

# OLIVE TREES

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The building's brick, so the walls get warm in summer.  
When the summer goes, they're still warm,  
especially on the south side—you feel the sun there, in the brick,  
as though it meant to leave its stamp on the wall, not just sail over it  
on its way to the hills. I take my breaks here, leaning against the  
wall,  
smoking cigarettes.

The bosses don't mind—they joke that if the business fails,  
they'll just rent wall space. Big joke—everyone laughs very loud.  
But you can't eat—they don't want rats here, looking for scraps.

Some of the others don't care about being warm, feeling the sun on  
their backs  
from the warm brick. They want to know where the views are.  
To me, it isn't important what I see. I grew up in those hills;  
I'll be buried there. In between, I don't need to keep sneaking  
looks.

My wife says when I say things like this my mouth goes bitter.  
She loves the village—every day she misses her mother.  
She misses her youth—how we met there and fell in love.  
How our children were born there. She knows she'll never go back  
but she keeps hoping—

At night in bed, her eyes film over. She talks about the olive trees,  
the long silver leaves shimmering in the sunlight.  
And the bark, the trees themselves, so supple, pale gray like the  
rocks behind them.

She remembers picking the olives, who made the best brine.  
I remember her hands then, smelling of vinegar.  
And the bitter taste of the olives, before you knew not to eat them  
fresh off the tree.

And I remind her how useless they were without people to cure  
them.  
Brine them, set them out in the sun—  
And I tell her all nature is like that to me, useless and bitter.  
It's like a trap—and you fall into it because of the olive leaves,  
because they're beautiful.

You grow up looking at the hills, how the sun sets behind them.  
And the olive trees, waving and shimmering. And you realize that if  
you don't get out fast  
you'll die, as though this beauty were gagging you so you couldn't  
breathe—

And I tell her I know we're trapped here. But better to be trapped  
by decent men, who even re-do the lunchroom,  
than by the sun and the hills. When I complain here,  
my voice is heard—somebody's voice is heard. There's dispute,  
there's anger.

But human beings are talking to each other, the way my wife and I  
talk.

Talking even when they don't agree, when one of them is only  
pretending.

In the other life, your despair just turns into silence.  
The sun disappears behind the western hills—  
when it comes back, there's no reference at all to your suffering.  
So your voice dies away. You stop trying, not just with the sun,  
but with human beings. And the small things that made you happy  
can't get through to you anymore.

I know things are hard here. And the owners—I know they lie  
sometimes.

But there are truths that ruin a life; the same way, some lies  
are generous, warm and cozy like the sun on the brick wall.

So when you think of the wall, you don't think *prison*.  
More the opposite—you think of everything you escaped, being  
here.

And then my wife gives up for the night, she turns her back.  
Some nights she cries a little.  
Her only weapon was the truth—it is true, the hills are beautiful.  
And the olive trees really are like silver.

But a person who accepts a lie, who accepts support from it,  
because it's warm, it's pleasant for a little while—  
that person she'll never understand, no matter how much she loves  
him.