go more for my own peace of mind, so that I could forget her. Because I do believe that when you sit down and tell a little old man in a worn cassock your pain, then God will offer you spiritual peace.

On the question of age, there are certain traditions I cannot overcome. In other words, I would like my wife to be at least 10 or 15 years younger than me. Even a greater age difference wouldn't bother me, and let them all say, "There goes granddad with his bit of skirt." Anyway, Marinaki was truly a nice bit of skirt – as good as any model. Whereas Roro was not all that lovely, but you could get it up for her. You could feel the woman in her from a long way off, she sent out signals. That doesn't mean that women who dress up somewhat are sluts and all the others are good. Let there be no mistake: even Megaera, who wore conservative twinsets, was the soul of prostitution. And old Nick's wife always dressed decently, but at heart she was a snake.

My friend X told me that he saw Roro with her new man, who is so unattractive one wonders how she can bear to go out with him. Two metres tall and thin as a telegraph pole. Consequently, I believe that most women are full of shit. Does that halfwit really think the scarecrow she has with her, that ugly mug, is such a big deal?

I am thinking of making the title of my autobiography, *Memoirs of a Tawdry Life*. Because I didn't begin my life like this. I believed in ideas, in greatness, in people, and I ended up a worthless nobody.

...

(p. 101)

I study the face of every woman, methodically. Is she troubled? Is she cheerful? Is she nicely made up? Does she breath vitality or an unaccountable melancholy? Has the woman in question finally thrown down the reins? If you see that she's shaved her eyebrows, you know that she will shave you. Guaranteed. I can tell straight away if a woman is approaching me for money, if she really fancies me or is just having me on. I can tell. I've been around.

...

(p. 234)

Time for myself I don't have at all. I run around all day, and pray to God that I'll be able to hold down a job, to lighten my debts a little. And some time, before I lay me down finally, I would like to wear a monk's habit and go to the Holy Mountain, to a beautiful and peaceful hermitage. The monk's habit I see as a deliverance, a refuge from the people who call themselves my family. Just to have my little cell, my peace and quiet, so that I can finally live like a human being. I have, unfortunately, wasted too many years – I have been taken advantage of by whores and ruthless employers. I was born unlucky.

...

(p. 250)

Grandmother Chrysovalantia had lost it by the end.

Whenever anyone came to our house, she would ask: “May I take your photograph?” And before they had a chance to answer, she would lift up her skirt and show them her knickers.

She did it to all our visitors without exception. We became a joke. Especially if she’d managed, without my mother noticing, to take off her knickers. And to think that at that time we were being visited by priests, church committees, military men and their wives (of course, their children had a whale of a time with Grandma).

By the end, we didn’t let anyone into the house. Dad was embarrassed by Grandma and took it out on Mum. God rest her soul, she created huge problems for us by the end.

I’m having panic attacks again. What if I take after Grandma? What if I have it in my genes? I tremble at the thought.



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God is my witness

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EUPL / FEP-FEE – Rue Montoyer, 31 – B-1000 Brussels – T. +32 (0)2 770.11.10
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