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ILONA MARTONFI

The girl by the sea

When you see me
swim in the Aegean sea
my name is Marisa.
Hard armpit lumps
burst and crust over
the size of brown-purple figs.
Undiagnosed lung sarcoidosis —
scar granulomas.

White sand Varkiza beach.
Here is a photo of us:
I am the girl in the blue sundress,
Plaka tavern, Old Athens, 1987 .
Yes, I get very tired.
Five-week family vacation.
My fiancé back home.

Standing in line with our bags,
Paris, Gare Montparnasse:
I don't remember fainting.
Mama slapping my face, calling my name.
Seven-hour transatlantic flight.
Yes, I get very tired.
I cough and wheeze.
Melancholia. Anxiety disorder.

Here is a photo of us:
silver champagne glasses.
a diamond ring.
I come to the marriage with my own house and linen.
Pearl necklace, black velvet dress.
The eldest daughter.
Two sisters, one brother.
You ask, do I remember
love words —
Mother's green plastic knitting needles.
Papa beating mama.

My name is Marisa.
I am the girl with
the wooden easel, gessoed canvas.
Tubes of oil, boar bristle brushes.

Ilona Martonfi is the author of three poetry books, Blue Poppy (Coracle Press, 2009), Black Grass (Broken Rules Press, 2012), and The Snow Kimono (Inanna, 2015). Ilona has published in Vallum, Accenti, The Fiddlhead, and Serai. She is the founder/producer of The Yellow Door and Visual Arts Centre Readings, and the co-founder of Lovers and Others. She is also the recipient of the QWF 2010 Community Award.