



A LONG DAY'S EVENING

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A large, light gray stylized figure with its arms raised, holding a circular object. The figure is positioned behind the title and author information.

A LONG DAY'S EVENING

Bilge Karasu

Translated from the Turkish
by Aron Aji and Fred Stark

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A small, black stylized figure with its arms raised, positioned at the end of the word "Lights".

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BY WAY OF A PREFACE

A Long Day's Evening is one of those rare works that alter a nation's literature; with it, Bilge Karasu introduced a remarkable dose of freedom and experimentalism into Turkish fiction. Nothing quite like it had been written before in Turkish, and much of the noteworthy fiction published since bears traces of it. A reader in six languages and translator from several, Karasu was richly cosmopolitan, achieving a deft synthesis between international and local narrative modes. Turkey's Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk is often cast among the likes of Calvino, Rushdie, Eco, and rightfully so; yet Pamuk's postmodern playfulness, polyphonic narratives, and genre-crossing also have much in common with the work of Karasu, arguably the first Turkish postmodernist.

Originally published in 1971, *A Long Day's Evening* contains three narratives held together by several thematic dualities — among them, faith/creed, truth/dogma, image/signification, freedom/loyalty, liberation/oppression. The book is made of two conspicuously unequal parts. The first part has two sections ("Island" and "Hill") narrated from the point of view of two Byzantine monks, Andronikos and Ioakim, each of whom endures a wrenching crisis of faith during the period of iconoclasm, when their mode of worship is forbidden by decree. The common plot elements, the relationship between the two

monks, and the overlapping time frames cast these two stories as a single coherent narrative, told from two perspectives. The second part (“The Mulberry Trees”) is quite different, a brief, self-contained story set against the more familiar backdrop of twentieth-century intellectual history. Suggestively autobiographical, the story focuses on an author writing in the 1960s. That decade had begun with a military coup in Turkey, an event that was seen then and for some years afterward as a liberation, because it toppled a government considered oppressive by many people, especially students. The paradox of liberation by force — a scenario that has been repeated in Turkey at least twice since — inevitably sends us back to the Byzantine Emperor Leo III’s terror, ostensibly aimed at freeing Christians from idol worship and affirming true faith.

Because the political tenor of the third story is considerably more somber, Turkish scholars have at times asserted that “Island” and “Hill” ought to be read separately, and some have even expressed regret that Karasu chose to include “The Mulberry Trees” in *A Long Day’s Evening*. Yet it is certainly possible — I want to say, necessary — to approach the book in its totality. Each of Karasu’s major works contains narratives that appear to have been created in overlapping time frames across several books. As such, the book proper presents itself as a studiously constructed and reconstructed artifice that renders its invention process integral to its scope. Moreover, the three narratives in *A Long Day’s Evening* unfold, quite beautifully, in a sonata form: Andronikos and Ioakim are the “movements” through which the major themes are developed, and the last fifteen pages serve as a striking — and unsettling — coda that transforms the historical novel into a fascinating act of self-interrogation through invented others.

A Long Day's Evening can be read as Karasu's companion to the crisis-of-faith literature penned by many authors whom he admired: Dostoevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*), Kafka (*The Castle*), Yourcenar (*The Abyss and Memoirs of Hadrian*), Camus (*The Fall*), Céline (*Journey to the End of the Night*), Mishima (*Patriotism*), and O'Neill (*A Long Day's Journey into Night*) — the book's title in Turkish is nearly identical to those by O'Neill and Céline. The meaning of the names Karasu gives his monks, Andronikos (man victorious) and Ioakim (God's chosen), inevitably alludes to the conflict between humanism and dogma central to all these works.

The emergence of a literary text means that, first, its language has been made to express that text. . . . Literature is . . . the memory of language. I am not saying the memory of individuals, it's the memory of language.

— Bilge Karasu

For Karasu, a dynamic correspondence exists between language and the literary text, as language shapes and takes shape inside the literary artifice. Meaning materializes in and through language. Things, ideas, emotions, experienced in inchoate form in ordinary lives, germinate, ripen and find their most authentic reality in and through language, which itself is consciously developed in order to express this reality. Karasu's language — complete with deep structures, metaphoric resonance, inner rhythms and sounds — effects a mode of expression to correspond as closely as possible to one's mode of thinking and meaning-making. His unconventional form and syntax (fragments, extended run-ons, indented clauses, dispersed paragraphs,

and so on) are intended to capture the moods, rhythms, and pace of an acutely self-conscious imagination in search of self-understanding. The stories in *A Long Day's Evening* begin with the plainest conversational language, and gradually acquire an almost operatic quality as the themes interweave and the language mirrors their complexity. To find correct English correspondences requires not only grasping the idiosyncrasies of Karasu's language but also somehow *inhabiting* the existential space created simultaneously by that language.

One example: In the original, the common conjunction *ve* (*and*) is absent. On one level, the omission has to do with the Arabic root of the word, and Karasu's rejection of vocabulary borrowed from other languages. However, this gesture carries an existential significance as well: Particularly in the first two stories, the Byzantine world being described is overwhelmed by imperial edicts that separate, that divide individuals from each other, from their kinship groups, their beliefs, their homeland; the crisis of faith effected by the prohibition against icons ultimately divides the very self, alienating the person from his values, faith, thoughts. In this light, the absence of *ve* reinforces the severe isolation of individuals. To re-create this existential dimension, I chose not to use *and* throughout "Island" and "Hill," which also helped to heighten the introverted, meditative character of the narratives.

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It is true that the twentieth century, saddled with the ruins of the nineteenth century, has become an era much debated by people who have found, exposed, interrogated the wrongs of the past, who have attempted to acknowledge, to imagine, to construe new ways to acknowledge, those wrongs; but

regrettably, it appears to have failed to do, all the way into its last years, anything other than exhibit over and over examples of the bloodiest, the most ruthless, the most senseless treatment of the other. Technological progress, even in the areas where it seems the most useful, can become another name for oppressing the other, inflicting on him unimaginable agonies.

In these pieces, I am trying to understand. I am as much us as the other, we are, we all are, us as much as the other. I am trying to understand us, what separates us from the other. That's all.

— Bilge Karasu, Preface to *Other Writings*

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Loyalty, personal identity, otherness, belonging, freedom, authenticity — these are also deeply relevant to Karasu's personal history, as he was born to an Eastern Orthodox mother and a Jewish father. In his lifetime, Karasu refused to describe himself as anything other than a citizen of the modern Turkish Republic, and insisted on being known by his pen name. However, it is very difficult to experience the world of *A Long Day's Evening* — one steeped in questions of faith and otherness — and to resist acknowledging Bilge Karasu's own liminality.

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A Long Day's Evening was the first book I was given to translate. Seventeen years and many other translations later — including Karasu's *Death in Troy* and *The Garden of Departed Cats* — this particular evening has now arrived. I am indebted to Müge Gürsoy Sökmen, Karasu's Turkish publisher, for her stubborn faith and encouragement. This

project was generously supported by a National Endowment for the Arts Translation Fellowship. I also thank my colleagues at St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa, and the students and faculty in the University of Iowa's MFA in Translation program for their continued support. A most sincere thanks to Elaine Katzenberger of City Lights, not only for her wonderful edits and insights but also for her continued interest in Turkish literature. And I gratefully acknowledge Fred Stark, a good friend of Karasu, and a superb translator, who agreed to share the pages of this book with me — he is the translator of the book's third section. Not having known Karasu in his lifetime has been one of my enduring regrets; yet his books have certainly carried me into many beautiful friendships. This book is dedicated to all of them.

— Aron Aji

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A LONG DAY'S EVENING

Translated by Aron Aji

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ISLAND

He turns to look ahead. He must be getting close to the island, since the dark imposing mass of its rocky peak has grown more distinct in the advancing dawn. His exhausted arms pull the oars with the numbed ease of a body that has grown indifferent to thought or will. He can hardly hear sounds. The oars plunge into the water, withdraw, plunge again; the sea tears open, yielding to the boat, mends itself in the morning calm.

He turns to look again. The island, getting larger as he approaches, appears to shrink in the glow of the sun rising from behind it. The first rays are about to touch the surface of the sea. A soft breeze makes Andronikos shiver, carrying the whisper, the scent of pine needles from the island. It has been a very long time since he experienced a new scent, different from everyday scents or even last night's smell of fish, seaweed, salt. . . . Still, Andronikos has no time to enjoy such distractions, though his soul craves them. He knows it shouldn't but can't say why. An indistinct grin settles on his lips, which would have been considered a smile of sorts in the monastery, in Byzantium. Once upon a time, when he used to belong to a community, more precisely, until yesterday — when he finally realized that he had made himself believe all along, that he had deceived himself into thinking that he believed he belonged to a community. No, it wasn't yesterday but the

day before. Morning is breaking; yesterday is already more than a day ago.

From now on, he'll have time. Abundant time. To die, to live, to experience new things. . . . In fact, so much time that it will have no intrinsic meaning or value. How best to use this time? He ought to do something. Perhaps create something. Yet to create, to find the strength to create something. . . .

Andronikos laughs. He still can't resist the seduction of such nonsense, such absurd reasoning. This deceptive, good for nothing, impotent. . . .

No, not impotent. Such reasoning shouldn't even be called impotent. He shouldn't forget that he accepted impotence from the start. So that he could use the word "love" often, freely, with dizzying abandon, until he made believers of others, made them nauseous with his play on words, until he convinced himself, too, that love is the mainmast of the universe, he accepted impotence from the start. . . .

He releases the oars to keep his palms from bleeding too much. How often he has had to release them since the start of his journey, he's lost count. (Why even count? He should stop counting at least for now.) He plunges his hands into the water. He can hardly feel his battered palms, as though they're not his, except for their pain, a sharp, hissing pain — like water spilled in scalding oil.

This, too, will pass, he thinks, this exertion at the oars. Soon he'll have to carry stones. For the next few days or just hours perhaps. He doesn't know.

Yet to create something, one must first believe. Above all else, believe. . . .

He is caught in the snare of impotence, worse still, in the void of his circuitous thinking. But what if he is? What would be the harm, given that being caught or being free have become equally meaningless now? Even if he were willing to relive the past two days, even if he were to

descend again into the swamp to start over, Andronikos would still fall prey to his reasoning. . . . Impotent or not.

He is thirty-three years old. The same age as the peasant who at the end of his life was nailed to a cross on a hill in Palestine, unaware that he had changed the world. . . .

But Andronikos shouldn't be thinking of him at all. So much has happened, so much is happening still, it seems, on account of the crucified one. No use in deception. Events are happening not because of the one on the cross, but because of the strife among his believers on both sides who equally believe that they are his true believers.

What's the use of assigning blame? Today, of all days. . . .

He settles back to his impotence.

Now the sun ushers in a soft breeze, combing the water. He can see the sea floor glistening under the deep, resonant shade of green — like glass, like fresh fruit, like ice. Exhausted, Andronikos doesn't want to turn his head to see that the island is saturated with the ever more intense sunlight. He knows that it is, he doesn't want to look. Although the air is getting warmer, he feels a slight chill, the residue of last night's cold that is only beginning to subside with the rising sun. Andronikos is pleased with himself. It's good to take note of real, tangible details, small sensations like these that keep one distracted. He shouldn't fall asleep yet.

The water turns dark suddenly, assuming a deeper shade of green with streaks of black, yellow. Andronikos pulls in the oars. He's not a sailor; one could almost say that he learned to use the oars during the passage last night. But when the water turns dark, one pulls the oars in — a bit of common knowledge that requires no prior experience or reasoning.

The undulant weeds spread out like flower stems, rising to the surface. Now the rocks emerge. It's time to look behind to figure out where to bring the boat ashore.

He steers slowly, cautiously, in order to avoid grounding the boat. He's not familiar with the rest of the shoreline, but here, on the island's west side, the shore is quite rocky. What matters is that he has arrived. The water swells almost imperceptibly. He stands up; the boat wobbles. There's a narrow clearing among the rocks — visible under the water — leading to a gravel bank. He'll try to follow the clearing.

Darkness lifts as the island's once looming shadow recedes with the rising sun. Close to its edge, the water gives way to gravel. From beneath the boat comes a rasping sound, at first faint, then harsher, like wood being forced against its grain. Andronikos is unsure whether he should use the oars since he doesn't want to damage the boat; he decides it would be safer to get into the water instead.

He lifts his robe, puts one foot in the water. It's cold. He laughs, amused by his sense of decorum, then lets his robe fall in the water. Carefully, he manages to bring his other foot over the edge without tilting the boat too much. Then he plunges in. It's deeper than he estimated, deeper than it looked. The seabed feels slippery; seeking flat rocks with his toes, he tries to move forward step by cautious step, pulling the boat along. The water feels warmer now that his legs have gotten used to it. His robe that first swirled around his waist then clung to his knees now clings to his calves.

He emerges from the water, hauling the boat, its bottom grating the rough sea floor. The stones hurt his feet. These are large, round, flat stones; even so, walking on them is not easy. . . . Andronikos keeps pulling the boat away from the water, far enough that the waves won't sweep it against the large rocks. The safest would be to move it up to the higher end of the shore. He pulls, pushes, drags, struggling to avoid damaging the boat. Now he gathers up his provisions, his shoes, his rope, his knife, the

hammer he bought two days ago in the market, his chisel, the ax. Then the round of cheese, the flour sack, his jar of honey. . . .

Staring at the not-insignificant pile of his belongings, he laughs again. Will he find water? He must. He places the oars inside the boat, which he thinks will be safe here. If it rains, the rocks rising high above the boat will shelter it, channel the rainwater away from it. The elevated pebble shore will bar the tides or threatening waves. Pirates? If they come, they come: Andronikos can do nothing against them. Best to leave the boat here, he decides.

He puts everything he's just piled on the ground into in his sack. Putting on his shoes, he wraps the laces around his ankles once, then ties them. He'll leave the sack behind. He can come back for it later. First, he has to find a path, perhaps tracks, water. . . .

He tucks the sack under the boat, just in case. But he may need the knife, the rope. He pulls the sack out, unties it; taking out his knife, the rope, he pushes the sack back under the boat. The knife's handle has a ring through which he passes the rope; he ties the rope around his waist. His hands are free. For a very long time, his hands haven't felt as free, as liberated. . . .

When he wasn't holding the cross, he was holding the icons, the censer or the hands of the blind, the cripples, the children, their mouths, their lips, candles, bibles, rosaries. . . . The oars, sleepless, invincible oars.

He shakes himself. It's not time to fall asleep. He scans his surroundings. The rocks are too steep, yet he must climb them, open a path for himself. He can't remain on the shore. He has to climb the hill. Whatever way he can find to do it.

Above the hill the sky is luminous. He decides to turn right, since to his left the rocks looming over the boat appear discouraging. Even if he starts climbing, he won't

be able to get very far, since he can't see even a single crack to grip or use as a foothold. To his right, perhaps, there is a way. . . .

He walks the narrow arc of the pebbled shore, alongside the tall cliff, until he can go no further when he finds himself standing at the mouth of an inlet. Wedged between tall rocks, the water heaves toward what appears to be a hole. His eyes fixed on this hole, Andronikos notes that it isn't entirely submerged. He removes his shoes, lays them high on a rock, throws himself into the water. His feet hurt as if burned; each time he moves them, a wisp of blood mixes with the water. What he did was foolish. He should have noticed the jagged lime deposits, the sharp shells covering the rocks. He's more careful now, but it's already too late. . . . The salt water soothes his cuts. He moves cautiously. The rocky sea floor begins to narrow. He should untie the rope around his waist, disrobe, dive in naked to bathe his whole body. He lays his robe to dry on the shore, securing it with a stone. . . .

He crawls into the water carefully, to avoid hurting his knees, palms, belly. Soon he reaches the mouth of the hole. He has to decide whether to go in. He'll try it.

He listens. Each time the water heaves through the opening, he hears reverberations in the distance. Maybe the hole leads to a cave. He should try going in. When he was a child, in the years before he entered the monastery, he used to go outside the city walls to swim with other neighborhood children. He had learned how to swim well, how to dive. Now he's about to do something he hasn't done for years.

Taking a deep breath, he plunges through the opening. Seaweed brushes against his belly, his thighs. There are no shells. As the opening narrows, he has to stretch his arms over his head in order to pass through. But he can't. He's out of breath. He shouldn't drown. He has to

go back. Back, farther back, faster. . . . Until he's surrounded by light. He thrusts his head above the water. Feeling dizzy, he takes another deep breath, dives again. This time, he stretches his arms farther. Gripping the rocks, he pulls his body through the narrow opening. He knows he won't survive if the surface is rough. But it isn't. His hands come out of the water, then his head emerges. He stands up. Inside an immense cave.

The entire space is drenched in translucent green. In the center of the cave is a pool, its water the deepest shade of aquamarine, its bottom coated with slick, soft, immaculate white stones. Sitting on the edge, Andronikos scans the surroundings. One could live here for a while. But the difficulty of access makes the idea uninviting. Besides, he is neither running away nor afraid. Why should he stay here?

The water was warmer. Andronikos begins to feel cold. Perhaps because he hasn't slept yet. He has to stay awake for a while longer. He's not sure where the light is coming from. A certain amount is seeping through the opening, but the actual source of this breathtaking translucent green has to be some place else. Perhaps there's another opening. Another mouth, another inlet, another. . . .

He gets back into the water, takes a deep breath, then dives. His arms moving more freely this time, he passes through the opening. Crawling briefly, he comes out of the water. The sun has risen. The air feels warm. He wipes the water off his naked body with his hands. He picks up his robe from the rock. It has dried. Good. Very good. He feels invigorated. I should come down to swim every morning, he thinks, then catches himself: In order to come down, one must first climb up. . . .

He scans the tall rocks surrounding this end of the pebbled shore. In the past, the nobles of the city used to come to this island for excursions. The regal, splendid boats probably didn't moor on this side of the island, even

though it's closest to the city. Maybe today he should rest. Tomorrow he can row to the other side to search for an old trail to climb the hill. Whatever it takes, he ought to climb the hill. From the top, he'll be able to see the entire island, perhaps spot a building once used by the courtiers who entertained on the island. Even among ruins, it's conceivable that he'll find a habitable corner. Or bricks or tiles he can use. Andronikos isn't sure. Others may have found shelter in those ruins, or fishermen might have settled there. Still, not too many people would take the trouble to climb the hill. Andronikos decides he'll try.

He puts on his shoes. Right above the cave, he sees a flat rock that will receive his first step.

The sun has risen further. His back is burning. He must reach the pine grove, whatever it takes. His exhausted body won't endure the heat.

One could sleep under the pines, even eat a morsel of bread. Sometime last night, he had torn off a piece of the loaf, chewed it for a long while. He hasn't put anything in his mouth since then.

Once he's standing on the rock, the climb seems more manageable. Right above, he spots another flat rock like the one under his feet. Each time his hands try to grip the surface, rock fragments crumble down. It's impossible to hold onto the soil. Maybe if he scratched it with his knife? The soil slowly yielding to the blade's tip, a notch begins to emerge. He needs to dig deeper before he can close his hand on it. His knees begin to sting. If he can find another notch, he'll pull himself up. Some more exertion. . . . He grabs an exposed root. The rest gets easier. Andronikos is amazed at himself when he reaches the next flat rock. He wasn't sure that he would be able to.

From here on, the slope is less steep; he's able to reach the top of the cliff by crawling on his knees along a path covered with dried pine needles. One can't be too careful

with them. Soon he's standing among the trees. They look like black candles grown soft with heat, bent, twisted. A grove of giant candles with broad, sprawling flames, dark green. . . . He keeps walking. The ground is almost level now but still slippery. If he loses his footing, he'll grab onto tree trunks or roots. He has enough bread in his pocket to curb his hunger, at least for a while. The piece left over from last night. Later, he'll have to descend for provisions. The thought of descending discourages him. But he'll deal with it later; for now, he needs to think of nothing else but climbing. That is, he needs to find a way, or make a path, to continue climbing.

A light breeze under the trees. The faint noise of the grove humming lightly in the breeze. Pine scent. But unlike that of a few trees scattered around a garden, it's the sharp, overpowering redolence of pines stretching farther than his gaze can contain, covering all the space that is not the sea. Unable to withstand it, he lowers his body, leans his back against a tree. The breeze isn't cool but hot, fragrant. Yet he does feel a certain coolness on his skin. Never forget the sea, he says to himself. He hears his voice — faint, reluctant. He needs to get used to hearing it. Even alone, he needs to get used to being heard. He needs to remember, to revive everything that the monastery called upon him to forget. Even if he has to live like those monks who endured the pious ordeal of solitude on this island, three hundred, four hundred years ago. Their faith never wavered, whether they lived on the hilltop, in the wilderness or the desert. At least that's what people believed.

Was it so in reality? Or was it the belief itself that satisfied the ones who chose to stay behind in the villages or in the city, those whose lives depended on the company of others because they couldn't be weaned from the sedative of multitudes? No one knew. In the monastery, some of the hermits were transformed into legends. The power

of their faith was believed to have conquered mountains, fierce beasts, the devil. . . . Still, there ought to have been among them more than a few who, bewildered by loneliness, mistook dreams for reality, eagerly accepted their own voice, their own shadow, as signs of other, immaterial beings. How else could one explain the countless legends about monks encountering the devil, battling him on mountain peaks, in the middle of deserts?

Why were people worried about the devil, who was never seen in crowded cities where no one could walk without stepping on another's foot?

Andronikos thinks it's not time to pursue such questions. First he needs to survey the area, inspect, get to know his surroundings. . . .

Somehow, it occurs to him that what the mathematicians call zero is utterly — and unexpectedly — different from all the terms he has invoked until now when thinking of nothingness. God alone was able to transform chaos into order. But human beings have had to overcome zero, by one, by two, by three. . . . The forest surrounding him now is zero. His task is to arrive at one, two, three, departing from this zero. . . . To arrange one thing after another, to decipher something as far as his strength, his mind, his humanity might allow. . . .

Not long ago, he was able to resist thinking in terms of imperatives; he's determined to resist it still. He raises himself from the ground, looks up, notices that the trees become sparser on the hill. Where he stands now, they seem densely clustered, they protect one another. Perhaps he's wrong. Still, more light seems to penetrate the trees in the distance. . . . He'll see when he reaches the top of the hill.

He climbs. The sun has risen; its rays reach him through openings in the trees. Walking eastward, he estimates that noon is three hours or so away. It's neither early

nor late. But if he wants to eat or perhaps rest awhile, he has to climb, descend to the shore, then climb again. There is no other way.

He tears off a piece of the bread he's been carrying in his pocket, puts it into his mouth, but only to chew it. He would run out of breath if he ate while climbing. He must pace himself, climb neither too slowly nor too quickly. He has to match the rhythm of the climb with the rhythm of his heart, his temples, his pulse. The singular, unending rhythm that God placed inside human beings. Changing but unending rhythm. Ending would mean only one thing, not two.

Death is useless, empty. Andronikos forgets the morsel in his mouth. Death must be avoided at all cost, unless the inner rhythm falters, unless God decides to stop what He put in motion, in which case nothing can be done. But if a mortal hand lunges at your body to choke that rhythm, then you can only do one thing. Grab that hand, bend that wrist with all the strength you can muster, if necessary, cut it off. No hand should have a right to another's life. Or, Andronikos reconsiders, you can do one other thing. Escape. As he's doing now. Because he doesn't have enough strength to bend that wrist, because he doesn't have enough faith to help him find the strength. . . . Escape. . . .

Once again conscious of the morsel in his mouth, Andronikos bites into the spongy lump swollen with saliva, feeling its unsavory warmth against his palate. The tree trunks are beautiful. Solid, dark, fragrant. They no longer remind him of candles melting in the heat. Neither, for that matter, of his need to find firewood. He delights in the scabrous layers upon layers of membrane-thin bark — like islets scattered among lagoons — that appear soft to the eye . . . along the deep cracks, gleaming — though slightly cloudy — trickles of pungent resin. . . .

He ought to think of the pine trees along with the

fallen pinecones — cracked, cracking, yet to crack — along with the needles that carpet the ground. The pine isn't just a tree; it's nature itself, an entire life cycle, earth beneath, sky above. Scattered among the blackened, dried-out pinecones are green ones, inexplicably fallen — incipient lives, interrupted dreams. . . . As long as it's the harsh wind or the sun rather than anything else that has caused their fall. As long as no hand has plucked them from the branches. . . .

He considers tearing off another piece of the bread, but decides to wait. It's laughable to be concerned about pinecones when wheat gets plowed, lambs are slaughtered. The pinecone, too, could be useful at times; so if you can't find one on the ground, you pluck it. Humans are sovereign, are they not? Has God not created everything to sustain human life? The senile aside, no one would dispute this most basic fact, Andronikos thinks. He wants to consider disputing it. He fails. Nevertheless, he has allowed the question to enter his mind. He closes his eyes, wants to think of something else instead. Because if one can dispute this most basic fact, then what remains? Surely, there would still be no justification for humans exploiting other humans. It's utterly indefensible.

God did not create humans for them to become each other's playthings. True, but what if it pleases us to think otherwise, with the pride the devil has instilled in us. . . . His temples throbbing, Andronikos realizes that he hasn't drunk water for hours. But his clay pitcher is still on the shore, inside the boat. . . . The water in the pitcher would last him for two days, three at the most. After that, it would become stale, infested. Andronikos had filled his pitcher at the well in the center of the village where he'd obtained the boat. It would be difficult to ration water in this heat. He should have thought sooner about finding water. The task is clearly more important than climbing

the hill. Not just water, but the spring that Andronikos remembers reading about in a book by an ascetic monk. The burbling spring described by the monk ought to be somewhere around here. Andronikos will have to find it in order to remain on the island. . . .

To remain here. If he has to leave because he couldn't find water, he will end up having wasted his days wandering. He'll have to postpone settling some place, doing something. Not much will change, except for the place, although at this moment he can't think of where. Even the opposite shore seems to be fading from his view. . . . Returning to the city would be — should be — unthinkable. He doesn't want to wander around aimlessly. As for doing something. . . .

Creature of habit. The human being cannot live without thinking of doing something. Yet, to do something, say, to keep bees, to raise chickens, birds, sheep, or to grow plants, vegetables, fruits. . . . He laughs. One would need the world to do these things. Eggs, chicks, seeds, saplings. He could find these in one of the villages across the sea. But he would need money to buy them. If he tells the villagers that he's a monk, they might laugh at the kind of monk he is; if he doesn't, they would grow suspicious. In these times, the villagers would have to be more suspicious than everyone else.

This is not the time to think about them. Hill, water, shelter. Rather, water, hill, shelter. There is no other way.

A few rocks come into view through the trees. Moss covering the rocks. The books had described the moss as edible. It both curbs hunger, quenches thirst. There's still time before he has to try it.

Andronikos listens. Breeze, rustling leaves, wings beating, seagull cries, crickets beginning to chirr reluctantly. He notices heather growing among the rocks. Even if there is a stream, he wouldn't be able to hear it. He knows

there is no rolling or cascading water on this island. He should keep moving his feet. Steadily, without pausing.

The rocks now seem like they're stacked one over the other, step upon step. A path, a stairway of sorts. Bordered with moss. Covered with pine needles, cones, dry, perfectly preserved shells of insects, which you couldn't find in the city, where they would be stepped on, squashed, trampled over time into dust. Not here.

The city. . . . What's happening there right now, he wonders. Who is being trampled on? What is being smashed, burned in the streets? How, by what means? His friends who didn't see him among the brothers this morning, how did they react to his absence? Did they hurry to inform the abbot? Or did they wait? If they waited, what did they wait for? If they informed, what did they say?

They must have waited until the start of the general council, which the abbot was supposed to lead immediately following the morning mass. Before the entire community, each monk was expected to come forward to renounce the old belief, affirm that his eyes had at last opened to the dreadful sin of idolatry, swear never to allow himself or others to commit such a sin. That's when his escape, rather, his absence, would be noticed. Only two monks would know that he had escaped. Ioakim. Andreas. They would have figured it out, recalling his agitated state the day before, his sudden request for dispensation to visit the city, his anxious, hesitant voice. . . . His absence at the evening mass might have led them to think that he had stayed in his cell, but the morning would have suggested otherwise. In any case, if they waited until the general council, it was probably not because they wanted him to gain time, but because they didn't know how to react. Once the news of his escape circulated, he would be called "hero" by those who liked him, "traitor" by those who didn't. Those who disliked him. . . .