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Evening Walk Yannis Ritsos

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Yannis Ritsos

EVENING WALK

Houses have their secrets. They signal back and forth by means of colors, carvings, windows, anthemions, chimneys in the most unlikely and suggestive postures. Stepping out my door, I catch them talking in whispers. They immediately fall silent, and their facades turn serious, as if a stranger had barged in on an intimate gathering. They wear the displeased expression of a man interrupted while drinking his tea, the hand holding the teacup arrested a little below chin-level. Just so the streets. No sooner do they see me coming than they hurriedly seal up their secrets, now under the traffic-lights at the corner, now under the few pepper trees, now in the shadow of a parked truck. They remind me of the huge buffet in the house I grew up in. It was always kept locked. Behind the fine cut glass, which reflected the bright squares of the windows in miniature, I could sense the delicate liqueur glasses, the little silver spoons that were brought out only for special guests, a giant fork for serving caviar, the porcelain, the jars full of candied oranges, and something else, I don't remember, they never let me see it, on the top shelf, I was so small I couldn't reach that high, not even the time I pulled over a chair and climbed up, one afternoon when mother was out and they'd left the buffet unlocked. "Good evening, Ariosto, how are you?" I hear an oddly gentle voice. It's a colleague from the office. His voice feels sorry for me. I can see in his eyes how sad and unshaven I look. The sunset flashes on balcony railings and in windows, at once lugubrious and magnificent. And I am like a man whose wife left him the day before, and he walks the street knowing that his house is locked, that its rooms are empty, that a fine layer of dust is forming along the backs of the furniture, and all that's left, on the arm of the sofa, are her worn, tan gloves, which she forgot at the last moment. Yet the evening spills over with colors—yellow, pink, cobalt, deep purple, and a gold chalice filled with warm water. I dip my fingers in the water. I wipe them on a piece of white cloth. I raise the chalice. Now I can hold services all alone in the world.

Translated from the Greek by **Martin McKinsey**