Not So Ill
with
You and Me
Also by Fani Papageorgiou

When You Said No Did You Mean Never?
Fani Papageorgiou

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with
You and Me

Shearsman Books
“Wisdom and love have nothing to do with each other. Wisdom is staying alive, survival. You’re wise if you don’t stick your finger in the light plug. Love – you’ll stick your finger in anything.”

— Robert Altman
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Here is a man, here is rich red wine, 
inchoate years beneath the floorboards. 
When you look up at the sky, everything is amplified. 
Being wrong means having an adventure. 
It is a journey and a story.

Consider the human need for war. 
In the world of professional wrestling, 
the men who hang around but are non-fighters 
are known as “shadows”.

Consider love that makes you strong 
before it pulls you down.
If your heart had legs, 
would it ever walk in a straight line?

Who wants to stay at home and be right. 
They say you will know progress 
by the number of people who are angry with you. 
The sand on the beach chills quickly; the day is over.

Someone will spot you through the dim bar light 
and the shadow will say, do you fight?

The question, heavy like a sugar bowl 
pinning down a note. 
We walk on air baby and 
since we cannot jump 
over two ditches at the same time, 
we gamble.

So here. Take the note.
Travels Without You
You walk around the lagoon,
again and again.
The heart is a muscle.

What does the lake look like
Depends on who you are.

You know every lap of water by name
but there’s a zero somewhere in your heart.

The lagoon is dissected by your thoughts
like a railroad bridge
and sometimes
as you walk at dusk
it feels exactly like madness.

You’re not responsible
for anyone else’s peace of mind.

Do you know the good years
when you’re in them?

Or do they look like high doorways
that lead nowhere?
You can never know what
a particular connection is about
until later.

You keep a close watch on this heart of yours.

All the spinning, then the end,
relief.

There's a shadow on you
but shadows lead nowhere.

Maybe one day, you too will see something
you can't explain.

You need someone to push against.
Where have your hands been, you wonder.
You’re watching for more shadows on the wall.
For their lack of blemish.
How do they survive when they’re not like everyone else?

They say people get addicted to surfing
because it’s impossible to feel depressed
when actually riding a wave —
them they could almost constantly have what they want.

You. Daylight banked against the blackness.
First square.
Lakewater darkens to stone.
Second square.
Joy without sorrow is mania
yet you only count the happy hours.
The light in the sky faint blue, the colour of ice.
In physics they call it the observer effect—
you can’t observe a physical process
without affecting it.

Whatever it is, it can almost always wait.
In the mean time, what else is there to do
but carry around the capacity to worry.
This is what sunlight means to me.

There is a Roman aqueduct near Preveza,
a bone which belonged to a mammoth.
It’s the place where a poet lived and worked.
He wrote in despair and then
for ten hours
he tried to drown himself.

So will you come with me?
I haven’t seen you for a long time.

Who said that people are not bad
when they have plenty of room?

Nothing calm in these thoughts.
I walk along a band of pale blue.

My chest is heaving when I think of you.
I’m not big on endearments.
You weren’t even mad at me but still, you left first.

They say nine-tenths of poise is pretence.

In the Cartesian theory of vortices all motion had to be circular and all matter had to be capable of further reduction.

Of all our games, we hold on to this: the only one that counts is the next one.

It takes four-and-a-half hours to drive from Athens to Preveza, built at the entrance of the Ambracian Gulf. There is a yellow sign on a curve just before the road starts to twist and turn — On the next 3 kms, fatal accidents tend to occur.

Then little towns on the edge of the sea on the north side of the Peloponnese, the green-blue of the Ionian Sea.

I began to count.

Suppose you threw a stone up into the air and it didn’t come down for a long time. Suppose you just stayed there and waited. Only staying power matters. The Sphinx says to Oedipus, the abyss you wish to throw me in, lies within you.
I walk across the lagoon to the spot
where the poet tried to drown himself
with a stone around his neck.

The sounds you equate with water.

The man who couldn’t drown
because he knew how to swim.

The waves took him to the shore at dawn.
A policeman escorted him to his clothes.

You and I do not swim in pools
where we can see the bottom.

And so we go to Preveza.
To the Roman aqueduct,
the mammoth bone
and the man who tried to drown.

It’s never just a place,
this is what life turns out to be.
The smell of dead fish, gasoline and salt,
ever a straight line.

*It is here that the poet Kostas Karyotakis found peace,
firing a bullet into his heart on July 21st, 1928.*

There is a second round in everything.
Can today forget yesterday?

There is a story about a wedding in Naples, where fireworks appeared in the sky making the letters *Ciao Fabrizio*.

Passersby stopped to ask who Fabrizio was. The brother of the bride, the family replied.

He had died years ago but because they were celebrating, they did not want him to think he had been forgotten.

The sounds you equate with water and light, which travels more slowly through it.

We walk past what used to be the slaughterhouse, into the centre of the town, the narrow alleys, the Venetian clock.

We have seen what we have seen.

The sound of heat.

Tinnitus is the word for noises that some people hear in their ears or in the head, buzzing, ringing, whistling, hissing and other sounds that do not come from an external source.
Old men in white undershirts
hosing down the pavement
while women are talking across balconies.

Battleships.
It’s that game where you make a grid
on a sheet of graph paper and each player
has one battleship (four squares),
two cruisers (three squares),
three destroyers (two squares)
and so on, then you have to
knock out the opponent’s fleet.

We played game after game.
I sit up in bed and find
my wristwatch on the night-stand.
It's ten minutes before three.
There are beams running across the ceiling
and I count them.

There is a story about an early meeting
of the Royal Society in London
attended by the King
regarding a bowl of water
weighing the same with a goldfish in it
as it did without.
Then a balance was brought
and the experiment was carried out.
The bowl was put on the balance
and the fish was added.

It will be impossible to talk about me
without mentioning you,
said the fish to the bowl
and then the bowl’s weight increased
by exactly the weight of the fish.

Horace said, change the name
and the story is about you.

Ciao Fabrizio.

The first people spent a lot of time
looking for food.