

## Kostas Kartelias

### Odyssey

#### Beside the Sea

I'll stay beside the sea so I can open  
a horizon in the depths of my soul  
and I'll keep a fire locked in my breast  
so I can have a sign of return  
to an Ithaca that I must come back to  
by a whole lifetime's journey.

I fear the fury of Poseidon  
I fear the anger of the winds  
I grow cold alone in winter  
but I love you and I have something to hold on to.

Embroider a sheet so you can spread it  
on the bed for us to lie on when I return.  
With a single look, understand all I went through,  
calm the wildness in my soul,  
and if I sleep, hold me in your embrace.  
Don't ask, they have no end, no beginning.

#### The Song of the Companions

Alone  
we'll travel into danger.  
The open sea awaits us.  
It is our fate  
not to fit anywhere  
not to find a shore  
to drop anchor.

For ever  
this unquenchable heart of ours  
placed our hands on the tiller.  
With our soul filling the sails  
we will leave  
for the sake of a love.

Ithaca,  
for us the open sea  
the harbors filled with suitors.  
The world always  
finds a new king  
and we lonely poets  
will remain.

### Shipwreck

Ah, sea, when you wake  
at the waning moon  
rock me gently  
so shadow doesn't fall on me  
because my sleep is deep  
from all I have been through.

I count the waves for days,  
by night I tame them.  
The wind blows from the north, from the south  
and I sail the seas  
to find a harbor to stay,  
a little island to disembark.

Ah, my sea that speaks  
the language of shells,  
take my torments away  
and turn them to laments  
because the pain of the heart  
cannot be told in words.

#### Song of the Sirens

I'm leaving secretly,  
a trick has wounded me.  
Like the children now that the wind  
blows a song that seems  
as if it will never end  
and on a sea that takes me far away.  
When the ocean decides to sing  
there is so much music to bear,  
a thousand voices so you don't know  
what to choose, and there is no mast  
to be tied to, and no rope.  
I'll go high with my wings  
that I'll spread  
on the strange islands of paradise.  
Untie your hair so I can see you, know you.  
Untie your hair so I can see you in the dark.  
Untie your hair so I can see you, know you  
in the blind alleys of the world  
in the endless desert of the world.  
Untie your hair so I can come and speak to you.

### **In the Underworld**

Alive, I walked in Hades  
and I have lived in the darkness of night.  
I've drunk with angels night after night  
and become a close friend of demons.

In the Underworld, the pariah they call it,  
there are men with true hearts,  
there are eyes that burn you when they overflow  
with tears that drip fire.

I was bound to the fire of the world  
I'm tired of the filth of society.  
and all those who denied me and judged me  
have darkness and poison in their hearts.

### **To Calypso**

Like a player dealing the cards  
without a stroke of luck in the whole game  
you ask me to stake all on a single hand  
and I stake my life on a royal flush.

Don't keep me in your arms by magic,  
set me free to leave, even if I am lost.  
When she rolled the dice, my fate  
had argued with God that morning.

So don't ask me to stay and save myself,  
don't try to keep me here with tricks.  
I've got used to hanging around in the streets  
and you're looking for a shoulder to lean on.

Like a beast in a cage  
that looks at you with two sad eyes  
you think you're saving its life  
but it's wasting away every day.

### **Beautiful Helen**

The neighborhood is not big enough  
for us, we must set sail.  
What was that sudden thing?  
Who expected it?  
She was married,  
beautiful Helen

They'll pay dearly for it;  
the joke is over.  
Forgive us, they'll ask.  
They'll see what she means...  
the cursed,  
beautiful Helen.

What if it's rumored everywhere  
that she went of her own accord.  
We'll say as relatives  
as jilted lovers  
that she didn't want to,  
beautiful Helen.

### **Circe**

Like Circe the witch, like the cursed night,  
like a bat that sucks my blood  
you take whatever truth I have in me  
to wrap in lies and sell.

You can't bear the mirror of your soul  
and so you try to look into my eyes.  
I am the alibi for this guilt of yours,  
the innocent mask you want to wear.

In the beginning I believed you loved me  
but you only love your emptiness.  
Be off with you then, to what you always served  
and let me be - you owe me nothing.

### **Like a Beast**

I'll become a wind to hunt you in the straits  
and snatch your skirt to lift it up.  
When you escape I'll be angry with my own rage  
like a beast that gets savage when it's in pain.

My desire is a river of fire  
that turns to lava and is only quenched  
by the sea  
of your black hair.

I'll start a dance with my bare feet  
in your eyes that burn with fire.  
Our sweating bodies will struggle,  
we'll quench fire with fire.

### **The Love God**

The love god  
swims  
in the light,  
high noon in the Aegean  
and a July madness touches us,  
secret whispers on the beach  
with two kisses.

The life witch  
gambles our years  
to and fro  
for a moment.  
And trying to find  
the beginning,  
we put an end to the journey  
with two kisses.

### Sea Witch

Sea witch,  
how I loved you.  
You my mother and I your child.  
The beginning of time,  
unseen thread.  
Fate that bound me to you.

And I want to be with you always  
and not forget to remember  
that the moment will come  
when a sail appears.  
And I must be ready to leave.  
And I want to be near you always  
and not to forget to remember  
in bottomless waters  
on unknown islands  
where the years are measured differently.

Sea witch  
take me far away,  
there, as far as the eye can see,  
there where the sky  
guards the ocean  
and the sun dyes it red.

### To Nausica

What I stole from you I hid well  
in the caves of my mind,  
in my heart.  
so my soul would have sensual perfumes  
so my dreams could smell your name.

Dreams have such smells that you say:  
I'll become a thief to steal scents.

Don't cry to the lover, don't abase yourself,  
you can't take back your kisses  
from the thief.  
Only keep the moment to remember  
when you told him whatever I have  
is yours.

### Penelope's Song

I sat alone again tonight in the dark  
and I strained to hear the words they made up  
through the years,  
a sound that remains as music  
and breathes.  
In the songs that we love  
each night we suffer;  
in the songs that carry us  
to all that we don't forget  
like boats traveling  
to our own celebrations.

I heard my story from the lyrics  
and I remembered people in other times  
in other places.  
An "Ah!" that kills us  
an "Ah!" that rescues us  
the truth of our love  
the tales of life  
the moons of love  
and the darkness of passion.  
The hardness of Hades  
and your sweetest caress  
in the songs that are stars  
in the songs that are knives.

### Without Identity

I exist without identity or name  
among people just like me  
and my small, threatened dreams  
I sign with a cross on the earth.

The only thing I remember is where I'm going  
in the crowd in a city I don't know.  
I carry the loneliness of my existence  
from bench to bench where I sleep.

Someone pointed to me and called my name  
but I didn't turn around at all to look  
because in this city I knew nobody  
because in this city I was Nobody.

(Translated by Gail Holst-Warhaft)