
The City

C. P. CAVAFY

Translated by Peter Green

You said: "I'll find a new land, find another sea—
A new city'll turn up, a better one than this.
Every effort I make is condemned, turns out amiss,
While my heart, like a corpse, lies buried deep,
And my mind—how long will my mind stay sunk in stagnant
sleep?

Here, wherever I look, wherever I turn my gaze
I see the blackened wreck of all my days,
So many years spent, ruined, lost by me."

There are no new places you'll find, you'll catch no other tide.
This city will follow you. The streets you tread
Will be the same, it's in these same houses your head
Will turn grey, in the same neighborhoods that you'll age.
Always you'll end up in this city. Don't hope to turn the page
To an Elsewhere for which there's no ship for you, no road
shows clear.

Just as you destroyed your life back here
In this tiny retreat, so you ruined it world-wide.

NOTE

Since all recent English versions of this poem known to me dispense with rhyme altogether, perhaps I should point out that the complex ABBCCDDA rhyme-scheme adopted here is Cavafy's own, in the original Greek.