

GERRE GALVIN

An Oral Tradition

I stroll on ancient stones of Plaka,
climbing winding streets above
the moonstone sea.
Garlic scents simmer,
skirts swish
behind ivy walls
and whitewashed homes
while muted female voices
strum the air.

Young men, sleepy-eyed,
lean on round tables and
sway to my silhouette.
My prickling skin
feels their stirring,
behind me.
The cicadas' shrill hum
joins the men's chorus
of whispers, whistles
and clicking tongues.
I pass wrinkled men
sipping espresso,
flipping, clicking red worry beads
through unworried fingers,
while the growing chorus of men
match footsteps to mine
and follow in a predacious line.

Montpellier encloses me
 in her mazelike streets.
 Men's bodies fan the air and
 their voices brush my ears,
 whispering, "I want you," and
 "Come sleep with me."
 These night men
 stalk alleyways
 like loitering tomcats
 or wait in tight pants
 with café crossed legs;
 their eyes forcing an opening.
 Some fingers graze, others probe,
 and some try to caress me like a lover.

I hasten along the creaking
 boardwalk of Provincetown,
 past shop windows
 with copper windchimes,
 cobalt pitchers and
 green quilted pillows.
 Two men lean, leering
 out their car window
 and yell: "Wanna get laid?"
 Their honking and laughing
 hammers the afternoon air.

"Psst."
 Clickety click of night tongues.
 A smacking of many lips in a wet kiss.
 A whispered "hey baby."
 A sideways, "Uhhh, good."
 The chorus finds me.

And then, a note splitting the
 green trees' stillness—
 "Bitch"
 from a boy
 perched high in a fir tree,
 twelve and cocky
 in my clean Canadian town.