

**I Just Told my 53-year-old Dad There's Nothing More Evil
than a Priest
as we're Driving through his Childhood Village, Zagliveri**

by

Vasilis (Bill) Fragios

I could swear that the clearing
by Nona's house was full of pussy
willows last time we were here.

And now their catkins are left
out of breath. Maybe people bored
the poor willows with their

blabbering. Maybe all the men travelling
in and out of the village had their eyes fixed
at those gorgeous rivers right under the city's nose

a little too long. How else can you explain
all the branches that have been molested? What?
Did they bend because they were burdened

by too many stories of blueberry summers?
I remember that story grandma used to tell us
about how the people here would jump in and out

of the hollow cypresses—expecting those blind
would see. Well, our cypresses are firm and smell like
a sea of citrus and all, but the village is merely

home to the fifty-one stones paving
the square. And there, humbled enough, climbs the
sun, occasionally inviting flea-struck dogs to lay

their spirits under the towering plane trees—
older than life. Have you noticed they sort of grow
larger every time the village ladies kiss

their teeth? And then, they exchange their
crafts and sharpen their athamés for
Spinach pies even the Turks would ravage.

We should stop for gas next to the church. I loved to
spin around its crooked cross. There were many unlikely
children there to play with. They all swore they heard

the canyon scream, but we never dared to see
if it was real. Look at it now. Two branches, rusted
cherries, ghosts in cabins where old people

pee discreetly. The muse has been
exiled where coffee brews and coconut soothes.
Oh, and of course Saint Akylina's house. Here it is!

Can't leave the village without seeing it. This is it.
House of magic. Isn't it here where the colorblind
managed to see BEYOND the raisined tablecloths

and the lilac plastered on the walls—untouched
for the protector's sake? Candles still burn for her
at 6 AM. What? Did the bell forget to wake the dead?

Poet's Note

This poem is a snapshot of how I like to remember my dad's village, with all of the warm contradictions that every visit there fills me with. Although I did not grow up there and haven't been its most frequent visitor, I do feel I have a very clear idea of what the place is like. Of course, describing the ins and outs of this place would not have been possible without someone guiding me through it— that someone being my beloved and strong-willed grandmother, Akylina Fragiou. I would like to dedicate this poem to her, as she unfortunately passed away not too long after I composed this poem. She will forever be "the muse" who never got to read the (only) poem written about her. This fact brings me sadness but also childlike joy, because knowing the type of person she was, I believe she couldn't have had it any other way.