

## THE BABY

I.

Flaking paint in November air,  
the house not what it was  
when his wife lived, keeping watch.

Jacks and kings, queens,  
tossed, shuffled and folded  
for coins. "No women,"

Stefanos says, when a daughter  
sets down her stack of bills  
and her beer. This is no rule,

this is no law. It is truth.  
He has six daughters, a son  
who never married. None of his nine

grandchildren bear his name,  
none speak Greek, the language  
of his childhood, the language

of the newspapers stacked on the chair  
in the corner of the kitchen . . .  
Men around a table. The stakes:

quarter-half. Soon, blindness  
and senility will take even this away.

II.

The daughters sing. Some silently,  
    some in Northern cities,  
        some together, echoing,

revising, their tongue American,  
    their tale Greek--rocky hills  
        of Kareia, north of Gythion.

*Begin at the beginning,*  
    and she does. Her black skirts  
        clutched, her sandled feet,

red with cold, step over  
    roots, climb the hill  
        above the Massachusetts town

and its defunct factory.  
    Later, the Thanksgiving feast,  
        but now, the story:

*I was twenty-one,*  
    *my first trip to Greece*  
        *driving with my father and mother.*

*Imagine me! Not yet married*  
    *hearing this ...*  
        *It was his first trip back--*

*dirt roads with potholes,*  
    *we'd pass sheep, goats,*  
        *wild dogs. Breeze cool*

*through the window. It begins,*  
    *around 1920, in Kareia,*  
        *a village of sixty people*

*in southern Greece. It begins with*  
    *my grandmother, my yiayia,*  
        *Ianthe.*

III.

Her house was furthest from the well  
at the foot of the village that stretched  
up the mountainside.

The distance from the well,  
the uphill walk, a sign  
of poverty, yet when she looked

from her doorway toward the south,  
there were no other houses  
No other people, only

the far off sea flashing between  
two mountains, some days  
white as blindness, some days a blue

sharp as a broken promise.  
Was it blessing or curse  
to live there? Where everyone

could see her, where she  
could see no one--So far  
from the well, so close

to the road.