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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

English

GUILT
&
The Storyteller and the Truth

by

Florentia Antoniou

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2017

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

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The Storyteller and the Truth

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Guilt is a historical novel set in the second half of the twentieth century (1963 – 1975) in the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. The story begins three years after the island was granted its independence from the British, when intense intercommunal violence between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots was on the rise, and ends several months after the Turkish invasion in the summer of 1974.

Guilt follows the life of a Greek Cypriot from her childhood to her adulthood, depicting the difficulty of growing up during politically troubled times as well as the life of women in the seventies in Cyprus. *Guilt* is a Bildungsroman novel. Although history and politics are in the background of the novel, national emergence often affects the relationship of the heroine with her family, friends and lovers; the public sphere and the private sphere are interlaced.

Guilt is a fictional story shaped around familial accounts of the Turkish invasion as well as of the everyday life of Cypriots prior to it, which means the novel is to a certain extent autobiographical. Concerning the structure, the novel is separated into a number of sections, which jump in time, as the memories of the heroine lead the unfolding of events.

In the critical commentary, whose title is “The Storyteller and the Truth,” I discuss the novels, books and journals that have helped me write *Guilt*, redraft it and understand it fully. In the critical commentary, I focus on the autobiographical element, the idea of memories, history and politics, what genre *Guilt* belongs in, and finally, the relationship between nation and gender.

There is a dearth of Cypriot literature and I wish *Guilt* can contribute to change that fact as well as draw attention to a country that is often either forgotten or seen merely as a tourist destination.

CONTENTS

Author's Declaration	3
Acknowledgments	5
The Novel: <i>Guilt</i>	7
The Prologue	9
Winter 1964: The Brave Tin Soldier	13
Spring 1970: The Girl Playing with Fire	43
Summer 1974:	77
In a Land Far, Far Away	77
The Return of the Prodigal Daughter	93
An Infant Crying in the Night	121
Autumn 1974: Accept and Adapt	163
The Epilogue	185
Critical Commentary: "The Storyteller and the Truth"	187
Biographical Background and Language	189

History and Genre	201
Nation and Gender	219
Bibliography	235

Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, Florentia Antoniou [please print name]

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

[title of thesis]

GUILT (Novel) & The Storyteller and the Truth (Critical Commentary)

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
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6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed: Florentia Antoniou

Date: 22 May 2017 / 28 December 2017

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Guilt

The Prologue

Murat hit the car radio, but the voice of the broadcaster continued to be interrupted by tuning sounds. It was his favourite secret station, which was run by a Turkish Cypriot youth, but there was always the same problem; too much interference.

“Anathema,” Murat cursed, hitting the radio harder, but Gizem, his wife, took his hand in hers. She kissed it, pressing it against her cheek, calming him down.

When they stopped at a set of traffic lights, Murat yawned, rubbing his eyes with his thumb and forefinger. It was after midnight. He had drunk one or two more glasses of raki than he should have at their friends’ house, but he had to stay focused and keep his eyes on the road. Christos and Maria knew how to throw a party. Maria had made baklava, which was almost as good as his Turkish mother’s, and Christos offered him one of the best raki he had ever had. The dessert and the alcoholic drink originated from Turkey.

Whenever the four of them gathered, they communicated in Greek.

“Vice President Dr. Fazıl Küçük opposed the thirteen constitutional amendments the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, proposed last month, while Turkey rejected them, also,” the broadcaster said before he shouted into his microphone, *“They want Enosis, union with Greece, while we want Taksim, partition.”*

The voice of the youth on the radio was unnerving; all his anger was upsetting Gizem.

“Murat, my love, turn the radio off,” Gizem pleaded with her husband, and when he obliged, she breathed a sigh of relief. “It’s Greek Cypriots’ Christmas in a few days,” she said, changing the subject. It was the morning hours of the 21st of December 1963. “We should buy Christos and Maria a gift. They always give us one on their Christmas day.”

Distaste was drawn all over Murat’s face. “It’s their religious holiday, my love, not ours,” he replied as smoothly as possible as he didn’t want her to think he was scolding her. “We’ll give our friends a gift on a different day, but not on their Christmas day.”

Gizem nodded, agreeing with him. She was, however, planning on giving her husband a gift soon enough. She wanted to find the perfect moment to announce to him she was pregnant; the doctor had confirmed her suspicions earlier that day. Murat and Gizem were recently married. They grew up across the street from each other and Murat had his eyes set on her from the beginning. Half a year ago, when he finally built up the courage to ask for her hand in marriage, her parents didn't think twice before accepting and Gizem couldn't have been happier.

The roads of Nicosia were almost empty. The streetlights were scarce and dim. Murat was a careful driver, especially when his wife was with him. They were within the Venetian walls of the capital city and only a few minutes away from their home.

I always believed a lot can change in a matter of minutes.

When Murat and Gizem saw two Greek Cypriot policemen standing in the middle of the road, they stiffened up. One of the two policemen signalled for them to pull over. Murat rolled the window down, but he didn't speak, while fear consumed Gizem.

"License and registration," the policeman said in Greek. He was curt and dull. He didn't even look at them twice. It was clear the young man in uniform was only doing his job, following orders. Murat, however, hated being disrespected.

"I don't think I did something wrong," Murat replied in broken Greek and Gizem swallowed against the lump that had risen in her throat. The policeman finally looked at them. He lifted his flashlight over their faces, shedding them with light. Gizem flinched, while Murat glared at him.

"License and registration," the policeman repeated, but Murat snorted. Shaking, Gizem attempted to reach for the documents the policeman was so persistent to see, but Murat seized her wrist, stopping her.

"We have done nothing wrong, my love," Murat told her in Turkish in his softest tone, but Gizem wasn't comforted in the slightest. She shifted in her seat, praying Allah was watching over them.

"These Turks are causing trouble," the policeman shouted over his shoulder to his partner, who was still standing in the middle of the road. Then, he turned his full focus back on the Turkish Cypriot couple, while the other one was fast approaching. "Step out of the vehicle," he demanded, opening the driver's door.

"Murat," Gizem whispered in horror.

“Don’t worry, my love, everything’s going to be alright,” Murat insisted, defying the policeman and the danger that came with such a decision.

The policeman lost his patience. “Step out of the vehicle, now, both of you,” he yelled. In seconds, his colleague opened the passenger’s door, grabbing Gizem by the arm and dragging her out. Gizem let out a low whimper.

“Don’t touch my wife,” Murat barked like a mad dog, jumping out of the car, but when the policeman pointed his gun at him, he restrained himself. The policeman pushed Murat against the car and handcuffed him.

“She’s pretty,” the colleague smirked. He was standing behind Gizem, eyeing her, sniffing her, daring her husband. “I should search her and show them who’s in charge,” he suggested slyly.

Before Murat had the chance to react, the more professional policeman pressed the tip of his gun on the back of his head, immobilizing him. “Stop playing,” he shouted in frustration at his partner. “Find their identification documents and let’s get this mess over with.”

Disappointed, the second policeman let Gizem go. After they finally found what they had been looking for, the identification papers, the couple was taken to the police station.

Within a few hours, the story spread across Nicosia by word of mouth, each time being exaggerated and interpreted based on the ethnicity and religion of the person who was telling it. The Turkish Cypriots rioted. They took to the streets, and by dawn, lives were lost and people were wounded.

Winter 1964

The Brave Tin Soldier

With my head resting on my hand, I mindlessly scribbled my name over and over again on the first page of the fairy tale book. Eva Adamou ...

Yes, that's my name. Eva. Hello. I want to tell you a story.

I drew doodles in it because I wanted to make it mine, clouds and flowers and other things I liked.

I had stumbled upon it a few months ago. It was on a summer day and it was half buried in beach sand, but it caught my attention because its golden pages were shining in the sun. It was old and didn't look as if it was something special, but the minute I picked it up, I felt as if I was the luckiest girl in the island. It became my most favourite possession.

It was a thin paperback with calligraphic letters, which made its story look important, and with black and white pictures that were like little lifeless paintings. It was written in English and I couldn't read it. I spent hours upon hours tracing my fingertips over the foreign words. Some of the English letters looked odd, a lot different from the Greek alphabet.

From its pictures I understood it told the story of a one-legged toy soldier and the ballerina who felt for him. I imagined it belonged to a rich English child, who must have forgotten or abandoned it on the beach, and for days, I went back to where I had found it, waiting for its owner to show up, but nobody came looking for it. Every night, I flipped through its pages, wondering how someone could forget about something so beautiful. The schoolteacher said we'd be taught English soon and I couldn't wait.

When I felt Mama standing over my shoulder, I swallowed with difficulty, lifting my gaze up. I had been doing nothing else for the past half hour other than preoccupying myself with the fairytale. My little sister, Sofia, who was five, was sitting on my lap, looking at its pictures, too. She was helping me give life to its characters with her colouring pencils. We coloured the soldier green because the

military uniforms of the Englishmen and the Greek men, who were always wandering on the island, were green. We coloured the ballerina pink.

“Enough for today, Eva.” Mama closed the fairytale, keeping a firm grip on it. “Go help your sister.” I put the fairytale in my schoolbag. I took it with me everywhere I went.

Mama spoke Greek, English, French, and Italian, but she never had spare time to translate the fairytale to me. She was always so busy. She was either at work or cooking and cleaning at the house, and the minute she sat on the sofa late at nights to catch her breath, she fell asleep. She never had much patience for my idleness and imagination.

I stood next to Rosa, my older sister, in front of the stove. Rosa was fifteen. The two of us helped prepare meals almost every day. Mama trusted us around the kitchen even though she often told everyone I was the clumsiest child she had ever come across.

Rosa, on the other hand, was never clumsy. She loved cooking and had a talent for it. She loved creating all sorts of sweets and dreamed of opening her own patisserie once she was over with school. She had a notebook filled with recipes of her own. She always scribbled in it.

With her brown curls over one shoulder and her head tilted to the side, Rosa cut the halloumi cheese into cubes, while singing along to the song that played on the radio. She was everything I wanted to be; beautiful, content, gifted.

I bowed my head, touching my own hair, scrutinizing it. Mine was darker, frizzier than hers. The colour of my face was paler than hers though. My olive skin was lighter than everyone else in the family. I was pale for my island and dark for lands away from it. One or two villagers had jokingly asked Papa if I was one hundred per cent Cypriot, and even though he had laughed, he was a little offended.

“All done,” Rosa smiled, wiping her hands on her floral apron, which she had made herself from an old curtain. We had turned the rest of the curtain into dust clothes.

I added the halloumi cheese cubes into the casserole, but ate the last one. I stirred the soup with the ladle before I leaned over, inhaling deeply. My mouth watered with the smell and I let out a hungry, “ah!” Rosa giggled and I joined her, but Mama called my name, scolding. I cringed, stopping immediately. Sofia lifted her head up, confused as to what was going on. She was sitting on a chair, playing

with the rag doll Rosa and I had made for her. I put the ladle aside, letting the soup cook in peace.

The song stopped playing on the radio.

“We interrupt our music program to broadcast some breaking news, concerning the latest intercommunal strife.” It was a man speaking on the radio. Mama, Rosa and I became rigid, while Sofia continued playing with her rag doll unaware. Lately, there were more and more such announcements on the radio. *“In a coffeehouse, outside Nicosia, an angry crowd of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots formed to fight each other. Greek Cypriot police reached the scene on time, breaking up the brawl. One Greek Cypriot and one Turkish Cypriot were taken to the hospital with minor injuries. The president, Archbishop Makarios, promises peace will be restored soon.”*

I didn’t understand why the adults had to fight each other all the time. It scared me. It had all started a few weeks ago, a few days before Christmas, when a Turkish Cypriot couple was pulled over by two of our policemen. People from both communities were being killed or wounded. The majority of the conflicts were taking place in the capital of the island, Nicosia, but the other cities and a few villages suffered strikes.

Not wanting to hear more radio news, I made for the door.

“Where are you going, Eva?” Mama asked. She was tiredly rubbing her forehead with the back of her hand. She held a knife, as she was sitting at the table, cutting the salad.

“To pick flowers for our dining table,” I replied, clutching the doorknob, eager to get out.

“Put your shawl on,” Mama ordered. “And don’t be too long.” She shook her head, mumbling things, and went back to chopping the tomato.

Knowing that was as close to permission as I’d get, I opened the door and ran outside. My parents loved gardening so we had all sorts of flowers, plants and trees in our yard. We had lemon, olive, orange and tangerine trees, but only one pomegranate tree. I very much enjoyed eating the bittersweet seeds of pomegranates.

One time, I dug my nails into the pink peel of a pomegranate, and using all the strength I thought I had, I tore it open, but its seeds spilled all over the kitchen, staining the wall with purple splashes. Rosa scolded me before she cleaned the mess

up and told Mama she was the one who had been careless with the pomegranate and had ruined the wall.

Among all the colourful roses, I jumped from one stepping stone to another with my arms open, pretending the dirt was the deep blue sea and if I fell, I'd drown, and nobody could save me. I loved the sea, but the deep end scared me. Papa took me swimming in the summer, when he had days off work, and he was always right there beside me, when I was floating or when I went below the surface to see the bottom of the sea. I always floated with my eyes closed. The cool water embraced me, playing music in my ears, caressing the sides of my face, while the sun warmed my cheeks.

When I felt as if someone had kicked me in the belly, I nearly lost my balance on one of the stepping stones. I had my first period that month, and even though Mama had explained everything, all the pain and blood were too uncomfortable and unfamiliar. I was bleeding from the most private place, but Mama said it was normal. My grandmother, my Yiayia, told me I had become a woman.

My neighbour, Stavros, was sitting on the veranda of his house. With a big smile on my face, I waved at him, and he waved back. He was eleven years old and we were in the same class in school. I'd turn eleven in a few days too. Stavros' left leg was limp and he had to use a wooden stick to support himself. Day in and day out, he tried to fit in with all the other children, but most of them didn't want to be friends with him, because in their eyes, he was different. He couldn't play tag because it was difficult for him to run and he couldn't play hide and seek because he didn't move as fast as everyone else. Stavros didn't let that sadden him. He was smiling, always. I didn't really pay much attention to him before I found the fairytale, but everything changed after I did. Now, he reminded me of the brave tin soldier in my storybook. He wasn't my friend, but I wanted him to be.

Stavros and his parents came to our village around the time the Greek Cypriot guerrillas started a struggle against the English colonizers. Stavros was only a baby back then and so was I. They used to live near a police station in Famagusta, but the guerrillas planted a bomb there one night, and when it exploded, it shook their neighbourhood up. The young parents decided it wasn't safe to stay and they moved to one of the villages nearby. They moved in the abandoned barn across the street from us. They were poor, but they were the kindest people. Pain made people

bitter, but not them. Some villagers warmed up to them, while some were hesitant in approaching them at first. Yiayia offered Stavros' parents a job. They worked at her field.

Stavros' hair was as black as coal, but his eyes were the colour of honey, and his skin was kissed by the sun. He was eating a piece of bread, some olives and half a tomato. His father was sitting on their rocking chair. The man had built it last summer with Stavros' help. His mother was standing behind her husband, massaging his shoulders. She was five months pregnant and her belly looked as if it was a football. Stavros had twin brothers, who were a few years younger than him. Having his supper, Stavros watched me as I smelled the flowers and touched their petals.

The church bells began ringing, imposingly and melodically, echoing throughout the village and signalling the end of the evening liturgy. I stopped in my tracks to cross myself. Every time the church bells rang, we had to cross ourselves three times. With my forefinger, middle finger and thumb joined together, I moved my hand from my forehead to my stomach, to my right shoulder, and finally, to my left shoulder. Stavros and his family were doing what I was doing, while I was sure that in the kitchen, my mother and sisters would also. Yiayia was at church, and even though Mama wanted to attend the sermon too, she had to stay home to prepare dinner.

When I saw a familiar figure approaching, I ran towards it. I crashed into Papa, wrapping my arms around him.

"Hello, my beautiful, my love," Papa said, rubbing my back. We walked together across the garden.

Every day, he came home from work exhausted and stinking of cigarettes. He was a heavy smoker. Every day, at seven o'clock in the morning, my parents went to the offices of the Grand Hotel they were working at in Famagusta and returned home at seven at night. Mama was one of the bookkeepers and Papa was one of the supervisors. They often left work at ten at night, and sometimes, they even went to work on Sundays. The Grand Hotel was built only a year ago and before that they used to work long hours under the scolding sun in Yiayia's fields.

When we entered the kitchen, Rosa and Sofia stopped whatever it was they were doing and ran to hug him, while Mama secretly smiled from where she was sitting. Soon, Yiayia returned from church.

After dinner, Rosa and I washed the dishes, while Mama went to find a clean, ironed pair of clothes for Papa to wear after his bath. Sofia was colouring at the table. All clean and shaven, Papa left for the village coffeehouse. He spent a few hours with his friends there every night, drinking beer or coffee, discussing politics, playing cards, relaxing.

Rosa and I went over our homework before we went to bed. The three of us shared a room. The lights were off, as Sofia was already sounding asleep, hugging her rag doll. In the dark, I changed into my nightgown and climbed into bed. Rosa was brushing her hair in front of the mirror. We could hear Mama moving around the house, doing some last chores for the day. Yiayia was sleeping in the next room, snoring softly. Rosa stopped with her hand mid-air, with the brush in her hair, and looked at me through the mirror.

“Why is your mind always elsewhere, Eva?” she asked with a furrowed brow.

I thought for a moment before I shrugged, sticking my lower lip out. “I’m not doing it on purpose,” I defended myself. “I like to imagine things.”

“You’re a little strange, Eva, but I love you.”

Mama had gone to take a bath. We heard her pour water into the tub. I yawned, turning on my side, and curling up in a ball, I shut my eyes. It was so warm under the blankets.

There was nothing wrong with being a little strange. Was there?

Everyone told me I was a winter baby. Only very few villagers were born in winter and I was one of them. It was my birthday that day and my parents had forgotten to wish me before they left for work, but I didn’t blame them because they were working long hours all days of the week. It was a freezing morning in January. The sky was moody and grey, while the cold was penetrating through our layers of clothes our bones.

In the schoolyard, a few of my boy classmates were exhaling with their mouths open, forming little white clouds in the air, pretending to be smoking, pretending to be their fathers. The majority of Cypriot men were smokers.

We were twenty students in the class; ten girls and ten boys. Some were playing tag, while some were still eating the sandwich or the other snacks they had

brought from home. I was sitting on an old wooden bench with a few other girls. I was wearing the checkered uniform, the thickest pair of white tights I owned, my black shoes and the blue jumper Yiayia had knitted for me, but I was shaking like a leaf, blowing warm breath into my hands. The girls sitting beside me were chit chatting.

As far as the eye could see, there were brown heads. We all had a variation of brown hair, brown eyes and olive skin; all of us except for one boy. Sebastian had hair the colour of fire, while his skin was as white as the clouds. He had freckles on his face. No one else had freckles. His eyes were as green as the leaves. Sebastian was English, but nobody ever said his name. Everyone called him Englezos or Billy because a lot of Englishmen were named William. Sebastian didn't mind the nicknames, and if he did, he never showed it.

His family was wealthy. His father was a military man, his mother was an idle housewife, who spent most of her time in Famagusta rather than in the village, while his grandmother was a stern woman, who felt superior to the locals. Some villagers treated them with respect, while some didn't bother with them. As long as the island had its independence, the people didn't care anymore about the English that walked among them.

Sebastian was friends with Melina, the half Greek half Turkish girl. Her father was a Greek Cypriot, and even though her mother was a Turkish Cypriot, Melina was baptized in the village church, when she was an infant, like the rest of us. She was an Orthodox Christian, but the villagers didn't allow her to forget about the Turkish blood that ran through her veins, especially during the last few months.

The relationship her parents shared was the kind that was almost always frowned upon by both communities; it was forbidden, but until recently tolerated. Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots got along well for the most part and her family lived peacefully in our village. Lately, however, a lot of the villagers had become hostile towards her family, and because of everything they listened to in their houses, the children were hostile towards Melina at school too. Sebastian, Stavros, and our teacher, Miss Milia, were the only ones that protected her. Nobody wanted to play with her anymore. We all avoided her.

We're at war, the adults said, it's a civil war, and ever since it all began, the two communities disliked and feared each other with a passion. Hatred was rising among all people for the opposite party and it was being imposed on their children

too. A few of the schoolteachers were sitting on the nearby bench, discussing the intercommunal violence. My classmates and I were born and raised during troubled times. Ever since we were toddlers, ever since we learned how to talk and walk, we heard war news and war announcements; the newspapers and radio were flooded with them. Our island never rested.

“It all began last November, when Archbishop Makarios proposed those thirteen amendments to the constitution,” one of the teachers said, shaking her head. “Thirteen is such an unlucky number.” People feared prejudices as much as they feared their own shadows. “Did the Turkish Cypriots *have* to rebel against it? We fought the British, we gained our independence, and everything was lovely for three years, but now this!” She sounded upset.

“There’s a lot of bad blood between us Greeks and those Turks,” one of the other teachers replied. “And you know what they say: corks always float on the surface. Turks have to have the upper hand. We want unity with Greece, while they want Partition. We say, Cyprus is Greek, while they say, Cyprus is Turkish.”

“Did you hear that a lot of them are fleeing to enclaves or to villages where the majority of the population is of their own?” the first teacher asked before she lowered her voice, “I wonder what the Yilmaz family and the Christou family will do.”

The Yilmaz was the only Turkish Cypriot family that lived in our village. Haluk Yilmaz was one of my classmates. His mother cleaned the villagers’ silverware or other silver items, while his father was a worker in a plastics factory in Famagusta. They were peaceful people, who were well liked by everyone, but the circumstances were rapidly changing. The same stood for Melina’s family, the Christou. I didn’t want Melina to leave the village. I liked her and wanted to be her friend.

“All the violence is sickening,” the second teacher replied looking at her nails. “This shade of red is my new favourite nail polish. What do you think?”

I wanted to cover my ears with my hands and stop listening to them talking.

All over the island, the two communities lived in mixed villages or in separate ones, while the way we all looked was indistinguishable, but our religion and language were different. As a child that was how I viewed things, but adults overcomplicated everything.

The trees were naked. They were left with no leaves and no colour. They only had long, grey branches. It had rained the night before, but the dirt had drunk all the drops and was almost dry again, dehydrated. There were little puddles here and there, but we were careful not to step in them. Stavros was limping across the schoolyard to reach his friends, but three boys closed in on him. The schoolteachers were too busy talking to each other to notice what was going on or to care.

“Where are you going, cripple?” one of the boys sneered, snatching Stavros’ support stick. “I want to see you walk without it,” the bully said, throwing the support stick to one of his friends. The boys laughed, while Stavros struggled to balance on his one foot and not fall down. They reminded me of wild dogs that attacked passers-by, wanting to bite their legs off for no reason.

“That’s enough.” Miss Milia interfered. “Give me the support stick,” she ordered, extending her hand, and even though the boy curled his lip in irritation, he did what he was told. “Run along before I change my mind and send you straight to the headmaster.” With wide eyes, the boys ran away in fear. Miss Milia handed the support stick back to Stavros. She was smiling. “Here you go.”

“Thank you, teacher.” Stavros was proud; he showed no signs of sadness or anger. “They don’t understand,” he said, acting more mature than he really was.

“Go play with your friends. Recess will be over soon.”

Stavros nodded, but Sebastian and Melina had already come to him.

“Eva, come, play with us,” one of the girls from class begged, grabbing my hand, pulling me up from the bench, and even though I followed, I wondered what it was like to be friends with the English redhead, the Turkish girl with the Greek name, and the brave limping boy.

Winter weather was a peculiar thing on the island. Whenever the sun was hiding behind the clouds, the days were freezing cold, but whenever it came out, it was warm and bright. The sunny days, I studied in the garden.

I loved being in the company of the flowers and being distracted by the birds, the butterflies, and the random stray cats, which were wandering about. I always sat behind the stone well, where I was out of sight. The only creatures that saw me were the chicken because our coop was a few feet away. My family knew

about my hiding place, but Yiayia always let me stay there for a while before calling me back inside.

I was sitting on a blanket with my back against the well. With my books on my knees, I ate a handful of roasted almonds, neglecting my homework. When two swallows flew over my head and away, I followed them with my eyes. It was early in the afternoon, the sun was high and the sky was as blue as it could be. I stared at the bright, traveling clouds until my eyes hurt. I blinked a few times before I rubbed them with the back of my hands.

When I heard voices, I went on my knees, and from behind the well, I spied on the street. Stavros, Sebastian and Melina were going for a stroll. Every time I saw them, they looked happy in the company of each other. Melina was holding a basket, but Sebastian took it from her, carrying it himself. They were heading to the woods. I had noticed that every other afternoon they went there.

I gathered my books, and hugging them, I went inside. I piled them up on the kitchen floor with their spines against the wall before I breathed in the sweet overflowing scent of the apricot jam Rosa had finished cooking. On the island, we called apricots our golden apples. Rosa had picked a big bucket of them earlier from the tree in the garden. The jam was in a copper casserole and covered with a cloth. She let the jam rest and cool down, while she was scribbling away in her recipes notebook at the table, humming along to the song that played on the radio. She had placed eight glass jars on the counter, which she was later going to fill with the delicious orange blend. After I drank a glass of water, I made for the door, and Rosa reacted.

“Mama told us to clean the living room before she comes home from work,” Rosa reminded me, but I hadn’t forgotten. “Don’t be too long.”

From behind a tree, I watched what my three classmates were doing. They were sitting on a blanket under the trees, opposite the sea. Melina gave the two boys biscuits from the basket. I was jealous of her gold hair and pretty face. I was jealous of all the attention she received from the Englezos and Stavros.

I attempted to withhold a sneeze by placing my forefinger under my nose, but I failed. I sneezed loud and clear, startling them. When Stavros spotted me, he

grabbed the support stick from by his side, getting up, while the Englezos and Melina widened their eyes.

“Eva,” Stavros called and I revealed myself to them. Melina was afraid, as if I was a threat to her, while the Englezos was defensive.

“Did you follow us?” Sebastian asked with his green eyes narrowed, but Stavros didn’t approve of his friend’s behaviour.

“Yes,” I confessed. “I was studying in my garden and I saw you walk by.”

“And what do you want?” Sebastian was as cold as he looked.

“I invited her,” Stavros lied, and even though the Englezos was doubtful, he let the matter go. “Come, sit,” Stavros smiled.

Stavros and Melina were the only children in the village that called the Englezos by his name.

“What do you do when you come here?” I asked, not hiding my curiosity.

“We eat biscuits, fruit, and we talk,” Melina replied, offering me an orange slice.

“What do you talk about?” I stuffed the fruit in my mouth. Its juice was bittersweet.

“School, how adults fight all the time.” Melina was a good girl and it was unfair how the villagers treated her family. Under different circumstances we might have been friends. Meanwhile, because I had forced the Englezos out of his indifference towards me, he looked as if he disliked me more than he could fathom. He was protective of her and I didn’t enjoy that. One way or another, the English and the Turkish always got along just fine.

“I see you sitting behind the well in your garden, doing your homework.” Stavros sought my attention.

“But I’m hidden there,” I argued. “It’s my secret.”

“I see you,” he replied matter-of-factly. “My father is teaching me how to whistle, listen.” He puckered his lips, forming the shape of a small “o”, and began blowing. “I’m not very good at it yet, but I practice every day.”

“Can you teach me how to whistle?” I asked, and Stavros smiled, telling me he would.

When nature was kind and the winter weather was bearable, Stavros, Sebastian and Melina had their little picnics in the woods near the sea once or twice a week. I grew into the habit of joining them. Melina accepted me and Stavros was happy I was there. The Englezos, on the other hand, warmed up to me only a little. Papa always said the English were phlegmatic and passive aggressive. The Englezos didn't admit it, but he believed he and his family were better than everyone else in the village. The Butler family felt as if they were on permanent holidays on the island.

Soon after my initiation into that little group, trouble began.

Every time my parents saw me smiling because I had had a good time with my new friends, they were quick to voice their objections. The English and the Turkish don't think the same way we do, Papa said repeatedly, adding that they both are different from us Greeks. He never failed to mention that in these times we're living in I shouldn't be spending time with the Turkish girl. Melina is half Greek, Papa, I corrected him, but it was no use. By the end of each of my parents' lectures, I grew to believe that half the blood in Melina's body was bad and that the Englezos was an emblem of imperialism, whatever that meant. What about Stavros? I asked them. What was wrong with him? Was it a crime his family didn't have as much money as the rest of the villagers? Papa's reply left no room for argument, "I just don't like the boy." Papa made me promise I'd stop spending my afternoons with those three.

But my parents were at work for long hours every day, Yiayia was busy looking after Sofia and the house, and Rosa was busy with her homework and baking, and I was left unattended. I decided to join the three friends one last time.

The Englezos brought to the picnic with him a brand new black transistor, which was a gift from his father. Consciously or not, he was bragging about his new possession.

Melina was melancholic. "My father doesn't let us listen to the radio at home," she confided. "He says, 'Forget about the violence, forget about everyone, and let's have dinner in peace'."

"I won't turn it on if you don't want me to," Sebastian said and I wanted to click my tongue.

"My sister turns the radio on only to listen to music, she doesn't like listening to the news either," I interfered, asking for the Englezos' approval, and Stavros scowled.

The winter afternoon was frosty, unfriendly, but the skies were clear. We ate figs, which were as sweet as honey, and when our fingers got sticky, we licked them clean, wiping them on our clothes. Not long after, a violent downpour began from the heavens, and within seconds, high wind with thunder and lightning joined in. We ran home, but Stavros had difficulty keeping up with us, and when I attempted to help him, he didn't let me. He stood still in the pouring rain, soaking to the bone. I wanted to shout at him to stop being so stubborn, but I held my tongue.

"Leave me alone, Eva," Stavros spat. "I don't need your help."

His words hurt me, and even though I didn't like it, I left him there.

In a panic, Yiayia was gathering the clothes from the tightrope in the garden to take them inside. Rosa was helping her, but when she saw me running home, she narrowed her almond eyes at me. She didn't approve of my new friends either.

"Help us with the laundry," Rosa said, pushing into my arms a big bundle of clean, wet clothes. I mumbled an OK, and while trying not to drop them, I looked over my shoulder. Stavros had finally reached the veranda of his house, sheltering himself from the storm. His pregnant mother and his twin younger brothers were waiting for him. His mother took his face in her hands and kissed his drenched hair. Rosa followed my gaze and shook her head.

"Girls," Yiayia yelled from the kitchen window. She was panting from all the rushing around. "Hurry up, come inside, do you want to catch pneumonia?" She disappeared back inside. Sofia was calling for her.

I took the deepest breath, filling my lungs with air, and the strong smell of wet dirt stung my nostrils. The island was dry land for its most part, and whenever it rained, dirt rose from the ground, smothering the atmosphere. Mama had told me not to do that because enjoying the scent of wet earth meant I envied the dead.

I looked over at Stavros' house. He was sitting on their rocking chair, but he was motionless, staring like a lost puppy at the fat droplets of rain that came down in buckets. Rosa grabbed my wrist, and all frustrated, she attempted to drag me inside, but I didn't budge. When his mother called him from the house to go and change his clothes, Stavros left the veranda. Our parents had just arrived from work, and the minute Papa parked the car, Mama jumped out, hurrying towards us, shouting,

"Rosa! Eva! What on earth are you doing outside in the rain?"

She held her purse over her head, but her brown suit had absorbed several raindrops, the colour turning darker. She put her arm around Rosa, while Papa picked me up, leading us inside. Our cast iron wood burning stove was warming up the kitchen. I wanted a fireplace, and begged my parents to build one, but they didn't listen.

I knelt in front of that stove, with my back to everyone, and stared at the flames, at how they embraced the little logs. I felt my face getting hot. Yiayia was folding the clean clothes, complaining that some weren't dry yet. Sofia was observing her, sitting on her heels on a chair, eating a butter biscuit.

"Eva, don't sit so close to the fire," Mama said. She was helping Yiayia. I heard her, but I continued staring spellbound at the licking flames. I leaned closer to the fire and felt the blood boiling under the skin of my cheeks. I thought about the brave tin soldier and his ballerina, who burned in the fireplace in the end of the fairytale. I imagined them dancing together in the fire in front of me before both turning into ashes.

"EVA!" Mama shouted, stomping her foot on the ground. I jolted and looked over my shoulder at her, blinking in a daze. "Get up from there, now!" she cried in a high pitched voice, adding in the same tone, "What am I going to do with you?" I got up, feeling guilty for making my mother feel that way, but I didn't mean to. "Go change your clothes, they're wet, and dry your hair with a towel. Rosa, you too." We obeyed her orders.

From her chair, Sofia was smiling smugly, still munching that butter biscuit. She enjoyed the fact we were in trouble and she wasn't.

In silence, Rosa and I went to the bedroom, pulled our dresses over our heads, and threw them on the floor. Half naked, I grabbed my blanket, wrapped it around me, and sat on the edge of my bed, while Rosa went through our chest of drawers in search of something to wear.

"Why were you with those three again?" Rosa had her back to me and I sensed she was struggling not to be too judgmental. "You promised Papa you'd stop seeing them."

"They're my friends," I replied, wiping my nose with the blanket. Rosa put on a rainbow dress we had sewed together. I had one too. She turned round, crossing her arms across her chest, and looked at me. Actually, Rosa never looked at you. She stared at you.

“I don’t understand you, Eva.” She was accusing, pleading. “I have a feeling something bad will happen. I feel it here.” She was clutching her stomach. The skin of her arms had goosebumps all over it, either from the cold, or from the fear, or from both. The rainbow dress was sleeveless after all. I hugged my knees, wrapping the blanket tighter around me, and said nothing in return. Rosa was only fifteen, but she was incredibly intuitive. When Mama came to check up on us, she sighed in exasperation. She walked in the bedroom, shaking her head.

“Rosa, put your cardigan on,” Mama told her, and then, she focused on me. “Are you trying to catch pneumonia, Eva, is that it?” She grabbed the first pieces of clothing she found in the chest of drawers and I stood like a lifeless doll as she dressed me. When Mama noticed my mind was elsewhere, she cupped my face in her hands, and I looked at her. “Don’t zone out, Eva. It’s not polite.”

“We don’t have guests, Mama.” That was my reply.

But my mother was tired and wouldn’t have any of that. Her patience ran out and she grabbed my shoulders. “Listen to me. Everyone you need to think and worry about is right here, in this house, around you. Don’t zone out in your own little world. You’re very much needed here. Your family will always need you here. Daydreams are useless and dangerous. Do you understand me? *Be* here.”

I was quiet. I was only a child. I needed to laugh and play with friends who stirred my imagination, I needed to create mysterious worlds in my mind, it was beyond my control, but my family was incapable of understanding.

“Yes, Mama,” I replied.

After dinner, we all sat in the living room. Every Friday night at ten, there was a Turkish film on the television. Most villagers watched it and women discussed it the following day on the telephone or over a cup of coffee. The films had big white Greek subtitles and were tales of passion or of forbidden love.

Not a lot of villagers had a television in their homes. Ours was a gift to Yiayia from a rich relative, who lived in a coastal city on the other side of the island, Limassol. The television was big, bulky and wooden, and we’d had it only a month.

As usual, by the middle of the film, Yiayia had fallen asleep with her head thrown back and her mouth wide open. Sofia had also fallen asleep, wrapped up in blankets, but when Papa attempted to pick her up and take her to bed, she refused.

She wanted to stay with us, as we were all gathered there together. It made her feel safe listening to our voices and the voices in the television while she travelled in and out of sleep. Touched by the film, both Mama and Rosa were silently sobbing. They held tissues to wipe their tears and blow their noses. Papa was lying on the sofa, watching the film bored and unmoved, yawning every once in a while.

I was sitting on the carpet in my nightgown and knitted jumper, which Yiayia had made for me, not paying attention to the film. I was looking outside the glass doors, focusing on the sound of the falling rain. When lightning sliced through the night sky, everyone looked outside, waiting. Thunder followed, echoing through the house, making Mama cross herself, waking Yiayia and Sofia up. The skies were roaring and the earth was shaking. Yiayia went back to sleep, but Sofia sat up.

“Come on, Sofia, let’s go to bed,” I told her, taking her hand.

After I tucked her into bed, she asked, “Eva, is God angry?”

I wiped my nose with the back of my hand. I must have caught a cold. “Why do you think that?”

“Whenever it rains like it does tonight I think it’s because God is angry with us.” Her voice sounded sleepy and her eyes were half closed.

“It’s only the winter weather,” I comforted her. “Don’t worry.”

“OK,” she breathed before she closed her eyes, her lips parting, already falling asleep.

Yawning, I went to draw the curtains, but I saw Stavros standing outside, looking up at the window. My eyes widened, but I soon smiled. Stavros was motioning with his hand for me to go outside. Quickly, I closed the curtains, slipped into my pair of slippers, and tiptoed my way through the kitchen to sneak out. Quietly, I shut the kitchen door behind me.

“Why are you standing in the rain?” I was whispering. I didn’t want my family to hear. “Aren’t you cold?” I was hugging myself, rubbing my arms.

Stavros shrugged. “It’s only drizzling now.” He fell silent for a few seconds before he said, “I wanted to say sorry for how I acted before.”

Listening to him, I nervously chewed the inside of my cheek. I accepted his apology, but I didn’t tell him out loud. I was still sad he had refused my help by pushing me away. “Do your parents know you’re out here?”

“No, they think I’m sleeping,” he replied. “I noticed how you always draw the curtains before you go to bed at night and I came because I wanted to talk to you.”

“Let’s sit at the well.” The old blanket I normally used was folded on the mouth of the well. I put it on the ground and we both sat on it, resting our backs against its wall. The earth was muddy, wet. “Do you think the storm will start again?”

“I think it’s done for the night.” Stavros took two chestnuts out of his pocket, peeled their shells with his teeth, and offered me one. “My family roasts chestnuts in our old cast iron stove almost every night,” he explained before we ate in silence.

“My family’s watching the Turkish film,” I said, wishing I had one more sweet roasted chestnut to eat. “It’s always ‘I love you ... No, I hate you ... No, I love you ...’” I was mimicking the overdramatic Turkish actors and we both laughed. “Shh,” I put my forefinger over my mouth, still smiling, but we quieted down.

“We don’t have a television,” Stavros said. “Sometimes, I sneak in our neighbours’ yards, and through their windows, I watch what they watch. They never notice me, and if they do, I run away. I may be limping, but I’m fast.”

“Why are you limping? Are you in pain?” It wasn’t out of curiosity I was asking. I cared about my friend.

Stavros smiled. “When I was little, when I was learning how to walk, my parents noticed there was something wrong with my left leg. They took me to the hospital and the doctors made me go through a lot of tests, but when the results came back, they said they saw nothing abnormal, and they told us to leave. One of the doctors said it could be caused due to remnants of trauma because a bomb exploded near me when I was a baby, but he clarified it’s just a theory.” Stavros shrugged. “My limping is a mystery, but I don’t feel pain.” He was staring at his limp leg, touching his knee. “When I grow up, I want to be a doctor. I want to find out what’s wrong with me and I want to help other people too.” I wanted to tell him about the fairytale of the brave tin soldier, but he asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

“If I tell you, will you laugh?” I asked. Stavros promised he wouldn’t. “My mother speaks four languages. She learned them in her high school in Famagusta. I’ll go there after I graduate from the primary school in our village. I want to learn

them too and I want to travel to those countries. I want to be a teacher of foreign languages.”

Stavros studied my face. It looked as if he didn’t like the things I was saying. “Do you want to leave Cyprus?” His question came off as an accusation.

“No ...” I trailed off. “Do you remember the world map we have in our classroom? I want to see what all those other places are like.”

“Why?” he insisted, he was abrupt. I pressed my lips together, firmly folding my arms across my chest. I thought he was different, I thought he’d understand, but instead, I felt criticized. “I’m sorry. Eva, talk to me.” But I didn’t talk to him. The night was quiet and cold. I was looking at the sky, which was dark, but clear, when he kissed me. I was taken aback and covered my cheek with my palm. His mouth was soft against my skin. He frowned. “Your face is warm.” He touched my forehead. “You have a fever,” he announced. He’d be a good doctor.

My parents came out in the garden. They had found out I wasn’t safely sleeping in my bed and were looking for me.

“Where is she? Where did she go?” Mama asked in a panic before she gasped in horror. “What if something bad happened to her?” Both my parents called my name.

“Oh, no,” I whispered, pressing my eyes shut.

“Don’t worry,” Stavros said, holding my hand, but his parents came outside too. His eyes widened, but he was calm. “See, we’re both in trouble.”

“Have you seen Stavros?” his mother asked mine. “We cannot find him anywhere.”

I could imagine the blood draining from my parents’ faces if they put two and two together, and especially if they blew everything out of proportion in their heads as they normally did. I jumped up from behind the well, revealing myself. Stavros stood up too. He stood right next to me. The four adults exchanged looks, and as I had thought, my parents were as white as ghosts. Their relief to see me lasted only a second because Papa charged towards us as if he was a bull and Stavros was a red flag. Mama ran after Papa. Stavros’ parents were on their veranda, and his father, foreseeing what would happen, crossed the street like lightning, throwing himself between his son and Papa.

“I’m sure there’s a logical explanation,” Stavros’ father said. Similar to his son, he was calm and composed. His mother had joined us. She stood by her

husband with her hand on her belly. In the presence of the pregnant woman, Papa attempted to withhold his anger, but he balled up his one hand into a fist, clenching his jaw. Papa knelt in front of me, putting his hands on my shoulders; they were heavy. Mama stood behind him.

“Stavros and I are friends,” I blurted out before they had the chance to cry or scold or yell or ask questions. “We were talking about what we want to do when we grow up. Is that bad?” Papa sighed, bowing his head, but Mama wasn’t as forgiving.

“What were you thinking, Eva?” Mama demanded. “Don’t you know better than to leave the house without telling us and at night-time no less? You had us worried sick.”

“Anna, please.” Papa raised his voice.

“You always defend her,” Mama complained. “We cannot let her get away with doing whatever pops in her head. She should be forbidden from seeing Stavros again.”

Stavros and I looked at each other. He was frightened and so was I.

“You’ll never speak to that boy outside school again,” Papa ordered, pointing at my classmate, my neighbour, my new friend. “We’ve talked about it before, but it’s the last time I ask nicely. If you disobey us again there will be consequences. Do you understand?”

“But he’s my friend.” I whispered. I was pleading.

“Do you understand, Eva?” Papa persisted. I nodded, holding back my tears. I didn’t dare look at Stavros. “Good,” Papa said, standing up to deal with our neighbours. He kept his temper at bay. “You had better keep your son away from my little girl,” Papa warned Stavros’ father, pointing his forefinger at him. “We offered you a job and this is how you repay us?” he retorted.

“Master Sophocles,” Stavros’ father began. “My son’s a good boy. He’s a good student. He respects other people.” Stavros was still standing behind his father, while his mother was resting her hands on his shoulders. He was staring at his feet and he looked distraught.

“I don’t want to hear it,” Papa cut him off. I couldn’t believe the way my father was behaving because of me, but his over protectiveness had clouded his better judgment. When one of our other neighbours opened their front door to see what all the fuss was about, we each returned to our houses.

My parents lectured me for an hour, and even though I tried to explain to them that Stavros was my friend, they were willing to hear nothing. When they finally allowed me to go to bed, I slipped into the deepest sleep the moment I got under the covers. I was hot and tired and trod a path of nightmares.

I dreamt of wandering alone in the woods. It was the dead of winter, but I was wearing a white summer dress. I thought I felt the cold penetrating my bones, I thought I was shivering. If I looked up, I could see the light of day, but inside the woods, it was dark, but I wasn't afraid. I sat down on the dirt, resting my back against a tree trunk, and out of the trees came a stray puppy. It was a mongrel, and with a sense of entitlement, it climbed right onto my lap. It was white, but its fur was filthy, and its eyes were like two black buttons. When a book of fairytales appeared out of thin air, the little beast whined, hiding its dirty muzzle with its dirty paws. I grabbed the book and threw it far away. The mongrel bared its teeth and pressed its front paws into my stomach, making me ill.

I kicked and cried until I opened my eyes, but the room was dark and I thought I felt the warm, wet breath of the mongrel on my neck. In a state of shock, I screamed, and even though I was drenched in cold sweat, my entire body was burning up.

"It was only a dream, Eva." Rosa was shaking me, sitting next to me on the bed. Sofia turned on the lights, squeezing her rag doll in her hug. She looked frightened. Panting, I looked around myself. The mongrel had disappeared. It was nowhere to be seen, but I could have sworn it was real.

My parents ran into the room. I had woken everyone up in the house. Papa's already worried eyes widened and it was only then that I caught sight of my reflection in the mirror. My hair was plastered to my forehead with sweat, my cheeks were red hot and my half closed eyes were shining. My vision was blurry and I kept blinking. Mama wasted no time. She hurried towards me and pressed the back of her hand against my forehead.

"She has fever," she said, searching for something in the nightstand drawer. When she finally found the thermometer, she put it under my armpit, pressing my arm against my body. "Stay still, my darling." She caressed my hair. "It's only for a minute."

Papa brought a bowl of cold water, towels, a half full glass of water and a pill in a tray from the kitchen. When I noticed the pill, I frowned. I had taken it before and it tasted horrible. Once the thermometer measured my temperature, Mama held her breath, but attempted not to let panic get the best of her.

“She has a fever of forty two degrees. Rosa, take Sofia to our bedroom. You girls sleep there tonight. Papa and I are staying with Eva.”

Rosa nodded, taking Sofia’s hand. My sisters left the room, but I wished they hadn’t, I wanted them with me. While Mama helped me change my nightgown, as the one I was wearing was wet with sweat, Papa crushed the pill with the spoon, put the little pieces into the glass and stirred. I wasn’t looking forward to drinking that. Once I got into bed and covered myself with the blankets, Papa gave me the glass, and as I had no other choice, I squeezed my eyes shut and drank in big gulps. The bitter taste of the pill stayed in my mouth.

“Try to sleep, sweetheart,” Papa told me.

When I closed my eyes, one of my parents, I couldn’t tell which one, placed a cold towel over my burning forehead. The relief was instant, and having forgotten all about the mongrel, I fell asleep, not thinking that another nightmare might have been in the making and was ready to come up soon.

The second dream I had was as equally upsetting as the first one. In the dream, I was no longer a child, I was a young woman, and Stavros was a young man. He was following me down the busy streets of Famagusta, and I kept looking over my shoulder, walking as fast as I could, but he was prowling through the crowd, not losing his sight of me. He was not limping in the dream, he was walking as perfectly fine as everyone else. In those Turkish films we watched on Friday nights, the man always chased the woman, but Stavros and I were playing.

When I came across my reflection in the window of a shop, I stopped and stared. I touched the purple dress I was wearing, appreciating its soft silky fabric. When I noticed I had on matching shoes, I bit my lip, smiling. I was pleased with what I saw. As for my hair, it was long and tamed, with two pearl pins in it. I thought I looked like one of those fashion girls in the magazines Mama always brought home from work. With the girls at school, we often talked about how we wanted to look like once we were older. We were going to be high school students in a few months. Day by day, we were growing up.

My mind took me away from Famagusta and in a park. Stavros had stopped running after me and I had stopped running away. He sat down on a bench and looked as sad as the moment my father told us we cannot be friends anymore. He had a moustache, he was wearing grown up clothes, and he was as serene as ever. When I walked to him, he grabbed my arms and told me to run. I didn't hear his voice, I only read his lips, but it was too late.

A number of hostile people appeared out of nowhere, closing in on us. Stavros stood up and put me behind him. The dark people barked at us in Greek and Turkish, while in the distance, a group of English people were having a tea party. A gramophone was playing their English songs, while they were drinking and laughing. In the meantime, Stavros and I were being attacked. A man took out his pistol, pointing it at us, and I wanted to yell, yet I had no voice, and my throat hurt from my violent attempts to be heard.

Someone was shaking me, forcing me to wake up. My parents were standing by my bed. They kept looking at each other and at me with concerned faces. My eyes fell on my father's hands on my arms. He was the one shaking me.

Papa retrieved his hands, explaining, "You were tossing and turning and crying."

"Come on, my love," Mama said, pulling away the blankets. "Let's change your nightgown. You're soaking in sweat again."

"What time is it?" I asked once I was changed and back into bed.

"Three in the morning," Mama replied, touching with the back of her hand my forehead and cheeks. "Her temperature is falling," she told Papa with a smile.

"Good," he yawned, rubbing his eyes with his thumb and forefinger. Mama kissed my forehead before she returned to Sofia's bed. Papa returned to Rosa's. My parents must have thought I had fallen asleep because they began talking to each other in whispers.

"Fever is making her hallucinate," Mama sighed. "It makes her see nightmares."

"In the morning, she'll be fine." Papa attempted to assure himself. "God will see to it."

The rest of the night was calm, quiet, free of fears and bad dreams, and when I woke up at dawn, I was finally fever free.

“Σε παρακαλώ, Μαμά,” I begged. “Please, Mama.” I had my hands joined up on my chin and I was jumping nonstop on the spot for extra effect. My body was weak from the night before, but I gathered all the energy I could to convince my mother. “Can I come with you and Papa at work today?” It was the tenth time I was asking. “PLEASE.”

On Saturday mornings, Rosa and I did our homework, but had the rest of the weekend to ourselves to rest and play with Sofia. That Saturday morning, however, I didn’t want to stay at home, I wanted to go to Famagusta and forget about the previous night.

“No, Eva,” Mama declined for the tenth time. She checked my temperature one last time with the back of her hand. “Your fever’s gone, but you should stay in bed. We must be extra careful today.”

“But I don’t want to stay home with Yiayia, Rosa and Sofia,” I complained. “I love them, but I want to go to Famagusta with you and Papa.”

But right after that statement, I sneezed, coughed a few times, and sniffed, wiping my nose with my sleeve. Rosa smirked, leisurely braiding her hair, while Sofia was drawing with pastels, paying no attention to the fuss around her. We had just finished breakfast, but the two of them were still sitting at the table, relaxing. Yiayia was washing the dishes, shaking her head. On the radio, like every Saturday morning, a female broadcaster was reading fairytales.

“Eva, go back to bed,” Mama ordered. “I’ll bring you one more cup of tea and kiss you goodbye.” I opened my mouth, sucking in a big breath, wanting to protest, but I was ready to accept defeat. Papa picked up the receiver, dialling an unknown to me number. I knew all my aunts’ numbers by heart. “Who are you calling?” Mama demanded, focusing on Papa, but he shushed her, and we quieted down to listen. Papa had a friend in Famagusta, who was a paediatrician, and he called him to arrange an appointment that morning. Papa wanted to take me to the doctor before they went to work and Mama didn’t argue with him. “Eva, go get dressed, and wear the warmest clothes,” she said. “It’s freezing outside.”

Not always, but most times, Mama was right, it was freezing cold that winter morning. The three of us buried inside our coats and ran to the car. While we waited

for Papa to unlock it, I traced my gloved fingertips over the small silver letters, which formed its name; Morris. Papa had bought it a few months ago. He had been in such big a dilemma about what car to buy.

“Triumph is beautiful to look at, but Morris is more convenient,” he used to say. “Everyone in Cyprus has either a Triumph or a Morris right now.”

I loved my parents’ car. I loved its colour, which was a warm, dark grey. It was the colour of a pencil smudge. I loved the inside the most because it was clean and comfortable. Papa took it to a car wash once a week.

Papa turned on the engine, but Mama remembered she had forgotten to grab an umbrella, in case it rained. While she went to get one, I looked over at Stavros’ house, at their closed front door, and tried to imagine what was going on behind it. I wondered whether they were having breakfast or whether Stavros was playing with his twin brothers or listening to the lady narrating fairytales on the radio too. When Mama returned, Papa pulled onto the street and we headed to Famagusta. It was a ten minute drive, during which I leaned my head against the window, looking at the sky outside. The sun was playing hide and seek with the clouds that morning. The radio was on and two broadcasters were discussing the fighting between the two communities.

“Chaos rules Nicosia, and dare I say, all of Cyprus.”

The night before, while I was disobeying my parents by going outside after hours, while I was having nightmares from fever, a group of Greek Cypriots had attacked a Turkish Cypriot village to retaliate for an attack that had been made by a group of Turkish Cypriots to a Greek Cypriot village. The Turkish Cypriots were blaming the Greek Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots were blaming the Turkish Cypriots, and in the meantime, they were hurting and killing each other.

I focused on the buildings we passed by with the car.

My parents worked in Kennedy Avenue, where the Grand Hotel and a number of other hotels were lined along the seafront. They were all newly built and a lot more were already being built. Kennedy Avenue and Democracy Street were the most popular places in the Famagusta quarters. They were always buzzing with people, locals and tourists alike. Democracy Street, according to Papa, was the place to be, as the best bakeries, cafes, cinemas, clubs, shops, patisseries and pubs were located there.

Every morning, before heading to the Grand Hotel offices, my parents stopped by their favourite bakery. It was packed inside and out. Every table was occupied by people, who ate fresh pastries and drank hot coffee or fresh juice, while they talked loudly and laughed even louder. I waited in the car while my parents joined the massive queue, which waited to be served. In the backseat, I hugged my knees and sat facing the sea of Famagusta. The bitter cold was beginning to calm down, but the blue sea was rough and untamed.

There was a tap on the window. It was Andreas and Agape. Andreas was the baker's son and Agape was his fiancée. I rolled the window down and greeted them with the biggest smile. They were leaning forward and they were smiling too. They were both wearing white aprons and white caps. I liked the two of them.

"Good morning, little one," Andreas said, giving me a transparent plastic cup with freshly squeezed orange juice. I sipped the drink and chewed on the transparent straw.

"Your parents told us you had fever last night," Agape said, but touching my forehead and cheeks, she estimated with a warm smile, "but you're better now."

"Drink the juice," Andreas told me, pointing his forefinger at me, and in a tone that left no room for disagreement. "It'll do you good." I nodded frantically, already sipping.

Without a warning, Agape took my chin in her hand; her name meant Love. She gently lifted my head up. "Let me look at you." She studied my face. "You're changing," she said. "You're changing into a young lady."

I frowned. Lately, I heard that a lot, from family and strangers alike, and the thought was starting to scare me. I didn't want to change. I wanted to always be Eva, no matter what.

"We should head back inside, my love," Andreas told her. "My father needs all the help he can get." As the two of them walked away from the car, my parents approached. "Have a good day, Mr. and Mrs. Adamou," Andreas said, while Agape smiled with her head bowed, holding her fiancé's arm.

My parents greeted them in return, and when they got inside, the car filled with the scent of fresh, warm pastries. My mouth watered, and for the time being, I forgot about what Agape had said. Mama promised we'd eat them after my doctor's appointment.

“What’s going on in that little head of yours?” Papa asked, looking at me through the rear-view mirror, while Mama turned round to face me. I was chewing on the straw, looking outside the window. I shrugged, staying silent. My parents exchanged looks before Papa turned on the radio. The broadcaster was talking about politics and the violence between the two communities again. Looking at the sea, which was in turmoil that morning, I thought that no matter what might happen in the future, I’d always have the sea of Famagusta to soothe me and bring me peace.

Yiayia had strict instructions from Mama, when she and Papa weren’t home, to not let me out of her sight and under no circumstances allow me to go sit in the garden by myself as I used to. My parents took extreme measures to make sure I wouldn’t spend any more time with Stavros, Sebastian and Melina.

As for Stavros, he even avoided making eye contact with me at school, let alone come talk to me. He looked as if he was held back by invisible hands and I figured his parents must have forbidden him to be friends with me, too, because they were worried they’d lose their job at my grandmother’s field. I had lost the only friend I wanted to have.

I should stay safe at home and comply with all my parents’ rules; that was what was expected of me.

“Rosa is such a good girl,” my parents kept telling me. “She always does what we tell her to do. You could learn from her, Eva. You could be more like her.”

It was another seemingly usual afternoon in the Adamou household, and I was sitting at the kitchen table, under the supervision of Yiayia. I had to learn by heart the Olympian Gods and their powers for a history test, but I kept sighing out of boredom as loudly as possible.

Sofia was sitting beside me. Her chin was resting on her folded arms on the table, and she was watching me, annoyingly. She was rocking her legs, which were dangling from the chair.

Yiayia was frying Jerusalem artichokes along with potatoes. On Mondays, Yiayia cooked beans, on Thursdays, she cooked lentils, and each Wednesday and Friday, we fasted by not eating olive oil. Most villagers followed the same schedule.

Rosa was helping with dinner. Chopping the onion for the salad, tears were falling from her eyes. I noticed how beautiful she still was even when she cried.

Mrs. Stella, our neighbour and Yiayia's good friend, came knocking at our door, but barged inside before Yiayia opened. Mrs. Stella greeted us flustered and out of breath.

"Kiki, I need to talk to you," Mrs. Stella said to Yiayia and the two middle-aged women exchanged looks as they had to take care of us children first.

"Rosa, help Sofia take a bath. Eva, study in your bedroom," Yiayia instructed and we immediately did as we were told.

After my sisters and I left, Yiayia made coffee and they sat down to drink it and exchange news. When Rosa went in the bathroom with Sofia, I tiptoed in the hallway, hiding behind the wall, listening to what my grandmother and her friend were discussing. They had left the door open. Curiosity killed the cat, Yiayia always said.

"Rena called me," Mrs. Stella said, sipping her coffee. "She spoke on the phone with her daughter." She sipped so loudly. "Rena's son-in-law, Petros, works at the headquarters of the sovereign base in Dhekelia. He overheard two English officers discussing." There was silence for some seconds, and I pressed my back against the wall, munching on a handful of sultanias, waiting. "Petros said that the English said that they found a mass grave of Turkish Cypriots in a village near Nicosia and that it was the Greek Cypriots doing." There was silence again, and I furrowed my eyebrows, wondering what mass grave meant. I'd ask Papa. "The dead were tied up like animals, Kiki, and they had been shot. There were women and children, Kiki. Do you believe our people are capable of such evil?" Mrs. Stella was seeking soothing lies. She couldn't wrap her head around the truth.

When my parents still worked in Yiayia's field, long before the Grand Hotel was built, I often went with them. Once, while I was playing with the shepherd dog, which guarded the sheep, I saw Papa tying up one of the fluffy animals. He had immobilized it with rope around its neck and legs. I was sure Mrs. Stella was wrong, I was sure people couldn't and wouldn't do that to other people.

"Παναγία μου," Yiayia breathed. "Virgin Mary," she had said, crossing herself. Yiayia spoke softly, aware Rosa and Sofia were within ear shot, unaware I was eavesdropping, "What about the Turkish Cypriots that force Greek, Armenian, and Maronite Cypriots to flee their homes? They kill, too." RIK, which was Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, was the only television channel and radio station on the island, and everyone believed the side of the story they were served. "And don't get

me started on the English and their damn divide and rule tactics, which started this entire feud a decade ago. They planted mistrust between our communities.”

I stepped closer, thirsty to hear more, but Rosa sneaked up on me. She covered my mouth with her hand so I wouldn’t make a sound, dragging me away from there, and my sultanas fell on the floor. Her hand still smelled of onion.

“What do you think you’re doing, Eva?” she scolded, when we were in our bedroom. Sofia was sitting in front of our mirror, watching us through it. She was waiting for Rosa to comb and braid her wet hair. I opened my mouth to reply, but Rosa shushed me, “Just, do your homework!”

Exhaling angrily, I climbed on my bed, grabbing my schoolbook. I felt as if I was a prisoner in that house. I had to either do schoolwork or chores and I wasn’t allowed to go outside by myself anymore.

“Rosa,” Yiayia yelled from the kitchen. “Come finish dinner. Stella and I have to go to Barbara’s house.” Mrs. Barbara was one of our other neighbours. Yiayia and Mrs. Stella had news to spread.

Before Rosa went to the kitchen, she pointed her forefinger at me, “Stay and study!”

The winter months were coming to an end, but Stavros and I hadn’t spoken in weeks. We only stole glances at each other at school. In the meantime, Haluk Yilmaz had suddenly stopped coming to school and we were soon informed by Miss Milia that he and his parents had abandoned the village. The villagers grew more aggressive towards them by the day and rumour had it they went to live in an enclave with other Turkish Cypriots.

One day, during religious education, while Miss Milia talked about the life and death of Apostle Andreas, I was cold and bored. Stavros was sitting on the desk beside mine and was one of the few students who were paying attention to the lesson. Miss Milia was walking among our desks, reading out loud the passage about the apostle from the book she was holding, when she fell on her knees. Immediately, we all gathered around her.

“Miss Milia, are you alright?” everyone was asking.

“Please, call the headmaster,” our teacher begged and her voice was barely audible. “I feel a little lightheaded.” She sat on the granite as she didn’t have the

strength to stand up. A few of our classmates ran to bring the adults. I saw Stavros standing behind her. His eyes were focused on something on her back and he was frowning.

“Miss Milia, you have a stain on your skin,” Stavros said. “It looks like ink.”

“Where?” The teacher asked.

“On your nape,” he replied, but she smiled at him.

“It’s probably nothing, but thank you.”

The headmaster and one more teacher came into the classroom, taking her away.

Miss Milia was always kind to everyone. Her name meant apple tree. That day, she went to the hospital, and a few days later, a substitute teacher came to take over. We were told that Miss Milia had taken ill and weren’t given further explanation. The substitute was a bad teacher and a bad person. By summertime, Miss Milia passed away. She was thirty years old and had left behind two children under the age of five along with a distraught husband. That was how I learned good people didn’t always win in life.

Spring 1970

The Girl Playing With Fire

It was suffocating on the bus.

By the middle of May, the weather was thirty degrees already, and the old bus was packed with giggling, singing, sweaty schoolgirls, returning to their villages after their day at the town of Famagusta. There were no high schools in the villages and all the teenagers had to travel back and forth daily. The bus rides were often nauseating due to the strong smell of perspiration and the fact it was a bumpy road, but I was overwhelmed with joy that day and didn't care. I had received a letter earlier. I had earned a scholarship to study in London.

My best friend, Artemis, was sitting beside me, talking to another girl from class. They were gossiping about the soldiers in the military camp across the street from our school. St Francis Terra Sancta was a high school only for girls and was run by Catholic and Maronite nuns. They were strict, they were our teachers, and they hated that there was a camp full of young soldiers, doing their morning exercises only in a pair of camouflage trousers a few feet from us. Most girls couldn't concentrate in class, they kept looking outside the windows at the soldiers, sighing, daydreaming, and the Sisters often gave out detentions or hit us with their wooden sticks on the backs of our hands to get back our attention.

The nuns watched us like hawks and whenever a student shortened her skirt even the slightest, it never went unnoticed or unpunished. The nuns called her in the corridor, while all of us were watching, and they tore the hem, making an example of her; wearing a skirt above the knee was unacceptable. The nuns were either European or Lebanese and they intended to put the fear of God in us as well as make sure we got it well through our heads that morality and prudence were of the utmost importance. We even had a class called "Morale", which was taught in Italian.

Six years ago, when Miss Milia died, when the intercommunal violence reached its highest point, Cyprus' National Guard was created. In the beginning of each summer, all eighteen year old Greek Cypriot boys had to report for duty. They had to serve in the army for two years. In the summer of 1964, Turkey threatened to

invade the island, but they were forbidden to do so by the US president Johnson. Meanwhile, Greece had its own problems to deal with, as in the spring of 1967 a group of colonels took over, forcing the country and its people to live under a dictatorship.

Six years fast forward, we lived on an island, where British soldiers, Cypriot soldiers and Greek soldiers, were roaming around either in their army uniforms or in their civilian clothes, while Turkey continued to breathe down Cyprus' neck. Things, however, had calmed down and the islanders lived mostly in peace and in separate villages. The interaction between the two communities was limited and restrained.

Greek Cypriots thought they were at the top of the world. Famagusta was thriving. Hotels along the seafront as well as apartment blocks were insatiably being built. It was the gem of the Mediterranean. Rich and famous people from all over the island and all over the globe visited the city. What was more, the island had its independence, the Turkish Cypriots were a minority, and the Greek Cypriots hoped and prayed for Enosis sometime soon.

The only thing that made the bus rides bearable for me was the beautiful crowd of blossomed almond trees in a field we drove by. I leaned my head against the window, shutting my eyes for a while.

During recess that morning, Sister Beatrix wished to see me in her office, and when she called for me, Rita told Stella, who told Marina, but it was Flora that finally found me. In her small, square office, she sat at her desk, listening to BBC, but when I went, she turned the radio off. In front of her, there was a silver tray with a teapot, a teacup and a plate with digestive biscuits. Every morning, at quarter to nine, we saw Mrs. Magdalena, one of our school's cleaning ladies, walking down the corridor to bring Sister Beatrix that tray.

Sister Beatrix was plumb and middle-aged, and behind slim specs, she had grey eyes, while none of us had ever seen her hair colour underneath her veil. Watching her pour the steaming, golden brown liquid, I thought about how I only drank tea when I was ill, while she drank it even in the hottest of days; with milk and one teaspoon of sugar. I was in her office for a few minutes, but it felt as if I was there a lot longer. I was standing still, waiting for her to open her thin lips and say something, and in the silence, noises seemed to sound louder; the pouring of the

tea, the clinking of the silver spoon against the porcelain cup as she stirred it, the chirping birds outside, the laughter of girls on the other side of the door.

Sister Beatrix was a silent, staring woman, but she wasn't as stern as some of the other nuns. She cared about our education and didn't concern herself with the stormy politics of the island. Sipping tea, she slipped a letter across the desk. It was addressed to me, but she had already opened and read it. My heart was pounding in anticipation. I had waited for such a long time.

"Well done, Eva," Sister Beatrix said.

Recess would soon be over, but I wanted to read my letter in peace. There was a catholic chapel in the schoolyard. Unnoticed, I hurried there, and luckily, I was alone. As always, it was clean and well-lighted. As long as we were respectful, we were allowed to go in if we pleased. It was a humble place with white walls, white statues, and a few wooden benches set in rows. Oftentimes, when we were in the classrooms, having our lessons, we heard calming, melodic music coming from it. I sat down in the last row, and reading my letter, the biggest, brightest smile spread across my face.

When the bus hit another bump in the road, I groaned, opening my eyes. I wished for fresh air, but most of the windows were stuck and wouldn't open. When a couple of girls, Irene and Areti, began laughing and pointing at something, I looked outside. Stavros and the Englezos were walking on the side of the road. I thought how ironic the two girls' names were; Irene meant peace and Areti meant virtue.

"Look, it's the Englezos," Irene clicked her tongue.

"He's so funny looking," Areti replied. "Look at his orange hair and at how red his skin has turned in the sun." She was giggling. "Stavros's handsome." But she complained, "If only he wasn't limping all the time."

"We should open the window and laugh at them," Irene suggested, and getting up, she grabbed her friend's wrist, pulling her up. I wanted to stop them, but I didn't have the guts.

"Leave them alone," Melina shouted from the back of the bus. She had stood up and was fast approaching. She was going to fight back. All these years, Stavros, Sebastian and Melina never stopped being friends. They didn't care at all about their different backgrounds.

Irene and Areti looked at each other, smirking. Melina had her backpack on, but was holding one of our schoolbooks against her chest, and before she could react, Areti snatched it from her, handing it over to Irene. The bus driver was watching what was going on through his rear-view mirror, not interfering, and only shaking his head.

“Give it back,” Melina demanded, but Areti blocked the way. Irene opened the schoolbook, finding a folded paper inside. “Give it back,” Melina shouted and I thought she was struggling with herself in order to not push Areti out of the way. Melina wasn’t the shy little girl I had met all those years ago. She had become tough. Everyone on the bus was watching, but no one was helping because they didn’t want to be targeted by Irene and Areti. Reading what was written on the paper, Irene gasped, but her shock was soon replaced by amusement, which she expressed with a grin.

“It’s a love letter from the Englezos to the half-breed,” she announced loud enough for everyone on the bus to hear. Upon hearing that, my eyes darted toward Melina. “I should read it out loud,” Irene said, already clearing her throat theatrically.

“No!” Melina cried out, dashing forward, but the bus hit another bump in the road, and she fell on her hands and knees. Half the girls burst into laughter, the other half felt sorry for her, while I sat frozen.

“That’s enough,” the bus driver shouted and his loud, bass voice intimidated all the girls into silence. “Everyone back to your seats.” He was mumbling curses. He was a big man with bushy black eyebrows and a bushy black moustache. Ironically, he was almost bald. The back of his shirt was stained with sweat, his forearms were covered in black, thick hair, and on his fat little finger he wore a gold ring.

“The Englezos and the half-breed,” Irene spat, pushing the love letter into Melina’s stomach. “What a romantic love story you have going on,” she snorted, returning to her seat.

It was clear to me that Irene was bitterly jealous because Melina was one of the prettiest girls in St Francis and how couldn’t she be with her gold hair and big brown eyes. Not just that, but she always had the full attention of Sebastian, the rich English boy, who no local could get close to. Like Stavros, Sebastian was too turning into a handsome young man. He dressed differently, more fashionably than

most Cypriot men, and he always smelled of soap and cologne. He was proud and felt superior.

Even though her face was hidden behind her silky hair, I was sure Melina was close to tears, but nobody on the bus seemed to care. Under the gaze of everyone, she returned to her seat. Quietly, everyone began discussing what had just happened with the three girls.

Artemis turned to me. "I heard her grandparents used to live in one of the enclaves until recently," she whispered, thirsty for gossip.

"Do you want to go for a swim?" I asked. I was eager to change the subject.

Artemis was taken aback. "The bus doesn't make any stops before it gets to the villages."

"We'll have to stop the bus ourselves, then," I replied, getting up. Hesitantly, Artemis followed. Walking by where Melina was sitting, I grabbed her hand. "Come with me," I whispered. She seemed scared, but nodded, coming along. I didn't care about how the girls on the bus would react. I was leaving the island in a month, going far away. Besides, I wanted to get Melina out of there. Someone had to help her. No one deserved cruelty. The driver saw us through his rear-view mirror and curled his lip in irritation.

"I'm not feeling well. Can I get off the bus?" I lied to the driver, clutching my stomach.

"Go back to your seats." He was indifferent and never took his eyes off the road. A few of the girls were curiously watching us.

"I think I'm going to be sick," I whined, covering my mouth with my hand.

The driver was getting unnerved, "I'm not supposed to drop you off in the middle of nowhere."

"Can't you see she's going to vomit?" Artemis demanded dramatically. A lot of gasps were heard as panic arose. The bus was filled with people, all the windows were shut, and those which weren't didn't make much of a difference, and if something like that happened, the stench would have been sickening. The driver finally flinched, brought the bus to a halt and let us out.

"Thank you, driver," Artemis shouted innocently, waving, while the driver scoffed, shutting the bus door, pulling into the road.

I turned to Melina. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

Melina smiled. "Thank you," she said and meant it. "I must head home. My mother needs help with the housekeeping." The village was half an hour on foot away and I watched her walk leisurely down the road towards it. She wasn't in any hurry to return there. All islanders from both communities went back to living harmoniously among each other, for the most part, but how could Melina forget how everyone treated her and her family a few years ago, while she was growing up.

The beach was only a breath away. Carelessly, Artemis and I roamed about the sand dunes, but she soon spoiled my mood by continuing what she had begun earlier.

"Living in the enclaves must have been horrible," she said and I rolled my eyes. I didn't want to talk about it. What difference would it make if I did? I couldn't change anything. I was a mere adolescent girl with zero power. She went on, animatedly moving her arms, "Can you imagine? Some of them had no running water, no electricity. It's like they were living in the Dark Ages. Honestly, what did they expect would have happened? They kind of brought it upon themselves. More than the seventy per cent of the island is inhabited by *us*."

"Come on." I grabbed her hand and pulled her along, putting an end to the discussion.

When we ran to the edge of the sea, she undressed without thinking twice and walked in. There was nobody else around. We had the entire beach to ourselves. Artemis was hugging herself, rubbing her arms. The water was up to her waist and it must have been cold. She told me to hurry up. She looked happy.

I kicked my black shoes off and peeled the school uniform off my skin. It was deep blue with purple collar and belt. The fabric was thick and prickly, and in the summer, it was a nightmare to wear. My white socks were the last thing to go. In my underwear, I let my feet sink in the wet sand, while the waves washed over my ankles. I stared at all the blue, breathing in the salty air, breathing it out. I never acted irrationally, irresponsibly, but I finally felt free. What great power words and a piece of paper had, they could change someone's life.

"We should climb on the rocks and dive," Artemis shouted, coming out.

The grey rocks were stuck together, forming a pathway into the blue sea. We climbed on them and walked with our arms open, working on our balance, trying not to fall.

“I should be home cooking dinner and studying,” Artemis said. I should be home, doing the exact same. Without warning, she jumped from the rocks into the sea. When she resurfaced, she was laughing. “That was the best thing. Come on, jump.”

“I’m afraid,” I confessed.

“You’re always afraid,” Artemis replied, rolling her eyes. “Just, jump. The water’s great.” Before I had the chance to object, she swam to the shore. She grabbed my clothes, raising her arms above her head, showing me the bundle. “Jump,” she warned. “Or I’m not giving them back.”

“That’s blackmail,” I shouted, but she ignored me. She sat on the sand, grabbing an apple and a book from her schoolbag. “That’s blackmail,” I repeated to myself, but it was no use. I turned to the unreachable horizon in front of me. The deep end always scared me. I didn’t want to drown. I didn’t want to be lost. I looked over my shoulder. Artemis was lying down with one arm over her eyes, yawning.

“Fine,” I groaned.

I took a deep breath and jumped. When my body hit the surface, I heard the loudest splash, and the sea swallowed me up. I didn’t open my eyes because salt water stung, and my only aim was to move my arms and legs in search for oxygen. But it wasn’t as deep as I had thought and I hit my head on a rock at the bottom. Disorientated, I twirled around myself, breathing in seawater, sending it straight to my lungs. I was swimming towards the surface, I truly thought I was, but I was still underwater. Overhead, the bright sun was blurry, and all sounds were drowned out by my drumming heartbeat. My brain, my body, stopped struggling; I was a statue, sinking.

Stavros grabbed my arm, pulling me to the surface. Where had he come from? He put his arm around my torso and swam towards the shore. Holding on to each other, we walked on the sand, but I fell down, dragging him down with me. We were on our backs, and while I was coughing because my nostrils and throat burned from the seawater I had swallowed, he was trying to catch his breath. When he sat up, looking over his shoulder at me, I finally felt self-conscious I was half naked in front of him. He was wearing his school uniform, but it was plastered on him.

“Eva!” Artemis screamed. She dropped on her knees next to me, handing me my clothes. Her face was full of regret. She kept saying how sorry she was. Meanwhile, Stavros had got up. Artemis, wanting to atone for her mistake, focused

her attention on him. “Were you spying on us? What’s wrong with you?” she shouted, throwing a fistful of sand at him, before she hugged me, glaring at him.

Stavros’ face was without expression, but he had his eyes on me; in the bright sunlight, they looked like ponds of liquid honey. When we were children, the way he looked at me was innocent, but that wasn’t the case anymore; his gaze was lustful, desperate. Over the last few years, Stavros and I greeted each other each time we crossed paths in the village, but that was all the interaction we had. I had often caught him watching me from a distance in church or in other gatherings. As almost all adolescent boys, he was sulking in silence most of the time.

I stood up to face him. I should have stood up for him and thanked him, but I didn’t.

“Stop staring at me,” I told him through gritted teeth, but he didn’t bother to reply.

Instead, he limped his way to where he had dropped his cane and schoolbag.

A few years ago, he underwent a surgery, where the doctors in Famagusta General Hospital opened up his leg to see up close what was wrong with it, but they found nothing abnormal. Stavros, however, wasn’t disheartened. His limping had got better the last year because he had started swimming in the sea almost every day of every season. He aimed at strengthening the muscles of his weaker leg; he was determined. I, of course, knew all that because everyone in the village was always meddling in everyone else’s business.

The Englezos was there too, but he didn’t bother coming closer. “Is she alright?” he asked his friend, but indifferently.

“She’s fine,” Stavros said, shaking his head, before the two of them walked away.

When I reached home, and Mama saw the state I was in, she almost dropped the can of olive oil she was holding. She was dressing the chicken and the potatoes with it before placing the roasting pan in the oven. My hair was wet and smelled of sea salt, while my clothes were covered in beach sand. Mama had the irrational fear that one of the Greek soldiers, who came to our village on their days off, would seduce me.

According to my parents, I had to always be prim and proper in order to not give others reason to gossip about me or my family. Morality was of the utmost

importance and I had to follow the rules to be the perfect daughter. When I was little, I was wild, strange even, in the eyes of my family, who wanted to restrain me. But growing up, I understood how the minds of my family, the nuns at school and the villagers worked, and so I complied with the behaviour they wanted me to have. Over the years, I grew distant from myself, subduing to the role of a silent observer, but that letter and the future it entailed, stirred the sleeping free spirit in me.

“Where were you?” Mama demanded. “Why are you late? Why didn’t you come with the rest of the girls on the bus? Why is your hair wet? Where are your socks? Yiayia had those socks embroidered for you.”

“I did,” Yiayia said. She was making sacramental bread, which she’d take to church to be blessed and given out to people. Rosa was helping her, while her son, baby Theodoros was sitting at the table, eating the tiny banana slices they had placed for him in a little plastic bowl. Sofia was there too, doing her homework.

“The socks are in my schoolbag,” I replied dully. I was tired from school, from the hot sun, and all I wanted to do was take a bath.

“Why is your hair wet, Eva?” Mama insisted. “Your school uniform is a mess. Did you go to the beach?”

“I went for a swim with Artemis.”

“Why?”

I took the letter out of my schoolbag and handed it to her. “I received it today. I earned a scholarship to study in London.”

Sofia lifted her head up; she was in shock. Everyone else froze. Even baby Theodoros, who was only six months old, looked at me with his big, brown eyes, as if he understood what was happening. Eating his banana, he smiled at me, before he looked away. Yiayia was the first one to break the silence. Crying tears of joy, she put a hand on each side of my head, filling my hair with dough and flour, and kissed both my cheeks. Sofia pursed her lips, bowing her head over her books again.

“I’m happy for you.” Rosa hugged me, and when she let go, she wiped the corners of her eyes with her apron before she picked baby Theodoros up. “Come on, you. It’s bath time.” The two of them left the kitchen. It was never easy to tell if Rosa was happy with the life she led. She hid her emotions well. She was married at nineteen with a boy Papa had chosen for her, got pregnant, had a baby, and never had the opportunity to open the patisserie she dreamed about since she was little.

Mama's eyes had welled up with tears too. "You want to go far away from here," she stated. "You want to go far away from us." Sofia rolled her eyes, while Yiayia shook her head. After Rosa married and had a baby, Mama left her job to take care of everyone. Rosa and her new family were living with us. Yiayia had got older, and even though she didn't admit it, she couldn't handle as much as before. Mama always took care of everyone.

"My daughter," Yiayia said. "Don't talk like that. Eva's after a better, brighter future."

Mama sighed, coming closer. She put her hands on my shoulders and I felt a burden weighing me down.

"Yiayia's cousin's daughter lives in London," she said. "Her parents sent her there, when she was seventeen, to work and send them money. As she got older, she made a life for herself there. I'm going to write her a letter. You can live with her and her family until you finish your studies. She'll give you a bed to sleep in and food to eat, but you'll have to help her with the housekeeping. Do you understand?" When I nodded, Mama hugged me. "I'm proud of you," she said and I felt as if the words were hurting her. When she let go, she told me to go change my clothes and come help with dinner.

It was after ten when Papa knocked on the bedroom door. I was sitting in bed, reading and rereading the scholarship letter. Sofia was in bed too. She had her back to me, pretending to be asleep.

"Hello, my love," Papa said. He looked more hesitant, more pensive than usual. "Can I sit down for a moment?" He pointed at the bed, and when I nodded, he sat on the edge of it. He had one hand resting on his knee and the other on the bed. He was looking at me, smiling, always. Finally, he asked what was eating him up. "Are you happy about the news you received today?" I nodded again. Papa let out the heaviest of sighs, losing his smile for a second, but recovered it as soon as he had lost it. "That's all that matters to me."

"Ευχαριστώ, Παπά." Thank you, Papa.

They always made me feel so guilty.

"I trust you," Papa said. "I have a lot of faith in you." He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. "I'll tell you a story. When I was a boy, my family

was very, very poor. We lived in a house made from mud and straw, and every time it rained, it leaked from everywhere. We barely had food to eat. If I wanted to eat an ice cream in the summer, I had to offer the ice cream man one or two eggs our chicken had laid because we had no spare shillings to give him. When I was about ten, I didn't even have shoes to wear and I went to school barefoot. When the teacher saw me, he told me, "get out of my classroom, you filthy gypsy, and don't return until you put a pair of shoes on." As I walked back home from school that day, I cried and felt embarrassed, but I didn't let that make me bitter. I began working, moving up in life until I had enough money to buy my own suits and car. Don't let the world make you bitter, my love, you must always fight." After Papa shared his story with me, he said goodnight and left. Every chance he had, Papa gave me advices; he had one thousand and one of them, all stored in his mind, all inspired by his life.

"Papa never tells me stories like he does with you," Sofia complained in a murmur.

"It doesn't mean anything," I told her, looking at her back. She didn't turn round.

"It does," she said, but before I replied, she added, "Turn the light off. I must sleep. I have school tomorrow."

One carnation ... two carnations ... three ... when I counted twelve red carnation buds I tied them together with a rubber band and put them in the pile with the rest of the bundles. In the summer and every Sunday throughout the year, Sofia and I worked from seven in the morning until four in the afternoon at the glasshouse of the village. We both needed the pocket money, which was a couple of pounds per day. I needed the money because I enjoyed going to the cinema once every month and Sofia because she always wanted to buy one book or another. She was desperate for education. She felt as if she needed to make something of herself. My straw hat did a good job blocking out the hot sunrays, but it couldn't prevent their heat, and when a fat droplet of sweat rolled down my forehead, I wiped it away with the back of my hand. Sofia was working alongside me.

One carnation ... two carnations ... three ... and a few moments later one more bundle of red flowers was created. We always had curious, wandering tourists

in the village, and when a group of them stopped their stroll to point and stare at us, I didn't pay much attention to them. Sofia, on the other hand, clicked her tongue. They were a family; there were the parents, their two sons and daughter. They all were of average height with blonde hair, blue eyes and white skin. The family of foreigners continued looking at us, while talking to each other. It was funny that my sister and I were a tourist attraction to them.

"We're such an amusement to them," Sophia complained, counting carnations.

"Yes," I agreed. "But they're such amusement to us too. Look at how red and sweaty they got in the sun. They can't bear the heat." When Sofia laughed, I laughed too. When the family of tourists walked towards us, Sofia walked away, while I stayed to satisfy my curiosity. I held the flowers close and looked at the five of them, waiting. The youngest of the three children, a boy that looked about my age, cleared his throat.

"Hello," he started with a smile. "I'm David Darling." He was English. "This is my brother Roger, and this is my sister Emma, and these are my parents. We're staying in a hotel in Famagusta, but we're exploring nearby villages today. Do you speak English?"

I didn't open my mouth, I didn't make a sound, and once he thought the language he was speaking in was gibberish to my ears, he wasn't as polite anymore. He turned to his family.

"I think we need subtitles," he said, sarcastically, and after all of them laughed, they stuck around for a little longer.

Emma talked. "Ah, once we go back to England, I'll tell Michael I want us to marry in an exotic location like Cyprus; maybe Portugal or Spain." Her brothers looked at each other, rolling their eyes. She ignored them, turning to her parents. "Mum, dad, what do you think of my idea?" she asked in excitement and the couple proceeded to pamper her.

Roger rubbed his stomach. He groaned because it was gurgling. "There must be fish taverns around here," he said, looking about. "I'm starving."

It was nearly noon. Of course there were fish taverns around. There were more than I could count on one hand.

"Can I take a photo of you?" David Darling asked for my attention and permission. "You're beautiful." In the background, his mother told his father with

pride what a good boy her son was. I wanted to laugh, but I stayed silent. “Me,” he said, touching his chest. “Photograph,” he went on, showing me his camera. “You,” he finished, pointing at me. He talked louder, slower. When I nodded, he was ecstatic. Sofia, who was watching everything, rushed towards me, and grabbed my arm, digging her nails deep. Sometimes, she reminded me of a wild animal.

“You cannot let a stranger, an Englezos no less, take a photograph of you,” she scolded me, glaring at him. “Tell him he’s not allowed to do it.” Sofia and I spoke in Greek.

“He thinks I don’t speak his language.”

She was taken aback. “Why?”

I shrugged, giving no answer.

She let go of my arm. “You’re so strange,” she accused. “Why do you always have to go against everything we stand for, everything we are?”

I yanked my arm away, turning to the English youth in front of me. His family was wandering around. “Φωτογραφία,” I said. The word “photograph” was similar in speech from one language to the other and I was sure he’d understand. I smiled, hugging the flowers, and the young man eagerly captured the moment.

“Thank you,” he said. “I wish you could understand me.” His parents called his name and he awkwardly waved goodbye at me before rejoining them.

After work, while we were walking home through the fields, Sofia and I came across two black whip snakes. The long, lean reptiles were mating. They were intertwined and it was almost as if they had formed the shape of a heart on the dirt. The villagers called these snakes wild beasts. Years back, a villager had accidentally stepped on one and the beast beat the poor man with its tail until a few of his ribs were broken and his buttock was bruised beyond recognition. He had to stay in the hospital for weeks. Sofia and I were clinging to each other. Sofia was stern and we fought often, but she was my little sister and I had to protect her. I put her behind me, and carefully, we walked away, letting the two beasts be. I wondered if what we saw was a good sign, or a bad one, or if it was a sign at all.

I sat down on the floor, resting against the bathtub. Baby Theodoros was having his bath. Rosa was washing his dark hair and little body with warm water while he was

playing with his wooden blocks, which were floating. His father had bought them for him.

“How was work?” Rosa was eyeing me; her intuition had kicked in. Having her arm around Theodoros’ back and holding him by the arm, she poured water over his head. I shrugged, running my fingertips on the surface of the water, not answering her question. There was no use telling her I felt as if I was a curious soul trapped inside a fragile body that was rooted to the spot, she wouldn’t understand.

Andreas, her husband, leaned against the doorframe. He had his hands buried in the pockets of his camouflage trousers. He was wearing a white sleeveless t-shirt and black boots. He had returned from a forty-eight hours army training and he was sweaty, dirty. Andreas, and all other Greek Cypriot youth and men, after their two year service, had to report for duty and undergo extra training once every three months. Andreas was a Lieutenant.

Papa had helped his son-in-law find a job at the hotel he was still working at. The two of them got along well, while they ritually smoked a cigarette together after every meal as well as with their coffee.

“Hey,” Andreas said, but Rosa ignored him. She was focused on bathing her son. When the bath was over, Rosa helped Theodoros stand up and I handed her the white towel. She had sewed with blue thread on it the initials of the baby boy. After she wrapped Theodoros, she pushed him into Andreas’ arms. I picked the wooden blocks from the bathtub, watching my sister and her family.

“Hold your son until I iron your shirt,” Rosa demanded, and Andreas nodded, hugging his son, kissing his forehead, but Rosa rolled her eyes, storming out of the bathroom.

The compromise bubble my sister had been living in had burst and I had to find out why. Cautiously, I followed her into their bedroom.

Rosa grabbed one of Andreas’ shirts, throwing it on the ironing board. “I’m not sure how much more I can deal with him.” She was desperate to focus on the chores she had to do. She failed. I closed the door, as Andreas was nearby, and went closer.

“What’s wrong, Rosa?”

She sat on the bed, placed her elbows on her knees and hid her face in her hands. I sat beside her, looking at nothing in particular, waiting. Finally, she sat up straight and hugged herself, balling up her fists.

“It’s been three years since Papa brought Andreas home,” Rosa began. She was shaking. It was difficult for her to express out loud everything she had been storing away for so long for the sake of her parents, her sisters, and her son.

“He loved you since the moment he saw you.” Was I sugaring the pill? Maybe I was. Was it the right thing to do? I wasn’t so sure. “It’s obvious in his eyes, his body language.”

She sighed. “I know. And I care about him, I do, but he hardly ever talks. He hardly ever even talks to me! Yet, he’s always around, watching my every move.” She was scratching her neck, and at that moment, my sister reminded me of a dove with a chain around its neck. “He’s the spider on the wall I won’t kill because I feel sorry for.”

Rosa was incapable of hurting a living thing, but so was Andreas. He was serene, silent. He was a good man. He worked hard to provide for his family and to show his gratitude towards my father for taking him in. Every night, he ate all his dinner without complaint whatever it was we had cooked, while he rarely went to the coffeehouse, where it was something of a tradition for the village men to go. Instead, he stayed at home with all us women, looking after his wife and son. He always sat on an armchair in silence, watching whatever it was Rosa and Theodoros were doing, as if not believing they were his. I thought Rosa had grown accustomed to him, as we all had, but something had triggered a reaction out of her.

As if she had read my mind, she said, “I’m sad you’re leaving, I’m sad because you’ll have the opportunity to fulfil your dreams, but I didn’t have the opportunity to fulfil mine.”

I didn’t believe her, I knew her better than that. There was more to it and she was hiding it. “What aren’t you telling me?” I asked and she bowed her head with a small smile. In the end, she took my hand in hers, kissed it, and got up, refusing to reveal her secret.

Without knocking, Sofia opened the door. She wanted to excel at school, and whenever she wasn’t doing chores or working at the glasshouse, she had a book in her hand, studying. The stray grey kitten she had adopted out of the blue one day was at her feet. Accordingly, she had named her Grey. “Rosa, you have customers at the door,” Sofia announced dully.

“Who is it?” Rosa asked, putting Andreas’ ironed shirt on the hanger.

“It’s the new schoolteacher of the village with his wife and children,” Sofia replied, and without looking up from the book she was reading, she left. The kitten went after her.

Rosa lost her colour for the quickest moment before she looked at her reflection in the mirror. She tucked an unruly strand of hair behind her ear, lingering, before she rushed to the kitchen. I followed her. The schoolteacher and his family stood at our open kitchen door kindly declining the insistent invitations of Mama to come inside for a cup of coffee. When the schoolteacher saw Rosa, he stood up straight, pressing his hat against his stomach, and I narrowed my eyes, disliking him already.

The villagers talked and information about the schoolteacher’s life circulated. His name was Leonidas Papadopoulos, he was thirty-five years old and he was from Athens. He came to our village almost a month ago with his family. His wife, Maria, was thirty years old and five months pregnant to their third child. They had a seven year old son and a four year old daughter. The family of Greeks lived in the house, where the previous schoolteacher used to live. In the aftermath of WWII and the current regime of the colonels in Greece, people all over the mainland were starving. Leonidas was one of the many Greeks who sought employment elsewhere. On our island, people worked hard and the economy was flourishing.

“Please, sit, don’t stand at the door,” Mama insisted, and finally, the wife gave in.

“Could I have a glass of water?” Maria asked, slowly sitting on a chair, touching her belly. Her son and daughter stood on each side of her, while Leonidas remained rooted where he was. The boy looked at all of us with suspicious eyes, while the girl held her mother’s sleeve. I thought about how difficult it must be for the two children to adapt to their new surroundings and to the dialect everyone on the island spoke.

“Of course,” Mama replied, rushing to oblige. In a tray, she placed four glasses of water, a little glass bowl with cherry spoon sweet preserve and four silver spoons. “My Rosa made it,” Mama said with pride, presenting the tray to the family of Greeks. “She creates excellent things.” The little cherry balls were soft, coral and bathed in syrup. After all four of them ate a spoonful of the sweet, I could tell from the looks on their faces that they had never tasted anything similar.

“Your reputation precedes you,” Maria told Rosa. “All the villagers we have met so far told us your jams and spoon sweets are the best in the entirety of Famagusta.”

“I’m afraid my fellow villagers are too kind,” Rosa replied. “But I do enjoy my hobby.”

“It’s the best spoon sweet I’ve eaten in my life,” Leonidas told her.

Rosa offered him her humble smile, which no one could ever tell what thoughts, secrets and regrets she hid behind. Andreas entered the kitchen. He was holding Theodoros, whom he had dressed. The little boy extended his little arms towards Rosa, asking for his mother. She picked him up, kissing his chubby cheek, rubbing his back. Leonidas studied Andreas, drawing his conclusions, before he directed his gaze towards Rosa and her son. Andreas folded his arms, leaning against the wall, and I stood next to him. I trusted Andreas more than I could ever trust the Greek man.

“What can I do for you?” Rosa asked, finally focusing on her customers.

“A jar of jam would be great,” Maria replied. “The village grocery shop is closed on a Sunday and we’d rather not go to Famagusta as it’s not one of the better days of my pregnancy. The baby’s restless today.”

Rosa nodded, handing Theodoros over to me. He reached for the cross around my neck, intertwining his hands and wrists with the gold chain. Intrigued, he stared at it. Meanwhile, Rosa had placed a basket on the table.

“This is a jar of apple jam I made yesterday. And these are a few apples from the tree in our garden. I picked them earlier today.” Rosa placed all the items in the basket before she went through one of the kitchen cupboards in search of the tin box with the fennel seeds. She grabbed a handful of them, put them in napkin, folded it and placed it in Maria’s palms. “Drink fennel tea every few hours. It can do wonders. It helped me a lot when I was pregnant with my son.”

“Greek Cypriots’ hospitality has been overwhelming,” Maria said, getting up, but the boy and the girl were still eating spoon sweet. Shaking her head, smiling, Maria took it from them. “Drink your water and say thank you,” she told them. “We’re leaving.”

Leonidas took the basket. “What do I owe you?” he asked, coming closer to Rosa, and I glared at him. Andreas, as always, was watching. Leonidas stood out from the village men. Everything about him was different. The way he dressed was

different, he wore a suit, his hair was different, it was the colour of ash, even his facial hair was different, it wasn't the typical moustache most men had, but it was a carefully groomed beard. For a poor Greek, he didn't look very poor. Andreas, on the other hand, was tall, dark, and at that moment, dirty.

"Only fifty shillings for the jam," Rosa replied. "The rest are on me. You can return the basket whenever you can." Leonidas paid her and the Greek family was on its way.

Sophia was fast asleep with the kitten by her side. In the dark, I listened to the heavy breathing and snoring of everyone in the house. Yiayia had flu and kept coughing. It was after one, when I decided to get out of bed. I threw my knitted shawl over my shoulders and tiptoed to Rosa and Andreas' bedroom. There were four bedrooms in the house and we all slept with the doors open.

Theodoros was awake in his wooden crib. Andreas had built it days after we found out Rosa was pregnant. Theodoros was on his back, grabbing and letting go of his toes again and again, entertaining himself, but making no noise. Next to him was his plush toy; a blue bunny. Rosa and Andreas were sleeping with their backs to each other, each on their own side of the bed. I gently woke Rosa up.

"I have stomach ache," I whispered. "Keep me company, while I have a cup of tea?"

"Yes, of course," Rosa said sleepily. When she sat up, Andreas stirred. I felt as if he was awake, but didn't want us to know. When Theodoros saw his mother getting out of bed, he grabbed the wooden bars of his crib, pulling himself to his feet. "Why are you awake, you mischievous boy?" Rosa picked her son up and the three of us went into the kitchen. "Would you like aniseed or Russian?"

"Aniseed."

When Rosa put Theodoros down, he crawled around the kitchen like a dizzy chick with his blue blanket over his head. Rosa brought a copper coffee pot filled with water to the boil, adding half a teaspoon of aniseed and a small cinnamon stick. In another pot, she poured milk, warming it up for her son. Once both drinks were ready, she handed me my tea, sat on one of the chairs herself, and placed Theodoros across her lap. He held his baby bottle with both hands, drinking his milk in a state of drowsiness.

“What do you think of the new schoolteacher of the village?” I asked bluntly, but whispering. The walls had ears in that house. The walls had ears in that entire village. Steam was rising from my mug, and I blew on the tea, avoiding meeting her eyes.

Rosa was silent, hugging her son, kissing the back of his head. “You don’t have stomach ache, do you?” She had called my bluff.

“Not really.” I sipped my tea.

“I named my son Theodoros because he’s a gift from God,” Rosa told me. “I’d never do anything that’d jeopardize his future.” She was defending herself, but a moment later, she calmed down. Carefully, she listened to all the noises going on around her. The heavy breathing and the snoring continued. Making sure everyone was fast asleep, she felt safer to say more. “I first met Leonidas two weeks ago. I was at the village fountain, filling our mud jar with water. He had gone for a walk to become familiar with his surroundings. We ran into each other. I was friendly, telling him I enjoy being old-fashioned and taking water from the fountain every Tuesday afternoon. I guess it was a mistake letting him know because last Tuesday he showed up at the fountain the same time I was there. He always has something to say to me. He never stares in silence.”

I put the mug down, not caring about the tea. “Greeks can be charming,” I warned. “They have a way with words, but they’re full of empty promises.”

Rosa squeezed my hand, smiling. “Don’t worry, Eva. I don’t believe his words. I only enjoy how they sound.” Theodoros had drunk his milk and had fallen asleep against his mother’s chest. Rosa took the empty bottle before it’d slip from his hands and fall on the floor. “Please, take him to bed.” Carefully, she put him in my arms. “These dishes won’t wash themselves.” Looking at the sleeping baby boy in my hug, I thought that the Greek man was trouble.

Leaving the kitchen, I came face to face with Andreas. He had startled me, but thankfully, the water was running in the sink; Rosa was washing the dishes in ignorance. Theodoros was still sleeping. Andreas was standing still and silent in the dark hallway. I wanted to ask him if he had heard what my sister had confided in me, but my gut already knew the answer. I wanted to scold him for eavesdropping, but what difference would that make. He had quiet footsteps and startled us often. Without uttering a word, he took his son from me and returned to their bedroom.

It was American cinema week in Famagusta and every night they showed favourite films of the last decades. I had already watched all of them, but I needed a night out away from the Adamou household, which was always full with people. We had two cinemas in our village, but I wanted to go to Famagusta. Artemis was leaning against the wall, reading out loud the synopsis of the films from the last page of the newspaper, while I was looking at my reflection in the mirror.

I had bought a red lipstick from Famagusta. It was the only one I owned. I wanted to apply layers of the vibrant colour on my lips, but Papa, Mama and Yiayia would never let me leave the house without wiping it all away first. I ended up merely brushing the lipstick on my lips. The red stained my mouth. It looked like the faintest of blood.

“Which film do you want to watch?” Artemis asked after having read the films’ synopsis.

“I don’t really care.” I had replied in a dull manner. “You decide.”

“It’s pretty. Can I borrow it?” She was referring to the lipstick.

I handed it to her and put my shoes on. Sofia was studying on her bed with Grey at her feet. The grey feline with the blue eyes was curled up into a ball of fur and was fast asleep. Sometimes, she followed me around, and sometimes, she steadily stared at me. I felt as if there was a human soul trapped inside that animal.

“Come on!” Artemis urged. “We have to leave if we’re going to get to the cinema in time. I don’t want to miss the trailers.” She grabbed my hand, pulling me along. “Bye, Sofia,” she said over her shoulder.

There was no reply.

Andreas drove us to Famagusta. In the car, he was quiet, but I didn’t speak either. Only Artemis disturbed the silence with her babbling. It had been a week since the night he eavesdropped on Rosa and me talking about the Greek schoolteacher, but he hadn’t said a word to her. He was as normal as every other day. And I daren’t tell Rosa what her husband had done. I didn’t want to meddle in their marriage.

Andreas dropped us off at the cinema late in the afternoon. “I’ll go to a coffeehouse nearby and come pick you girls up in two hours,” he told us. “Take care and have fun.”

Arm in arm, my best friend and I went to buy tickets. Inside and out, the Olympia cinema was packed, but so was the outdoor cinema behind it. On Friday nights, young adults from Famagusta and the surrounding villages went to Democracy Street to spend time with their friends and socialize. There were a lot of familiar faces from school and the village. In the distance, I spotted Stavros with his two loyal friends; Sebastian and Melina.

In the queue of Olympia, there were the three English siblings I had met at the glasshouse a week ago. Their blond heads and sunburned faces stood out from the locals. Walking through the streets of Famagusta, we seldom heard Greek. People visited from all over the world and a number of other languages were dominant; English, French, German, Russian. The three siblings were chatting animatedly with each other. I pointed them out to Artemis, explaining who they were. Instantly, Artemis grabbed my hand, dragging me along. She insisted we should greet them.

“Hello,” I smiled. I spoke in their mother tongue. “Do you remember me?” They looked puzzled; maybe they really couldn’t recall who I was, but maybe they didn’t want to mix too much with the locals.

“You’re the girl with the flowers,” David Darling said surprised, adding with a frown, “I thought you didn’t speak English.” Finally, he smirked. “You tricked me.”

“We’ll buy tickets for Breakfast at Tiffany’s,” Emma interfered.

“We’re thinking about watching Night of the Living Dead,” Artemis told them.

“I wanted to watch that,” Roger complained.

Olympia had the romantic comedy, while the outdoor cinema had the thriller.

“We could watch it together,” Artemis suggested.

“But I want to watch an Audrey Hepburn film,” Emma insisted. “She’s such a role model to all women everywhere.” While she was gushing, Artemis and I exchanged looks, withholding our laughs, but then, they all began arguing about what film to watch.

“What is that man over there selling?” David asked. He was pointing at old Abdullah and his handcrafted cart.

“Come, I’ll show you.” I urged him to follow me. We walked side by side. “Hello, Mr. Abdullah, can we have one ayran, please?” I talked in Greek, while David watched. The old man was eager to serve us. In a plastic cup, he whisked well a few spoonfuls of yoghurt. Then, he poured water, filling the plastic cup, and stirred, adding salt. On top of it, he put mint leaves. He handed it to me and I handed it to David.

“Ten shillings,” Abdullah said in his thick Cypriot dialect. He extended his hand, which was shaking, and it looked as if he was begging. His dark, wrinkled face was tired, and his eyes were in the shadows of the thick set of his grey eyebrows. His head was bowed. He had grown thinner.

After David paid him, we walked away. When he took a sip from the ayran, he raised his eyebrows, showing he appreciated the refreshing drink.

“On Friday nights and weekend nights, Mr. Abdullah is always on that same spot, always outside this cinema, selling his ayrans,” I told him. “He has been doing it for years. He’s been doing it since my father was in his twenties. People that come here often know his story, but a lot of them avoid him now. When there’s trouble in a country, the normal people are collateral damage.”

David listened to me talk, drinking the ayran. When he finished it, he threw the plastic cup in a dustbin. I smiled because some Cypriots would have thrown it on the street without remorse. He was thinking about something, but he built up the courage to say it out loud. “Your accent is a little confusing, but your English is perfect.”

“Thank you. I’ve earned a scholarship to study in London.” I was proud of myself and there wasn’t a single person I hadn’t told.

“Ah, congratulations!” His brother and sister called for him. I noticed Artemis wasn’t with them anymore, and when I looked about, I saw she was talking with a boy from a nearby village. His name was Vangelis and I could tell he was interested in her. “I think we won’t be watching together that film after all.”

“I guess you’re right,” I replied.

David reached in his pocket for his wallet, taking out a card. He asked for a pen and I searched my purse. It was my mother’s purse, but she let me borrow it. He wrote something at the back before handing it to me. “It’s my parents’ business card, but I wrote down our home address and telephone number. Feel free to reach out when you’re in London.” Emma and Roger were calling for him again. They

were almost at the end of the queue. “Our stay in Famagusta ends tonight,” he said. “We’re leaving for England tomorrow.”

When he returned to his siblings, I walked to my friend, who was still with Vangelis. He was a dark, short, slim boy with big lips and indifferent eyes. When Artemis turned to me, he glared at me.

“English people think they’re better than everyone else and that their opinion is the only one that matters,” Artemis told me all upset.

“Maybe they just wanted to watch *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*,” I argued good-humouredly.

“Don’t defend them!” she shrieked, stomping her foot on the ground. She was a petite girl, and whenever she was angry, it looked as if she’d explode. I raised my hands, calling a truce.

In a lane, a few minutes by foot away from the big Famagusta cinemas, there was a smaller, a not as popular one, and in the end, we decided to go there. We were late and the film had already begun. All the lights were out and the big screen was playing the black and white film; *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Half of the director chairs, which had been set in rows by the staff of the cinema earlier, were occupied, but the rest were empty. While thinking about where to sit, I saw two heads I’d recognize everywhere; one with short orange hair and another with long blonde hair. Next to Sebastian and Melina, as always, there was Stavros.

“Let’s sit here,” I sneakily said to Artemis, who hadn’t seen the three friends because she was chatting with Vangelis.

When Stavros saw me, he was taken aback. He shifted in his chair, sitting up straight, while I sat back feeling at ease. We were sitting side by side and our arms were almost brushing against each other. Above us was only the sky and we watched the film under the stars. I was glad I had brought with me a cardigan because it was a chilly evening.

Stavros offered me roasted chickpeas from the small paper bag he was holding; a man was selling them outside the cinema. I took a few. They were hard to chew, but they were delicious. Then, he offered me his Coca Cola. I took a sip from the glass bottle before I returned it to him and he drank a big gulp. Throughout the film, we didn’t speak to each other, but we enjoyed the calm chemistry we shared

since we were children. We were old friends that came together after a long time, a really long time. Sometimes, while I was watching the film, he was watching me, but I didn't mind. In the meantime, the people we were with hadn't noticed a thing.

When Andreas and I returned home, we found everyone in the living room, watching a Greek Cypriot sketch on the television. Theodoros had fallen asleep on Rosa, and she was rocking him, whispering a lullaby to him. When she saw me, she smiled. Andreas sat beside her, putting his arm around her. Papa, Mama, and Yiayia were half asleep on the sofas, while Sofia was studying on the carpet. Grey was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Grey?" I asked.

Sofia closed her schoolbook and stretched. "She runs off at nights."

When I turned to leave, Papa asked, hoping, "Why don't you sit with us for a while?"

I looked at the television, watching the sketch for the briefest moment. It was always the same actors, always following the same formula.

"I'll look for Grey," I said and my father's face saddened.

"You don't have to do that," Sofia replied. "She always finds her way back home."

Outside, the night sky was cloudless, starless, but was accessorized by the moon, which looked like a tiny pearl. In 1969, an American astronaut walked on the moon and scenes of it were shown on the television; humans always wanted to dominate things.

While the crickets sang in the background, I looked for Grey. Across the street, Stavros was sitting in his rocking chair, on their veranda. He had a schoolbook on his lap, and while whistling, he was writing with a pencil in it. He was an excellent student. When we were little, he had promised to teach me how to whistle, but we never had the chance. As for that night, we didn't exchange one word at the cinema and our ways parted once the film was over. Apart from the crickets, Stavros' whistling, and a dog barking in the distance, the night was silent. All the villagers were in the privacy of their homes.

When we heard someone curse in Turkish, both Stavros and I were alarmed. The unpredicted, potential danger sent shivers down my spine. Stavros held my gaze and put his forefinger over his mouth, signalling to me to be quiet. I was sure if he was closer, he'd tell me not to worry. He had stopped rocking his chair and I stood as motionless as a statue. In the Yilmaz's neglected garden, the figure of a young man was roaming. In the dark, he must have stumbled upon something, and that aggravated him.

When the Yilmaz family fled our village six years ago, their house was left lifeless. In the winter of 1964, a handful of Greek Cypriots looted a lot of the abandoned houses of the Turkish Cypriots, burning a number of them to the ground. The villagers, however, didn't go near the Yilmaz's abandoned house, and throughout the years, they avoided it like the plague. It was overgrown and looked hauntingly uninhabited. I wondered who decided to disturb its peace that night.

The young man walked down the street with his head bowed and his hands deep in his pockets. He was nervously looking about him unaware that Stavros and I were watching him. As he came closer, I recognized him; it was Haluk Yilmaz, my old classmate. He must have come to see his old house one more time. Maybe he had come before, but nobody had caught him. After his family fled the village, they lived in an enclave for a few months before they moved to a nearby Turkish Cypriot village, where they still lived. Haluk's body language betrayed he was afraid of walking through the streets of a Greek Cypriot village alone at night, even if it was almost ten o'clock and most people were in their houses, even if the village used to be his home a few years back. Greek Cypriots didn't dare go near a Turkish village at night anymore and the same fears and emotions were shared by the other party.

Haluk spotted me, and when he did, he reacted as if he had seen a ghost; I was a ghost from the past. In seconds, he spotted Stavros, too. Haluk was horrified. He felt we were a threat to him and we felt he was a threat to us. The two communities had limited trust for each other anymore.

"Don't be afraid, my friend," Stavros said, standing up, but Haluk ran away as fast as possible, putting an end to our brief confrontation.

Out of nowhere, Grey meowed. She was sitting on the well. Her eyes were glowing in the dark. By the time I turned my focus back on Haluk, he had disappeared. Grey jumped down from the well, looked at me over her shoulder with her tail up in the air, warning she was up to no good, and ran away.

“Grey, no,” I whispered in frustration, but she was already gone. I clicked my tongue, heading back inside.

“Goodnight, Eva,” Stavros spoke.

“Goodnight, Stavro,” I replied.

With my head thrown back, I stared at the giant palm trees in Artemis’ garden. The bright afternoon sun was hiding behind them, while a warm breeze was slightly shaking them. In the background, birds were chirping. Artemis brought two glasses of homemade lemonade and I took one. She had invited me because she wanted to tell me something, but for the time being, we flipped through the pages of Woman’s Encyclopaedia, which was an amusing pastime. It was published in Athens, but was also sold on the island. It talked about everything that had to do with women; their anatomy, the male anatomy, their love life, carrying a child, motherhood, good nutrition, healthy lifestyle.

“Beauty suits women and strength suits men,” I read out loud.

“Man: strong, dutiful, intelligent, logic,” she sneered. “Woman: passive, lack of logic, motherhood.”

“Is that all we are?” I asked my friend. “Is our sole purpose in life to become wives, mothers, housewives?”

Artemis made a silly face. “Don’t be so serious, Eva. Life is life.” She closed the encyclopaedia, putting it aside. “I need to tell you something.”

“Is it about Vangelis?”

Artemis laughed in an attempt to mask her uneasiness. “He wants to meet my parents and ask them for my hand in marriage. I warned him I’m leaving in a month to study in Athens, but he says he’ll change my mind.”

“What are you going to do?”

She shrugged. “What if that’s my fate?”

Fate ... Huh ... I said, “Is there such a thing?”

Artemis and I talked for hours on end about our dreams, fears, hopes, and everything else there was to talk about almost daily, and under other circumstances, we’d have started a long conversation about fate and whatnot, but my friend had a reason for inviting me that day. She was serious when she said,

“That’s not what I wanted to talk to you about. Villagers talk.”

I frowned. "What do they talk about?"

"About your sister, Rosa, and the Greek schoolteacher," she replied. "Some villagers saw them walking together, talking, smiling earlier today as well as last Tuesday afternoon. It's silly of her to do that." I was silent. "Villagers always talk," she repeated. "Some say that they'll start an affair, but everyone respects your father too much to dare and talk to him about her immorality."

I clicked my tongue. "My sister has done nothing wrong." Unintentionally, I had raised my voice. "These people are idiots." I scoffed, jumping up from the garden bench and almost spilling the lemonade all over me. There was no point hiding I was upset and my eyes had brimmed with tears.

"Eva, I'm sorry, I'm only warning you." Artemis was apologetic.

"There's nothing to warn me about." I had to defend my family. "I have to go."

As I ran towards home, something caught my eye. In the street, a group of boys were torturing a black cat.

Based on a Byzantine legend, in the fourth century, the monastery of St. Nicholas in Limassol was infested by poisonous snakes, but St. Elena brought hundreds of cats from Egypt and Palestine in order to defeat the serpents and restore the peace. That was why there were so many stray cats on the island.

I put my little fingers in my mouth, folding my tongue, and I whistled as loudly as possible. The boys were distracted and the cat escaped.

"Pick on someone your own size," I shouted at them.

"Black cats are bad luck," the boy shouted back before he spat on the ground, wiping his mouth with his forearm. I didn't bother replying. How was it its fault it was born that way? I was tired of these people, of their gossip, their prejudices and superstitions. The boys went back to playing football.

As always, the kitchen door was open and Rosa was in the kitchen. On the table, our mud jar was filled with water. It was a Tuesday afternoon after all. Rosa was tying her apron behind her back, humming a song, smiling. She looked happy. She probably thought she was happy. She was assembling ingredients on the table.

"What are you making?" I asked.

"Biscuits," she replied, turning on the radio, letting the music play in the background.

"Where is everyone?"

“Papa and Andreas are at work. Mama and Yiayia went grocery shopping. Theodoros is taking his afternoon nap. And Sofia is studying somewhere in the garden.” She placed a big bowl in front of her and was ready to begin.

“We’re alone ...” I was unsure of how to say what I wanted and worried about how she’d react, but she put me out of my misery.

Rosa sensed something was wrong and put the flour down. “What is it, Eva?”

“You must stop spending time with the Greek schoolteacher.” There was no sugaring the pill this time. “The villagers talk. They’re saying you’ll start an affair with him. You have to end it before their gossip reaches Papa and Andreas’ ears.” I was forthright, harsh even, but I had to make her understand, I had to save her reputation.

Rosa took a deep breath before blurting out in the most accusing tone. “How can you ask of me to give up the only thing that distracts me from the life I lead, the dreams I’ve given up, while you’re leaving everyone and everything behind you in a month?”

I felt as if she had slapped me. “I thought you were happy for me!”

“I am, but what about me? I’m starving for even the smallest slice of happiness.”

I hugged her as tightly as I could. “You’re pursuing happiness in the wrong places, Rosa, and at the moment, you’re playing with fire.”

“I’ll miss you,” she cried, her voice breaking.

Theodoros called for us from the other room, talking his unique gibberish, and we broke apart, wiping our wet cheeks.

“I’ll go get him,” I told her. “You go ahead with your biscuits.”

Theodoros was yawning in his crib, rubbing one eye with his little balled up fist. He was waiting for someone to help him get out. When he saw me, he opened his arms. I picked him up, kissing his forehead, and we walked to the kitchen, where his mother was.

After our talk, Rosa stopped spending time with the Greek schoolteacher. I believed what had happened was partially due to those damn Greek photo-romance magazines Rosa ritually read every week; *Romantso* and *Domino*. She had stacks of them in her drawers. They were love stories illustrated with photographs of famous actors and actresses, while the inscriptions were around them. *Romantso* was

coloured, while *Domino* was black and white. They had filled her head with unrealistic expectations.

My sister was a good girl. She always did what she was told. She was taught that family as well as to maintain a respectable place in society through that family were above all else, and as soon as she showed signs of her free spirit personality, she was tamed. A promiscuous morality was the biggest crime we females could commit. Gossip could be deadly for any adolescent girl or young woman in a Greek Cypriot village and we were all well aware of that.

Father Heracles, the priest of the village, wished to renovate the church and he asked from the Mouktaris, who was the president of the village council, for his opinion. The Mouktaris decided to organize a fair to raise money and a lot of villagers volunteered to help. The fair, like all other fairs, was held in the yard of the church late in the afternoon. Plastic chairs and plastic tables had been placed in rows for the visitors, while there were small stalls that sold the food the women of the village had made. There were pies everywhere; halloumi pies, olive pies, pumpkin pastries, spinach pies. Apart from all the savoury snacks, there was a selection of syrupy sweets, which were either recipes from Cyprus, Greece or Turkey.

Papa was sitting with a few of his coffeehouse friends. They were smoking, drinking Cypriot coffee and discussing politics. A cloud of thick, white smoke was hanging over their heads. Mama was holding her grandson. Theodoros was sitting on her lap, and being the chubby, cute six month old baby boy that he was, had all eyes on him; the fact delighted Mama. Rosa and Andreas were sitting side by side. He had his arm around her waist, but they weren't speaking. Sofia sat aside, looking miserable. She wanted to stay home and study, but Mama forbade her to do that, forcing her to come along.

"We'll go for a walk," I informed my family. Artemis was next to me.

"Don't be too long," Mama instructed.

During fairs, teenagers went on strolls on the other side of the church, away from the hawk eyes of the adults. There, the boys sat in dark corners, smoking, while some of them had the chance to finally flirt with the girls they had set their eyes on. Arm in arm, Artemis and I went for a walk. Away from the lights and the noise of the fair, the teenagers of the village were free to rebel. Stavros was there

with some boys. Sebastian and Melina weren't. The Englezos' family moved to a bigger house in Famagusta a few years ago, while Melina and her parents rarely participated in these things.

"Let's say hello to Katerina and Alik," Artemis said.

"Go," I told her. "I want to say hello to someone else."

Artemis didn't let go of my arm. "To whom?"

"I'll tell you later."

Artemis pulled me back. "What are you up to, Eva?"

"Nothing! Go to Katerina and Alik."

"I'll be watching you," she warned, but with humour.

"I'll catch up with you later."

When Stavros saw I had walked away from Artemis, he walked away from his group of friends. There was an orange tree field behind the church. We went there, and for a few moments, I made him walk behind me before I turned round.

Famagusta was famous for her oranges, and once a year, her people organized a festival for the luscious fruit. People from all over the island as well as tourists from all over the world gathered in Famagusta to take part in the Orange Festival. Speeches about the health benefits of oranges, big floats made from oranges, and a beauty pageant, naming a young woman Miss Orange, took place.

"I owe you a thank you for not letting me drown that day on the beach," I said and Stavros smiled from ear to ear. He had shaved his head a few days ago. We'd both graduate from high school in a month and he had to enlist in the army soon after that. The time had almost come for him to serve his country for two years.

Stavros saw I was studying him and said, running his hand over his shaved head, "I think I'm starting to get used to it. Once I'm done with the army, I'll study medicine in Germany." He was determined to fulfil his childhood dream.

I was silent for a few seconds before I told him, "I'm leaving for London in a month."

Of course, Stavros already knew that because Mama, Yiayia and all my aunts had spread the word throughout the village, and I already knew he was planning on becoming a doctor by studying abroad because his father had proudly announced it to all the men at the coffeehouse one of the many evenings Papa was present.

“Do you think you’ll return to Famagusta afterwards?” I asked.

“I’ll always come back here and so will you.”

“That night, when we were children, is marked in my mind.”

“It’s a shame how things turned out.” Stavros came closer, leaning in, but I bowed my head, avoiding his face.

“You have to stop trying to kiss me.”

“Never.” He took something out of the pocket of his shirt. “Here.” He took my hand and placed an amulet in my palm. “I want you to have it.” It was a little blue pillow, as big as my thumb, and had a cross embroidered on it with white thread. Stavros name meant cross. “A while back, my family and I went to a monastery in the mountains and one of the monks there gave it to me,” he explained. “Inside its fabric, there’s cotton with oil and myrrh from the monastery. It’ll protect you and ward off all evil things.” He had a storyteller’s voice. “I hope it’ll ward off pretentious Englishmen too,” he said and laughed.

“Don’t you want it?” I asked, looking at the amulet, wondering if it really had all the power Orthodox Christians believed it had.

“You can return it to me whenever you want,” he replied.

A streak of lightning brightened up the night sky before thunder roared through the field. A storm was coming. The last few days, the temperature often dropped out of the blue from thirty degrees to twenty and heavy thunderstorm prevailed for an hour or so. Afterwards, the temperature was back to normal.

“I should return to the fair.”

“Stay with me,” Stavros said, pressing my hand against his chest, pulling me closer. His thousand thoughts about me were pouring from his eyes.

“I must go,” I insisted. I had heard how young couples often sought privacy in the church’s orange tree field, but it didn’t matter if I wanted to stay with him or not because I had to return to my family.

Stavros thought it was wise not to pressure me and he nodded, leading the way back to the fair. Side by side and in silence, Stavros and I strolled towards the church. He had chosen a longer, more secluded path, but I didn’t complain. I trusted him.

“Say something,” Rosa shouted from somewhere deep in the darkness and I stopped dead in my tracks. She was carelessly yelling in the middle of the orange field. What was she thinking? I followed the sound of her voice and Stavros

followed me. In the distance, I distinguished two figures, but away from any streetlamps, the night had veiled our surroundings, sealing their identities. If I hadn't recognized her voice or her hair comb, which sparkled in the dark, I wouldn't know it was her.

"Tell me you forgive me," Rosa said to the man that stood opposite her, but there was no reply to the desperation of her demand. "Goddamn you, Andreas, say something."

Hearing his name, I was relieved. From behind an orange tree, Stavros and I watched the confrontation between my sister and her husband.

"I heard you talking to Eva that night in the kitchen," Andreas calmly confessed. "I already knew."

"We should give them some privacy," Stavros advised, but I didn't budge.

Rosa, realizing her husband had not only eavesdropped on her, but had done nothing to prevent her from flirting with another man, hit him on the chest with her fist. The first hit was timid, the second was with more force, and on the third time, Andreas seized her wrist.

Stavros seized mine. "No, Eva." He forbade me to intervene.

"He'll hurt her," I breathed, but I knew Andreas wouldn't lift a finger on Rosa.

"He won't hurt her, Eva." Stavros patronizing tone pestered me.

"Tell me you forgive me." My sister was begging.

"I love you," was all that Andreas said, releasing her wrist. He grabbed her waist, pulling her to him, and they kissed, but when Rosa reached for his belt buckle, I twirled around and Stavros pulled me away.

Rosa and Andreas were always so reserved in front of everyone, but what I had witnessed was a side of them I didn't know about. There was something primitive about the manner they grunted rather than talked and about their harmless aggression towards each other.

"Are you alright?" Stavros asked.

"Yes." I was walking mechanically, but the lights of the church fair weren't far. "Thank you for the amulet. You're a good person."

Stavros laughed.

Meanwhile, thunder and lightning continued and there was nothing we could do other than wait for the eventual downpour. In the end, the fair was short lived. Some villagers took shelter inside the church, while the rest ran to their homes.

It was the first time my parents, my sisters and I visited Nicosia International Airport.

Yiayia had stayed at home with Theodoros and I had to say goodbye to them before leaving the village. Yiayia had a smile on her face and tears in her eyes, while Theodoros returned my hugs and kisses with excitement, unaware I was going away for a long, long time. It hurt me I wasn't going to be around to see him growing up, but Rosa promised to send me photographs.

The airport was a colossal building and it was overflowing with travellers who were coming and going. Some were rushing and some were more relaxed; businessmen, families, groups of friends. Most had plenty of luggages, while I had only one old leather suitcase. Mesmerized and intimidated, I looked around, taking everything in, while my family looked lost.

A group of airhostesses walked by and it was as if they had stepped out of the pages of a magazine. They wore the Cyprus Airways' uniforms, their hair was styled with an excessive amount of hairspray, they had flawless makeup, and the brightest smiles. They were chattering and it was evident they enjoyed their job. A tall, imposing pilot was a few steps behind, and because some people stared, he was grinning with overconfidence. I wondered if he was the pilot that'd take me to my destination.

"Remember, Eva," Mama spoke, stealing my attention. "Your father and I trust you to go, but remember the two conditions we talked about. One, you must return to Famagusta, to us, as soon as you're finished with your education. And two, under no circumstances will you get involved with an Englishman. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mama," I reassured. "Don't worry."

Rosa hugged me as tightly as possible, crying in my ear, "I'll miss you more than you can imagine," while Sofia was staring at me with sad, accusing eyes.

“The English are phlegmatic people,” Papa was mumbling continuously, withholding his tears, while Mama insisted, “Promise you won’t forget the two conditions.”

“I promise.”

Summer 1974

I

In a Land Far, Far Away

For four years, I lived in a grey world. I walked down grey streets, under grey skies, surrounded by grey buildings. For four years, I walked in the rain, I stood in the rain, and I daydreamed in the rain. I was often soaked to the skin because umbrellas weren't always effective against its force. When I slept at nights, the raindrops kept me company, tapping on the bedroom windowpane, sometimes softly and sometimes relentlessly. And I had to wear layers of clothes almost all days of the year in order to keep warm.

It was the middle of June, but rain poured down for days on end either way.

It was a Sunday morning and I was in the kitchen with my cousin, Andrea. She had a cold, but she was babbling away as she normally did. Aunt Thea, Uncle Vernandos, whom everyone called Vern, and Elena, my other cousin, were at church, but I had stayed to keep my sick cousin company. Andrea was plump and cheerful with skin darker than mine.

When the kettle started whistling, I poured the hot water into two cups with teabags. I let them steep, while Andrea blew her nose into a tissue. I added a teaspoon of honey in mine and milk in hers. While white steam wafted in lazy spirals out of our cups, we watched from the kitchen table the British soap opera that was on, on the coloured television. In London, nearly everyone had a coloured television; I was sure Mama would have loved one.

I had grown accustomed to drinking three cups of tea a day, but I kept that a secret from my family. Cypriot coffee was the national beverage back home and those that didn't drink it were frowned upon. I once told Rosa in a letter I liked tea and she wrote back that she, Mama and Yiayia found that funny.

Aunt Thea, Uncle Vern and Elena had returned from church. They never missed a Sunday sermon. They dropped their dripping umbrellas on the carpeted floor, taking off their wet coats.

“It’s always rain, rain, rain here,” Aunt Thea said irritably in Greek. “It’s summer. Where’s the sun? Where’s the heat?”

“Ah, Mama, you’ve been living in London for decades, don’t you think it’s time to get used to English weather?” Elena teased in English. She had joined her sister and me at the kitchen table. Uncle Vern smiled, but Aunt Thea was less amused.

“You’re lucky you’re not a child anymore. Otherwise, you’d have gotten a beating,” Aunt Thea warned, but her husband and daughters laughed because they were used to her harmless threats. Poor Auntie released the heaviest of sighs and began making breakfast. I jumped up from the chair to help her. “You understand me, Eva, don’t you?” she asked, and I nodded, wanting to relieve her from her misery.

Aunt Thea was sent to London by her parents, when she was seventeen. They were poor and depended on their oldest daughter to work in a sewing factory in the foreign city and sent them half her salary. Years flew by and it became harder and harder for her to return to her island, to her birthplace; especially, after she found and fell in love with Uncle Vern.

In the house, Auntie always spoke Greek, while Uncle Vern spoke Greek with his wife and English with his daughters. Andrea and Elena spoke English at all times. As for me, I normally replied to the language I was being spoken to. Sometimes, my cousins and classmates in the university teased me about my accent.

Because I spoke to her in her mother tongue, while her daughters didn’t, Auntie often shared stories with me about her past, about the seventeen years she had lived in Famagusta, about her younger sister, whom she loved dearly and missed daily, but hadn’t seen in years.

Auntie was making Cypriot coffee for herself and her husband, while I spread butter on slices of fresh bread. She had baked it the night before. She always baked bread herself she never bought one from the store. All these years, she had been following her mother’s recipe.

“They sent me away in this cold, miserable land,” Auntie often said about her parents. “But I forgave them. How could I not? They were my family and blood is thicker than water.”

I put a teaspoon in Rosa’s jar of jam before I put it on the table. Throughout these four years, she often sent me boxes with her jams. Rosa used to write me a

letter almost every day; she confided everything to me, I was her diary. As time went by, she wrote me a letter once a week, and even though she talked about a lot of things, she was more reserved. Gradually, I only received a letter from her once a month. She had become distant, but it was my fault, I scarcely called or wrote to my family. Life was different in London and it kept me preoccupied. I was more often than not busy either with studying or with working. Or other obligations ... Rosa might have ceased writing me letters, but she never stopped sending me her jams.

Auntie dipped a biscuit in her hot coffee, soaking it with the bitter liquid before indulging it, while Uncle Vern leisurely read the Sunday newspaper, waiting for his own coffee to cool down.

“Jill Viner, first female bus driver in London, is passionate about her new job.” Uncle Vern sounded impressed and continued reading the article. “Like it or lump it, Jill is certain she’s the first of many women drivers.” A black and white photograph of the attractive, smiling woman graced the front page of the newspaper.

Andrea and Elena were animatedly discussing the Greek and Greek Cypriot ball they had attended the previous evening. There was a Hellenic community centre in the area and they organized a ball each month.

“You should have come with us, Eva.” I had lost count of the times Andrea had told me that. “We had a lovely time, didn’t we, Elena?”

I had told them I was tired from work and didn’t go with them.

“She’ll come next time,” Elena replied. She was a serious girl, who kept to herself. Regardless, I could tell she was secretly seeing someone as she smiled more often than before and was more furtive than usual. Her parents had no idea.

Andrea was two years older than Elena and Elena was two years older than me. In contrast to her older sister, Elena was slim, and similar to her, she had dark skin. The sisters never missed a ball because they were on the lookout for potential husbands. Andrea worked in the Underground, while Elena worked at her parents’ tavern, *The Taste of Cyprus*.

I, on the other hand, had my future planned out for me. Back home, Papa had talked with the headmaster of the school village, who was an old friend of his and who promised to employ me as a teacher the second I stepped my foot on the island’s soil, while Mama was discussing with her sisters and sisters-in-law in order to find a good man for me. My parents’ expectations of and persistence on my return to Famagusta grew bigger and more frustrating with their every phone call. As soon

as I finished with my education, my family wanted me back, but I stalled buying a ticket. My time in London was running out, but I had unfinished business.

I stood up; it was time to go to work.

“I’ll drive you,” Uncle Vern offered. He owned an Austin Allegro, which he had bought in yellow as that was the colour of Cyprus’ flag after its Independence. Austin Allegros were problematic cars, yet popular due to their simplicity and low cost. Uncle Vern often complained about its poor gearchange, but I thought its square steering wheel was amusing; both the British and the Cypriots drove on the left side of the road.

“Thank you, Uncle, but I’ll take the bus. Besides, the rain has stopped.”

I grabbed an aniseed and sesame seed biscotti and was on my way. I had bought a bag of them from an Italian café I had discovered recently in one of the many London lanes. It was called *Carmela’s* and it was next to a Turkish grocery store.

Rosa, of course, used to make her own version of the Italian biscotti, which tasted much better.

On the bus stop, an Englishman with his Indian wife and their baby boy were waiting alongside me. While I was munching the biscotti, the baby boy with the dark skin and ocean eyes was staring at me. I waved at him, and he smiled, showing me his gums. He looked around the age Theodoros was when I left him.

A double-decker bus, as red as a poppy, sprung from around the corner; London streets were crowded with them, but not on Sundays. Waiting behind the young couple and their child to buy a ticker, I observed the advertisement on the side of the bus; “Don’t miss Agatha Christie’s *The Mousetrap*! Now in St. Martin’s Theatre!”

On the bus, in London, nobody cared who I was or what I was doing; nobody cared to meddle in my affairs. People minded their own business. From time to time, I received some curious stares, and at those times, I disliked being the foreigner. With wild, brown hair and olive skin, I stood out in the sea of faces as pale as marble.

Soon, I reached my destination, but I was a little late, as usual.

I worked as an assistant in a beads and jewellery shop in Kensington market. The owner was Clémence, a Frenchwoman in her sixties. She was kind, but was well aware of how to run her little business. Apart from me, she had two more employees: Barkha, an Indian girl, and Xiu Mei, a Chinese girl. Clémence had lived decades in England and was aware exotic sold well there. She hired three foreigners with pretty faces to attract customers. The two other girls assisted her during the week, while I assisted her during the weekends.

People came and went, and most of them wanted to guess where I was from. The top theories were Italy and Spain. Sometimes, I felt as if I was on public display, but that small shop was to me almost a second home. Clémence was envious of our youth, she had missed the attention and admiration she used to receive in her prime, but she was always protective.

One autumn afternoon, about a year before, in September 1973, David Darling walked in the shop. He recognized me and I recognized him, but that was only the beginning. Once David Darling discovered I worked there, he came to Clémence's shop often. The Frenchwoman saw from the start the attraction between us. He came wandering in her store, starting conversations with me, buying something small each time, and he repeated the ritual every weekend, but whenever he asked me to join him for a cup of tea or for a walk, I politely declined. One late afternoon, when it was nearing closing time and I was tidying up, Clémence pulled me aside.

"That Englishman, Mr. Darling, is incredibly interested in you," Clémence said. "And I see how you smile when he's here." I tried to tell her he was only a customer in my eyes as well as remind her how strict my family and relatives were. She stopped me by taking my hands in hers. "Don't be afraid to feel, my lovely. Don't be afraid to live."

"If they saw me with an Englishman, they'd all turn against me to say the least." I hadn't forgotten the promise I had made my parents.

"It takes a strong woman to step away from the safety of the conventional," Clémence advised. Then, the cunning Frenchwoman asked me to clean her flat on Monday afternoons and keep company to Juliette, her basset hound.

The next time David Darling asked, I accepted his invitation.

The Englishman and I spent three lovely seasons together, and how I wished we could have spent many more, but then, the summer of 1974 came.

After several days of severe storms, the sun was finally shining teasingly through the low clouds which covered the sky. Strolling down Portobello Road, my body devoured the gentle warmth of England's sun. I had a meeting at the university, but I took my time. I stopped at a stall; a handmade notebook had caught my attention.

The street, as always, was busy, but the shoppers weren't as carefree as they normally were. A few days before, in the morning hours of June the 17th, IRA had bombed the Houses of Parliament, injuring nearly a dozen people and leaving the Londoners in stunned disbelief. Frequently, there were bombings in Northern Ireland related to the Troubles, and sporadically, there were in the Republic of Ireland and England, too. It was the second time they had bombed London, the first time was a year before, and in both occasions, they had attacked the heart of the city. If the academic year hadn't ended, I'd have been on my way to a lecture and nearer to the blast, but instead, I was safely sweeping my relatives' tavern in the suburbs. That afternoon in Portobello Road, everyone was looking over their shoulders, wondering if they too were in the wrong place in the wrong time. Remembering I was late for my meeting, I paid the mesmerizingly beautiful African woman, who owned the stall, and was on my way.

The university grounds were almost empty. Classes and exams were over so only scarce students were wandering around. A young man was handing leaflets by the bricked wall which was always covered with a variety of vibrantly coloured posters. He was wearing tight flared trousers and a t-shirt which wrote "Save the world with love." He was standing in front of a Diamonds are forever poster, where James Bond was accessorized by two half-naked women, and the bright blue poster of Women Today. There was a screening of the film on weekends in one of the lecture theatres, while the female students' community met on Wednesday afternoons.

I pushed the double wooden doors of the old building.

A group of classmates had decided to gather in a venue one last time.

"Hola, señorita," Oliver called. "You're late, again."

The very first time I set my foot in the university, I met Oliver. Due to my large, hand knit shawl, which was wrapped all around me, sun-kissed skin and frizzy hair, he had assumed I was from Spain. I didn't speak Spanish, but my

knowledge of Italian had helped me understand what he had meant. After all this time, he still greeted me in the same manner.

On Oliver's lap, Eleanor was sitting, and similar to a couple of other girls there, she was wearing a fashionable mini skirt. Diaspora Greek Cypriot girls were forbidden to wear such short garments. Our dresses or skirts had to be below the knees; otherwise, we weren't allowed to leave the house.

On the table, there was a bottle of Blue Nun, the sweet German wine which was everyone's favourite. I took a seat among my former classmates; I was one of the three foreigners in our class. The table was sticky due to previously spilled drinks so I put the handmade notebook I had bought on my lap. On its first page, I wrote: "You're my sunshine in this sulky world." I intended to gift it to Darling; we were together for nearly a year.

"Oi," Oliver objected. "What's that?"

"Nothing!"

I put the present in my purse and joined in the conversation with everyone else. The rest of the afternoon was spent sharing memories of our university years.

It was a Monday afternoon, a week after the Parliament bombing, and I was in Clémence's flat. It was a small space with white furniture, while there were black and white photographs of her husband and teenage son everywhere. They had both been killed during WWII. Clémence moved permanently to London right after she received news of their deaths. She never fully recovered from their loss.

I dusted the surfaces and all the photographs, and mopped the floors, while Juliette, the basset hound, was snoozing on her pillow in the corner; she was thirteen years old. Once I took the scones I had baked out of the oven, Juliette woke up, yawning big, and walked to where I was, her nails clicking on the hardwood floor; she wanted a snack. I put one in her bowl and set the rest on the table next to the white rose I had bought earlier; it was Clémence's favourite flower. With little things, I thanked her for everything she had done for me all these years.

When I opened the Juliet balcony, clean, frosty air hit me across the face and I breathed it in, filling my lungs with it. The air in Famagusta was drowning in dust during the summer, but in London, it had been raining for hours and there was no sign of the sun in the sky. The greyness of the clouds had once again consumed

everything. The rain was dull and depressing, repetitive and steady. The few times it rained in Famagusta it was always a thunderstorm, it was never calmness.

When there was a knock on the door, I greeted David Darling with a kiss.

“It smells wonderfully in here,” the Englishman said, looking at the freshly baked scones on the table before he focused back on me. “My mouth has watered.”

We always met at the Frenchwoman’s flat, nobody would see us there, and the times we went out, I was careful not to cross paths with my relatives. I wasn’t allowed to go outside alone in the evenings so we secretly always met early in the afternoon. In the privacy of that small space, we talked, ate, drank, and made love. Clémence was the only one who was aware of my relationship with him.

I led Darling to the sofa, offered him tea and a scone, and let him talk about his day. His parents were the owners of a retirement home, and he worked there as a carpenter, but he dreamed to one day own a workshop, where he would build furniture.

“I kept Mr. White company today,” Darling said, sipping tea. “He’s a resident at the retirement home. He’s a lovely fellow, nearly ninety years old, I reckon. He used to be a Queen’s Guard.” He took a big bite of the scone. “He tells stories to anyone who’ll listen, but he talks about his deceased wife the most.”

“I bought you a gift.” I handed him the handmade notebook I had found in Portobello Road days ago. When he read what I had written on the first page, he showed me his appreciation with a long kiss. “How’s the scone?”

“Delicious.” Darling licked jam off of his thumb before he washed the sweetness down with the remaining tea.

“They’re not as good as Rosa makes them.” I mused. “She’s a talented baker. She dreams about opening her own patisserie. She’s eight months pregnant now.”

Darling smiled. “You’ve told me before.” He came closer.

“Have I?” My sisters were a part of me, my parents also. They restrained and defined who I was. It had become a habit missing them. They were a permanent presence at the back of my head. Rosa had kept her promise and sent me photographs as often as she could; birthdays, name days, Christmases and Easters. In the beginning, I had the photographs on the wall over the bed I slept in, but in time, I stored them in an envelope in the nightstand. I was content in London, but

how could I forget about them. They were the clay I was made on; my own flesh and blood.

Darling distracted me. He was good at distracting me. He was a gentle, simple man, whose needs, both mental and physical, were as clear as day. He had undone the pearly buttons of the newest cardigan I had knitted. In London, I developed the habit of knitting and sewing. I was self-taught, but I experimented, and ended up creating clothes for myself.

When Darling held my breast, I thought about how warm his hand was all the time. His body temperature defied the permanently cold weather. He suckled, and I petted his blond hair, forgetting for the time being what I had been contemplating. My eyes fell on Stavros' amulet on the inside of my cardigan. Every morning, I pinned it on the inside of my clothes. I wanted it to protect me, but did it? Could it?

Darling realized I had ceased responding to him and he nestled his hand between my legs. He stole my attention and was satisfied. He entered the warmth and wetness of me. I was on my back, and he was on top, looking upwards, enwrapped by euphoria. Placing his arms underneath my knees, lifting my thighs, he leaned to my face to warn, "I'll steal you, if you try to leave me." Our time together was being measured by an hourglass, but I avoided the subject and he hoped his fears were false. Darling thrust and throbbed, planting his seed. It felt as if he stole a piece of me each time we were together.

I buttoned up the cardigan, hiding underneath it the amulet, wondering when the consequences of my actions would catch up to me. Maturing from a teenager to a young woman in the foreign land, I had reached the conclusion that fear and guilt were useless emotions, but they often came knocking on my conscience's door.

"My mother wants to invite you for dinner," Darling said, buckling his belt up; it wasn't the first time he had mentioned it.

"Let's talk about it later. I must wash the dishes before we leave." I took the empty teacup and dessert plate to the sink. I was aware I was abrupt, but lately, he kept pushing me; he felt threatened by the passing of time.

Darling was annoyed I had dismissed his words, but didn't voice his complaint. He grabbed the newspaper from the floor and angrily flipped through it, waiting for me to finish. I was toying with his patience and he was struggling not to start an argument.

In the cinema near Clémence's flat, we watched *Chinatown*, a recently released American film. In the darkness of the cinema, we shared a box of popcorn and a glass bottle of Coca Cola, and we kissed often. After the film, we went for a walk to the quiet park we normally did. Emerald trees were all around and above us were the grey skies. Ducks, ducklings and a swan swam in the pond. My relatives' restaurant was in the suburbs, an hour by bus away from where I led my double life, but I lived in fear that a friend of theirs might see me somewhere and tell them the truth about me.

"I'd love to get to know your family, too, I can talk to them over the telephone," Darling was determined to continue the discussion he had started earlier. We sat down on an old wooden bench, opposite the pond, and he rubbed my hands in his to keep me warm.

"My father doesn't speak English."

"I'll speak with your mother, then," he said, not losing heart. "My mother's American, my father's German, and they met in a pub in London. I don't understand why you believe your family won't accept me!"

I smiled at his sweet naivety and persistence. Two policewomen on horseback were patrolling the area. The British loved their horses as much as Cypriots loved their cats. The sound of the horses' hooves on the cobblestone street was rhythmic, calming, while the policewomen looked graceful, powerful, in their uniforms. There were no policewomen in Cyprus, no female bus drivers, no groups for women.

"Have I told you about Buddy?" I steered the discussion towards a different direction.

"Who's Buddy?" he enquired patiently.

"He's a horse. On Sundays, Ms Millie, his owner, and Buddy, roam the streets with a cart, selling firewood. My aunt and uncle always buy from them. Ms Millie let me feed him a carrot once."

"I want you to be mine, Eva." Darling sounded desperate. "You drive me crazy."

I sighed. "I'll talk to my family, but for now, let's talk about something else."

The Taste of Cyprus was filled with customers, Hellenes and foreigners alike, daily from noon until night-time. A lot of afternoons, I assisted my relatives there.

Waiting to take their order, I observed the family of expatriate Greek Cypriots. The young couple was looking through the menus, talking to each other in Greek, while their daughter, who looked around five years old, was singing an English nursery rhyme, while playing with her Paddington Bear soft toy. The child tapped on her mother's arm to attract her attention.

"Mummy, Mr. Bear is hungry," she said in her little voice and in English.

Elena touched my shoulder. "I'll take it from here." My cousin's small, tight smile signalled trouble. "My mother wants to talk to you."

Behind the bar, Aunt Thea was on the phone that hung on the wall. Her face was veiled with a mixture of concern, shock and panic. She handed me the receiver. Mama was on the other end of the line.

"My love, how are you?" Her voice sounded shaken and distant. I needed to sit down and I did on a stool. Auntie was patting my back, releasing one sigh after another, mumbling incoherent complaints and curses.

"Είμαι καλά, Μάμα." I'm fine, Mama.

"My love ... in the morning ... something bad happened here ... a bomb went off ... in the village square ... where the statue of the Archbishop is ... was ... it's destroyed now." I gripped the receiver tightly until my knuckles were white. My blood was boiling. It was the first time, after all these years of turmoil and conflict, whether it was with the English, the Turks, or the Greeks among themselves, that something as dangerous as an exploding bomb had happened in the village. "Everyone's alright, there were no casualties, we're only a little disoriented. Eva?"

I cleared my throat, reclaiming my tempter, and spoke in a calm tone. "I'm sorry I wasn't there with you, Mama." I meant it.

"Your father wants to talk to you. I'll put him on the phone."

In his letters to me, Papa felt the need to keep me up to date with what was happening on the island. He wrote to me about what he read in the newspaper, what he heard on the radio, what he discussed with his friends in the evenings at the coffeehouse. A year after I went away, in 1971, the general that had formed EOKA in 1955 to fight off the British, had returned to the island to form EOKA B. They wanted to overthrow the president, Archbishop Makarios, and unify Cyprus with Greece. He and his minions had the Greek Junta's support. Bomb attacks on police

stations as well as attempts on the Archbishop's life took place throughout the island. When the general passed away a few months ago, the colonels in Athens started sending Greek army officers to take charge of Cyprus' National Guard to finally achieve *Enosis*.

"My daughter," Papa sniffed and sighed. He had been crying. "It's time for you to come back. You've been away from your family, from your home for too long. Rosa's going to give birth to your new nephew soon and it'd break our hearts if you missed it. You've finished your education. You have nothing holding you there." He paused to hear some sort of reaction, but I was silent. "I'm warning you, if you don't buy a ticket for Cyprus in the following few days, I'll come to London myself and bring you back." Once he was done with his threats and tears, we both hung up.

Throughout my time in London, too often, there were bombings related to the Northern Ireland conflict, while the past seven years people in Greece lived under a dictatorship. Yet, my heart ached for Cyprus. How could it not? My pregnant older sister was there, my fragile little sister was there, my innocent nephew, my parents. Even if Papa hadn't asked me to return in such a manner, I'd still travel there to be with them in this time of need.

I was excused from the restaurant and walked to the house I had lived for four years. It was dusk and I was alone. I sat on the sofa, staring at the black television screen. When Andrea returned home from work, she found me sleeping curled up in their living room. All these years, I tried to cheat myself, but that house, that life, didn't belong to me. I couldn't avoid reality anymore; the time had come for me to be a good little soldier again, a good daughter.

The vinyl was lazily spinning in Clémence's record player, filling her flat with melodic music.

"You're my sunshine, my only, only sunshine, you make me happy, when skies are grey, you'll never know dear, how much I love you, please, don't take my sunshine away ..."

While we waited for the tea to brew, Darling and I danced in the middle of the flat. As I was forbidden to leave my relatives' house after eight in the evening,

we never had the chance to go dancing. He was patient with the rules our relationship revolved around, most of the times.

“Wendy came to the retirement home today to play with Winston,” he said and his sky blue eyes were smiling. Wendy was his toddler niece and Winston was his bulldog. As I was hesitant about meeting his loved ones, he had showed me photographs of them. He held me close as we swayed. “You should have seen them. They both looked happy.”

It was the beginning of another afternoon with him, but I was about to spoil it. I walked away from his embrace, but he followed me. He was standing behind me, when I lifted the needle from the vinyl. Our eyes met in the mirror on the wall.

“Where do you think you’re going?” He spoke softly, slowly lifting my skirt.

“I need to talk to you about something.”

Darling froze before he frowned. “I don’t like the sound of that.”

It was time to tell him the truth. I reached for the ticket I had bought, but I held it behind my back, hiding it from him. Clémence had tried to change my mind and persuade me to stay, “for my own good,” as she had said, but the decision had been made.

“I ...” I cleared my throat. My eyes watered. “I’m leaving for Famagusta.”

His bright eyes widened. “For how long? When are you returning to London?”

“I’m not sure yet, sometime soon.”

“Why? Why are you running away?”

“I talked with my family a few days ago. They told me they need me at home, that it’s time for me to go back.” Subconsciously or not, I was repeating Papa’s words. “I’ve finished my studies and they think I have no excuse to stay. Besides, things are horrid right now on the island. I should be with them, at least for a while. And Rosa will give birth soon.” I was piling up the reasons, or the excuses.

“Don’t I have a say in it?” He was doing his best to remain calm.

“I’ve already bought a ticket.” I showed it to him and he studied it with angry eyes.

The Englishman erupted. “From the beginning, you treated me as if I was a secret and I tolerated that, but now, you’re leaving without ever coming back!”

“You must understand,” I persuaded.

“I understand you don’t want to fight for us. Stay with me, don’t go away. You cannot live by your family forever.”

“I’ll be back by the end of summer, I promise.”

“Nonsense, our affair always had an expiration date for you. I always had the unsettling feeling I was going to lose you and I was right.”

He still held the ticket and I feared he might crumple it in his fist or tear it in two. He read my thoughts and handed it back to me, but he scowled at me in such a way that I felt as if he wanted to strangle me and relieve himself from the frustration and heartbreak I was causing him. Then, he fell silent, staring at my chest, and lost himself in thoughts.

“David ...”

Darling sighed, sitting on the sofa. He took me in his arms, holding me tightly, and closed his eyes. He was still so silent. He wouldn’t talk to me, but he wouldn’t let me go. I stayed still, it was the least I could do, but after a while, I stirred. When he opened his eyes, they were wet and red.

Tell him, Eva, I thought, opening my mouth, but the words wouldn’t come out.

My body was like a clock. Every twenty eight days, I had my period, but the clock was broken. I hadn’t had a period in more than a month and I wasn’t willing to face the reason why. It was possible it was due to stress or sorrow or other factors, but it was also possible that it wasn’t.

“I’m leaving,” Darling declared.

“Let’s enjoy the day,” I proposed, following him to the door. I took his hand, but he freed it.

“No, Eva.” He was curt, decisive.

Tell him, Eva, I urged myself, but I didn’t want to blurt it out during an argument.

“I’ll return,” I attempted to convince him.

“Well, when you do, you know where to find me.” The Englishman left the flat.

Juliette had been watching us from her pillow. With her muzzle resting on her paws, she stared as I touched my stomach. I wanted to tell Darling about my potential pregnancy, but things didn’t turn out how I had hoped. In the past, he mentioned he wanted children. His siblings had married and had already had their

firstborns, and my dear David was craving for all that, too. How could I possibly rob him of happiness? How could I possibly rob myself of happiness? It was final, I'd go to Famagusta to put an end to the pressure put on me by my parents, and once there, I'd explain to them I had a life in London.

Yes, that was my plan.

After I had announced to Darling I was leaving London, he disappeared for days. The night before my flight, Auntie prepared a farewell dinner. We were all sitting around the kitchen table. Andrea and Elena were telling me how much they'd miss me, while Aunt Thea was sobbing silently into her tissue, and uncle Vern was sighing one minute and smiling the next.

"You must come and visit us as soon as you can," Andrea insisted and Elena nodded in agreement.

When the telephone rang, my goodhearted aunt went to answer it.

"It's for you, my dearest." Wiping her nose, she handed me the receiver.

On the other end of the line was Clémence.

"Mr. Darling is looking for you," the Frenchwoman informed me. "He has called numerous times. The shop's telephone hasn't stopped ringing today. He needs to see you."

"I'm afraid it's too late," I replied coldly. My flight was in less than eight hours and he was well aware of it. I was upset with him for having reacted in such a manner. He refused to understand I had to see my family. He refused to see me for who I truly was, even though I tried to show him a dozen times. I carried Famagusta deep inside me; her traditions and way of life. I couldn't wipe all that away and be another neutral person in London.

"It's a mistake going back to Cyprus," Clémence told me for the hundredth time. "You're a gifted girl and your gift will perish there."

I was tired of her advices. She meant well, but she had her head in the clouds. And it irritated me that both she and Darling were convinced I wasn't coming back.

"Tell the customer everything will be alright in the end." I trusted her to pass my message to him. I thanked her again for everything she had done for me, promised we'd meet again someday soon, and hang up the phone.

I truly thought I'd come back.

Summer 1974

II

The Return of the Prodigal Daughter

The drive from Nicosia International Airport to Famagusta was more than two hours. It was boiling in the taxi, and halfway through the journey, I began feeling restless, shifting in my seat. Discreetly, I wiped with a tissue the fat drops of sweat that trickled down my forehead, while my bare legs stuck on the leather seat. I thought I was sweating everywhere.

My stomach growled, reminding me how hungry I was. I hadn't had something to eat in almost a day, but that was for the best because if I had, it'd probably make me sick. I had stomach aches nearly daily.

I rolled down the window, but only hot air smacked me in the face. I was desperate for some coolness. It was the first week of July, but the temperature was already more than forty degrees. From my purse, I grabbed my paper fan, and proceeded to frantically wave it in front of my face, while thirstily drinking cold water from the bottle I had bought at the airport. I had forgotten how brutally hot the summer months on the island were.

The driver, who was a man in his forties, was talking nonstop about everything and nothing. He asked me where I had flown in from, and when I told him, he began listing all the English words he knew. He embarked on a monologue on how the English were bad because of the colonization, but how they were good because of the tourism, and all the while, the radio played songs at a loud volume. The driver looked like a caricature. His black hair was thick, long, and curly, while he had on a floral, short sleeved shirt, with an obscure combination of colours, which was unbuttoned down to his stomach, showing off his hairy chest. His skin was dark. Around his neck, there was a big gold chain. He was embracing, enjoying even, the heat. He was familiar with it and loved it with all his heart.

When we finally reached the village and were driving through its streets, people turned their heads and stared at the taxi with desperate curiosity. As always,

they were famished for news. This land and its people never changed. Soon, the taxi parked outside my house. My whole family was standing in the garden, waiting for me to get out. Only a piece of glass and metal were separating me from rejoining them.

“You’ve come home, miss.” The driver winked at me through the rear-view mirror, chewing his gum loudly, before he went to take my old leather suitcase out of the trunk.

I grabbed the handle, but Papa had grown impatient. He pulled the door open and offered me his hand. I took it, stepping outside. He kissed both my cheeks, holding my arms; he was crying. In all four years I was away I hadn’t come back home once.

Mama had approached and was standing behind him. “Pay the driver,” she instructed. Papa nodded, rubbing his wet eyes with his forefinger and thumb. His lower lip was trembling.

“Welcome home, my daughter,” Papa said, patting my back, before he went to the driver. Andreas had already taken my suitcase inside, returned to where we all were, and was chatting with the driver about a recent football match. Papa joined in their discussion, while taking money out of his pocket, counting it.

Mama hugged me before she took a good look at me. “How are you? How was your trip?” she asked with the calmest, warmest smile she could master.

“I’m fine,” I replied. “The trip was tiring.”

“You’ve changed.”

“Have I?”

“Very much so ...”

I looked at my sisters and nephew. Rosa was smiling, all of them were. She opened her arms, waiting for me to go to her. Carefully, I hugged her before I held her hands in mine.

“Your belly looks like a watermelon,” I said, and we both laughed. Within the safety and warmth of her flesh, she was carrying her second child. She was eight months pregnant.

Theodoros, who would turn five years old in two months, was standing shy and silent next to her. I kneeled in front of him. “Do you remember me?” I asked, but the little boy shook his head, telling me in a whispery voice that he didn’t.

Rosa ran her hand through his curly hair; he had my curly hair. She explained to him, “She’s your Auntie Eva. She went away for a while, but she’s home with us now.”

“She was in London,” Andreas said, standing behind his son, beside his wife. Theodoros looked up at his father with furrowed eyebrows.

“Do you know where that is?” I asked, drawing his attention, but he shook his head one more time. “Do you want me to tell you?”

“It doesn’t matter where it is,” Rosa snapped. “What matters is that you’re here with us now.”

I looked at her swollen ankles, feet and legs, at her belly that stretched the fabric of her summer dress, and I nodded, not saying a word. I stood up, wondering if my own body would become as bloated and as fragile soon; the thought terrified me.

Sofia cleared her throat. She was tired of waiting for me to greet her. Her thick, straight hair, which was lighter in colour than the rest of us, was cut chin length, and the dress she was wearing was too big for her. She was sixteen and it looked as if she wanted to hide her budding body and face. As always, Grey was at her feet, licking her paw, and like Sofia, she had grown too. I hugged my little sister, and surprisingly, she hugged me back.

“What have you done to your hair?” I asked, touching it.

“I cut it myself a week ago,” she replied, hitting my hand away.

“It looks good,” I told her and I was being honest. Her hair was wild and her dress was dull, but natural beauty couldn’t be hidden.

I looked around myself. The earth oven, the garden, the house, the well, everything looked exactly as I remembered it. It was as if not a single day had gone by, but four whole years had. While I was observing my surroundings, Rosa placed without a warning Theodoros’ hand in mine.

“Talk to your nephew,” she said. “You two have a lot of catching up to do.” Walking towards her husband, she winked at me over her shoulder. “Run to the market and buy these things.” Rosa handed Andreas a paper list and the quiet man went without complaint or hesitation.

I looked at Theodoros, whose height reached only up to my thigh. He let out a sigh, which was heavy and loud. He was bothered by the hot weather, but he wasn’t making a fuss about it. Instead, he was absentmindedly staring somewhere,

at something. He was wearing a sleeveless white bodysuit and a pair of clear jelly sandals. It felt strange holding him, being responsible for him.

Papa rested his hand on my shoulder. "He looks like you," he said, proudly, pointing at Theodoros. I forced a smile. I was aware of what I should be feeling, of what emotions I should be showing to satisfy their needs, but pretending never came easily to me.

On the ground, an old bed sheet was spread. A sketchbook and crayons were on it.

"Do you like to draw?" I asked Theodoros, who didn't say anything, but he sat down on the bed sheet, not letting go of my hand. I had to sit down next to him.

"I like balloons," Theodoros replied, reaching for a crayon. Sometime earlier, he had filled a page with blue balloons. He began drawing on a blank page purple ones, counting them in the process. He was so focused on his task.

"He knows how to count to ten," Rosa said, watching her son.

Theodoros clicked his tongue. "To twenty," he corrected her.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sweetheart," Rosa humoured him. She turned serious and said to me, "He likes balloons, beach balls, and circles. Those are the only things that he likes, no toy cars, no toy trains, nothing of all that."

"Who knows what goes on in a little child's head," I replied, assisting my nephew in creating more circles with curling strings on his white paper.

"I'm exhausted," Rosa said. She was massaging the back of her neck with one hand, while the other was placed underneath her belly. She confessed, "I haven't baked in months."

I put the crayon down. "Why?"

"I don't have the time to," she replied. "I work all days of the week, but never on a Sunday. Andreas and I are saving to build a house of our own. It's difficult. It'll take time. Did you know we work the exact same hours, but the boss gives him eighty pounds and he gives me only twenty-three pounds?" She laughed. "It's ridiculous." She paused, chewing her lower lip. "Besides, baking doesn't come naturally to me anymore." In the end, she shrugged. "Que sera, sera. It means whatever will be, will be. I heard it in an American film that was on the television a few nights ago." She was rambling.

"You need to take care of yourself."

“Don’t worry about me,” she assured me. “What’s happening on the island right now is unsettling for me and the baby though.” She was rubbing her belly. “When that bomb exploded, I thought we’d all die. It was early in the morning and it woke us up. We never had a bomb go off so close to us before. It was the loudest thing I had ever heard and all that smoke was asphyxiating.” She was panting; even talking too much tired her. “The baby was restless for the rest of the day. It was tossing and turning until night-time.”

A civil war was on the rise and it was between the Greek Cypriots this time around. Nevertheless, people were used to going through troubled times and they tried to lead their lives as they normally did.

Andreas came back, holding something small in his hug.

“What’s that?” Rosa asked.

“I found Father Heracles’ wife on my way. She was grateful for the bottle of your handmade liqueur, and in return, she gave me a bunny.” Andreas showed us the brown newborn in his hands. “One of her rabbits gave birth.” Excitedly, impatiently, Rosa asked to see it, while Theodoros had stopped drawing and was watching his parents. Gently, Andreas put the bunny in her hands, saying, “The little fellow opened his eyes a day ago.”

Theodoros got up and went to them. He was curious to get close to the tiny animal.

“What should we call him, sweetheart?” Rosa asked her son, who put his forefinger on his cheek and looked up at the sky, thinking hard about what answer to give. “Do you think Mr. Brown sounds good?” she said and Theodoros’ face lit up. The boy nodded.

“Father Heracles’ wife said if we want him to make a great stew one day we should get him really fat,” Andreas said, shocking his family.

“Papa! NO!” Theodoros shouted.

“Andreas, we are *not* going to eat Mr. Brown,” Rosa protested. She was already attached to the helpless little beast.

Andreas looked down and a smile formed underneath his moustache. Rosa had written to me about how her husband had grown a moustache last year, how she wasn’t very fond of it at first, and how people get used to everything in time. “OK,” he simply said. “He’s yours. You two decide his fate.”

“Enough with the rabbit,” Mama said. “Let’s eat.” She was carrying a tray with a number of traditional dishes; grape leaves stuffed with minced meat and rice, grilled halloumi, oven baked pasta, pork marinated in red wine with coriander seeds. Sofia was following her with cutlery and plates. On the veranda, we all sat around the table to have dinner. Mama helped everyone put food in their plates, and before she took a seat, she kissed my forehead, saying, “Welcome home.”

During dinner, they wanted me to tell them stories about my four years in London. They asked all sorts of questions, but my body and mind were numb. I was tired from the long trip and my answers were short and simple, leaving everyone disappointed. I promised I’d make it up to them after I had some food in my stomach, a bath and a few hours of sleep. After that, they let me eat in peace, and then, I stole a glance at the house of my old friend across the street.

Stavros’ house was dark and silent. It looked almost abandoned. Their old rocking chair was still on their porch and the pots with flowers around it were the only signs of life.

“You never change,” Rosa said and I snapped out of whatever memories I was treading through. She had leaned closer and had whispered her words. “A lot has happened,” she told me, adding unnecessary mystery to it. “I’ll tell you everything later.” She didn’t. She forgot all about it before it was time for dessert.

“What are you two whispering about?” Mama intruded.

“Nothing, Mama, eat,” Rosa said, devouring a forkful of food in her attempt to change the subject. Suspiciously, Mama looked from one to the other, but within seconds, she let the matter drop. She hated secrets, but sometimes, they were necessary.

Between my hands, I rubbed the soap, gathering as much foam as possible. I took my time to bathe. I wanted to get rid of all the dirt and exhaustion I had picked up during the trip back home.

“I need to go, Papa,” Theodoros cried from outside the bathroom door. “I need to go, but Auntie Eva is inside.” Smiling, I looked at the locked door, listening to what was going on on the other side of it. Andreas’ footsteps were heard in the corridor. Some houses’ toilet was outdoors, while some others’ was inside.

“Come.” He dragged the boy away. “Let’s go in the garden.”

Everyone else was in the living room. In the background, I heard the dialogues and laughs of whatever it was they were watching on the black and white television, but in the bathroom, there was a soothing silence, which was absolute. In the bathtub, the water was warm, and I lay back, closing my eyes. The night, like the day, was hot, and I felt my face turning pink. I fell into a light sleep, but I was woken up by a door opening and slamming shut, and then, the old rocking chair from across the street began creaking methodically. A little boredom and a little curiosity were dangerous things. I rose to my knees to look outside the window, which I had let open in order to hear the crickets during my bath.

In the light of the streetlamps, the trees danced, complying with the summer breeze. In the shadows, Stavros was sitting, rocking himself, staring at the starry sky. There was always the same image of him stuck in my mind; Stavros sitting on that rocking chair as a boy, or as a teenager, and now, as a young man.

The moon was crescent that night. He looked different, but he looked the same. He had followed the fashion of the island and had grown a moustache. He was wearing a suit as he must have spent a night out in Famagusta. When he spotted me, I ducked down. The creaking of the rocking chair stopped for a few seconds before it began again. I sat back down in the water, which had turned cooler, hugging my legs, pressing my cheek on my knees. I paid attention to every little sound; as always, he began whistling.

London, Darling and the university had altered me. I wasn't an innocent village girl anymore. My mind had been stretched into a different shape. I was adaptable, but I didn't want to be. Being a woman was such a curse and a blessing. Day in and day out all our problems began and ended because of what we women had between our legs, because of that sensitive, strong organ. I wasn't going to be an angel or a slave to the conservative, close-minded society of the village, of the island. I refused to be a prisoner in my own body and mind.

In the bathtub, I got up and stood right in front of the open window; naked, exposed and free. Stavros, my childhood friend, jumped up from his rocking chair, while his KEO beer bottle fell from his hand, dropping on the ground and spilling everywhere. I had shocked him and it felt great. Slowly, steadily, he sat back down, never shifting his eyes away from me. I moved around the bathroom, doing what I normally did, but more gracefully, more theatrically. I wrapped myself up with a

towel and I brushed my wet hair with a comb before I blankly stared at myself in the mirror.

Time passed like water; four whole years. I was neither a child nor a teenager. I was twenty-one years old, almost twenty-two. I was a young woman, and I was more likely than not with child. My face had matured, my body had matured, and my soul. I almost didn't recognize myself anymore. Some days, I felt absolutely nothing, and some others, I invited my emotions. I touched my tummy and my eyes welled up with tears. Darling had no idea. Maybe it was a mistake leaving without telling him. Maybe it was a mistake having had an affair with him altogether. But maybe the island had already begun affecting me. The distance and the heat could work wonders.

Stavros' whistling had stopped and he was watching me in silence. He was the audience and I was performing for it, but I needed to sleep. I put my nightgown on and left the bathroom.

In the bedroom, Mama and Sofia were going through my suitcase. Sofia was sitting on the floor with her legs crossed, while Mama was sitting on a wooden stool. I climbed on my bed. It was made with freshly washed sheets. In London, our freshly washed clothes smelled like vanilla, but on the village, they didn't use scented soap. I curled up on my side, shutting my eyes. Morpheus was calling, but they didn't let me go to him just yet.

"It's like a treasure chest in here," Sofia said. "You have beautiful things."

Rosa came too. "Everything is wonderful, isn't it? To be honest, I'm a little jealous."

"The women in the village will be envious, when they see you in these clothes," Mama told me. "In the morning, I'll use the holy smoke to protect you, all of you." Drifting between sleep and awake, I smiled at the things she blindly believed in. She must have got up because I heard the scrape of the stool being dragged on the floor. "Come, sit down," she told Rosa. "You shouldn't stand all the time in your condition."

"Mama, I'm pregnant, I'm not ill," Rosa replied irritably. I opened my eyes for only a second to look at her. Protectively, she was holding her big belly, and without a doubt, she looked worn out. I closed my eyes again. "The men will stare

like hungry wolves at you,” she said. “They always do at attractive women. They feel extremely entitled.”

I laughed, sitting up. The window was open, but the bedroom was warm.

“Let me tell you a story,” Rosa continued. “Agatha, Mrs. Ambrosia’s daughter, was hired to teach Ancient Greek in an all boys’ high school in Famagusta. When it was time to teach year seven, where all the students were eighteen year old men, all hell broke loose. You see, Agatha is twenty-one, just like you, and the students kept teasing her about her hair, her face, her body; about everything that made her a woman. They were relentless. In the end, she ran out of the classroom, crying. Needless to say, she left the school the very same day. Poor thing, I felt sorry for her, the entire village was talking about it for weeks. Thankfully, her uncle, who owns a hotel by the seaside, helped her find a role in an all girls’ high school and she’s happy.” She paused before she asked, “Are Englishmen as disrespectful as Greek men are or are they as gentlemanly as everyone presents them to be?”

“I don’t know, Rosa.” I hated the heat, it was making me cranky. Sofia was still staring at all the things in the old leather suitcase. In London, in the mornings, I went to the university, in the afternoons, I helped at *The Taste of Cyprus*, and in the weekends, I worked at Clémence’s shop, and whatever money I earned, I spent on fabrics. Over the years, I created a number of dresses and other outfits. Whatever free time I had, I spend on knitting or sewing. I wanted to be better, more beautiful than others, I wanted to be different. There was a small store in Kensington market with good fabrics in good prices. I said, “Sofia, we should go fabric shopping tomorrow and make a new dress for you. I brought English magazines, which have instructions on how to sew in them.”

“Greek magazines have instructions on how to sew in them too,” Mama intervened. “You used to read them all the time, when you were in high school, don’t you remember?”

“I remember, Mama,” I assured her.

“I have to analyse two Italian poems tomorrow,” Sofia said, getting up from the floor. She was attending the same high school Mama, Rosa and I had.

The suitcase looked as if it had exploded after all the exploration.

“Sister Beatrix believes Sofia will earn a scholarship once she graduates next year, just like you did.” There was no doubt Mama was proud of her youngest

daughter. "Sofia looks up to you, Eva," Mama informed me. "She has set you as an example. She'll do whatever you'll do." I looked at my little sister, who was already looking at me with her large, bright brown eyes. It was as if she was expecting me to give her some magic answer that'd solve all the mysteries in the world.

"You can study at the beach, we'll go there after we finish shopping," I said to Sofia.

"I don't have a bathing suit," she replied worried.

"Me neither, but we don't need one to enjoy the sand, the sea, the sun," I argued. Rosa, who was listening, had grown quiet. "Rosa, why don't you take the day off and come with us?"

"I promised the boss I'd work one more week before I take the maternity leave," Rosa replied. She wasn't as bubbly and as joyful as before.

"You have already worked more than enough," I told her.

"It's only one more week," she insisted.

Papa came to the door. "Let Eva sleep. She's had a long day. She can answer all your questions tomorrow."

Sofia rolled her eyes, getting into bed, while Rosa expressed her complaint in words, "ah, Papa, it's always Eva, Eva, Eva for you, isn't it?"

Papa laughed. "I love all my children the same," he stated.

"Let's all go to sleep," Mama said, turning the light off, and the three of them left.

"Everything's changed, but everything's still the same. Does that make sense?" I said to Sofia. We were both on our sides, facing each other. She nodded. "I love you," I told her. Sofia whispered something I didn't quite understand. Finally, we both closed our eyes.

When I opened my eyes, it was dawn. I had a deep, dreamless sleep, and I was grateful to my brain for it, but when I woke up, I rushed to the toilet to vomit. I had to go to a doctor.

Wiping my mouth with one hand and massaging my stomach with the other, I returned to the bedroom and went to the window. It was open, but only bugs got in and no air. The sun would rise soon, but it was already bright and warm. Mama and

Yiayia were in the garden, feeding the chickens, watering the flowers, but everyone else was asleep.

On the island, everything was so symmetrically blue, green and brown, but I felt as if I had lost the ability of absorbing all these colours. I felt as if the only one I could conceive was grey. I had to paint myself with all the colours I had forgotten about.

In the reflection of the window, I saw Rosa leaning against the doorframe, and I turned round. Once again, she was caressing her belly. She was more aware of her pregnancy than ever before. She had become pale, while her eyes had lost their spark and were decorated with dark circles. She needed rest, but she refused to accept that. Sofia stirred in her sleep. For as long as I could remember, the bedroom was the same. There was one bed for Rosa, one for me, one for Sophia. There was one dressing table, one wardrobe.

“You were gone for so long,” she said softly. “I’ve missed you for so long. I needed you, but you were far away from here.”

I went to her and hugged her. “I’ve missed you too, terribly.” I took her hand. “Come, let’s fix breakfast for everyone.”

In a grail made of clay, Mama put a small piece of coal, covered it with olive leaves, and lit up a match, burning them. A small, thick, white cloud of smoke rose from the clay vessel and Mama crossed herself. When I was little, Mama showed me how we picked olive leaves from our olive trees, put them in a small cloth bag and took them to the church, leaving them there to be blessed for forty days and forty nights, and then, she explained how after that we burned them, creating the holy smoke, bringing it in our souls and home.

It was seven in the morning and we were all lined up in the garden, waiting for her to grace us with the holy smoke, wanting to go about our days. One by one, we bowed our heads, crossing ourselves, while she moved it three times in a circular motion over them. Then, she took the holy smoke in all the rooms of the house. Finally, she returned outside.

“That will ward off the evil eyes.” Relieved, Mama put the grail aside, letting it burn out. She was confident in what she believed in.

Aunt Thea did the same religious ritual often. Auntie held onto Cyprus' traditions as much as possible, persistently reminding her family of their real origins, when they were quick to forget. Auntie had an orange, an olive and a lemon tree in her backyard. The houses in London had the same shape and size, were a breath away from each other, and had a small backyard each, while in our Famagusta village we had more space, sea and dust than we needed. Auntie was happy with what her trees produced, but the permanent rain didn't do them good and their fruit tasted differently from the ones on the Mediterranean island. Auntie had forgotten how bitter the lemons should be, how juicy the oranges, how savoury the olives.

Rosa's floral perfume tickled my nostrils, reminding me where I was.

"I want you to be a good boy today like you're every day, OK, sweetheart?" Rosa told her son and the boy nodded. "I'll see you in the evening. Give me a kiss." After Theodoros kissed her cheek, Mama took him inside. "Are you two not coming to Famagusta with us today after all?" Rosa asked me.

Overnight, Sofia had changed her mind. She didn't want to buy fabric for a new dress, she didn't want to go to the beach, she only wanted to be left alone and study.

"There are whispers in Famagusta that Brigitte Bardot and Elizabeth Taylor are staying in one of the beach hotels," Rosa shared the gossip, adding with mild disappointment, "They're not in our hotel though."

Both Rosa and I looked at our little sister, anticipating a change of heart, but Sofia turned the page of her schoolbook, paying no attention to us. Papa and Andreas were waiting for Rosa in the car with the engine running.

"I tried," Rosa smiled, hinting at Sofia. "I have to go. I mustn't be late for work." Walking away, she told me, "I want you and Theodoros to get to know each other better. He needs his aunt and you need your nephew. Spend some time with him. *Please.*"

I spent the morning unpacking the suitcase before I stored it away until further notice. I helped with a few chores and played with Theodoros for a while, but by the time the clock struck twelve, I was hot and bored. I had asked Darling once, on one of our walks, if he thought he could survive a summer in Cyprus, if he could handle the heat; "Of course," he had exclaimed, pretending to be offended, adding, "Every summer, I go on holidays in Spain!" I welcomed the unexpected

memory with a smile and grabbed my straw hat. I was ready to set off, but Mama called.

“Eva, where are you going?” Her tone was soft, but strict. I cringed, turning round. In the sink, she was cutting a chicken into pieces. She had already removed its feathers. With a sharp knife, she was slicing through skin, cutting through joints, pulling away body parts from the whole. Witnessing that, I regretted having eaten that boiled egg earlier.

“I’m going for a walk, Mama,” I replied. “I’ll be back for lunch.”

“Didn’t Rosa ask you to spend time with Theodoros?” she asked, removing the backbone.

“She did.”

“Take him with you.” The chicken was in pieces and ready to be cooked.

Theodoros, who was drawing at the kitchen table, looked at me with fear in his eyes. I was almost a stranger to him after all.

“Come,” I told him, extending my arm. “We’re going for a walk.”

The little boy looked at my hand for a few seconds before he took it, trusting me. I spread sunscreen on his face and shoulders before I put my straw hat on his head; it was big, but it was going to protect him. We were on our way.

I held his hand, and leisurely, we walked through the streets of the village. At first, we were both quiet, but with every step we took, Theodoros opened up more, and like most children, he began babbling about everything and nothing, sometimes cohesively and sometimes not. A lot of curious villagers approached us, the majority of whom were women, asking intrusive questions about my time away, but I avoided them as kindly as possible. The determination and insistence of some of them to learn more was so great that Theodoros got scared. He was a little human among threatening giants.

When we walked by the destroyed statue of the Archbishop, Theodoros pointed at it. The statue used to stand imposing and tall, but it was in ruins now. The Archbishop was the president of the island for as long as I could remember, since I was a child, but recently, a group of people turned against him because they thought he didn’t prioritize and support Enosis as he once did. My nephew started telling me how afraid he was when the bomb exploded. I saw it in his wide eyes and heard it in

his shaking voice how scared he still was. I quickly changed the subject, taking his mind off of the traumatic experience.

Walking through the woods, I watched Theodoros eat the Kit Kat I had bought for him from the market. A circle of chocolate had decorated his mouth, while it had also melted on his fingertips, which he licked clean. I studied the little boy, who looked a lot like me. He looked more like me than he looked like his parents. It was a strange sight. Out of the blue, Theodoros yelled, pointing ahead, “Grey!”

It was our cat and she had around her neck the pink ribbon I had sent for her in one of my letters. Throughout the last four years, I used to send here and there little gifts I could afford to my family; beads from Clémence’s shop for my mother and sisters, photographs I had taken, English recipes for Rosa, a pair of blue and white socks I had knitted for Theodoros.

“Where is she going?” I mumbled.

“Where is she going?” Theodoros repeated in his little voice.

“Do you want to find out?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied, pronouncing the letter “s” as if it was a theta, singing it, stressing it; the tip of his tongue was showing through his teeth and I smiled. We followed Grey, and when she went through an opening in the woods, we went after her. She led us to a small, secluded beach, which was surrounded by rocks. I let Theodoros sit down and play with the sand, while Grey was chasing a bird, but when she spotted the little boy, she came closer. She curled up next to him, resting her head on his thigh, and lazily, she began moving her tail from one side to the other, creating the shape of an ice cream cone on the sand.

I kneeled. “I’m back, Grey,” I said, but she refused to acknowledge my presence. She was staring at something behind me, meowing.

“Hello. How are you?” I didn’t recognize the voice that had spoken to me. It had changed through the years, since the last time I had heard it. It had become more mature, more melodic. Stavros sat beside me. “I enjoyed the show you put on last night. It was the warmest welcome.”

The sun was savage that day, and if we weren’t wearing shoes and clothes, the golden sand would have been unbearable to walk or sit on. Some trees veiled us with their shadow. Seashore lilies had sprouted all over and their aroma was intoxicating.

“Did you come back to the island recently?” I asked. It didn’t matter we hadn’t spoken or seen each other in years. We were pieces of the same puzzle and we connected each time, regardless of the circumstances.

“Three days ago.” He explained, “I take a break from Berlin and come back for a week every summer. I need the sun, the sea, the food. Our house in the village is uninhabited, my parents and siblings moved to Famagusta after I went away, but I made my mother promise she’d keep it clean. I want to stay there whenever I’m back. It’s my childhood home, you see.”

His black hair was recently cut, while the skin of his face was smooth from shaving, and his black moustache was carefully groomed. Even though he was wearing casual clothes, it was obvious he took good care of his appearance. A cane was by his side; it looked a lot more expensive than the one he had before. Stavros saw I was studying him and held my gaze, but I looked away. Stavros sighed, staring at the sea.

Theodoros was drawing circles with his forefinger on the sand.

“Sweetheart, go gather seashells, we’ll make a bracelet for your Mama,” I persuaded my nephew, who instantly, jumped up, overwhelmed with happiness. He went looking for seashells and Grey went with him. “Don’t go too far, Theodore,” I called, keeping an eye on him. I turned to Stavros. “Don’t you like it in Berlin?”

“Not as much as I like it in Famagusta. I have to stay for a few more years there before I can return to the island to settle down. Sebastian and Melina are married and are expecting their first baby. They want me to be the godfather.” He was happy at the thought. He reached for his wallet in his trousers’ pocket. He took out a photograph, showing it to me. “She’s waiting for me in Berlin. Her name’s Chrysanthé. She’s from Crete. I was drawn to her because she has similar hair to you, but she turned out to be a lovely woman.” He was an honest man. “So far, she has managed to put up with me for a year.” He put the photograph away, laughing.

“I’m happy for you.”

“Do you have someone waiting for you in London?”

“I do.”

“I see.”

We watched Theodoros search the sand for seashells.

“Last night,” Stavros started. “When I saw you naked, I saw your belly bump.”

“Stavros, stop.” I didn’t appreciate his honesty anymore.

He touched my belly and I grabbed his wrist. I was aware he wasn’t a threat, but my reflexes made me react in such a way. His hand was careful and steady, calming me down. I had known that man since he was a boy and he was one of the few people I’d trust with my life. And to think I had befriended him only because he reminded me of my favourite fairytale. Stavros was, for better or for worse, what I was familiar with.

“If it was an accident, it’s not the end of the world.” He was jumping to conclusions. “People make mistakes all the time.” His patronizing tone irritated me. “Do you need help, Eva? Let me help you.”

“I ...”

He interrupted me. “I’ll be a doctor soon. Don’t deny it. I’m certain of what I saw.” He was curt, serious. “You can hide from everyone else, but you cannot hide from me.”

“No.” I was firm, pushing his hand away, but he had had enough.

“You showed me what you did last night and you expect me not to do something about it?” He had lost his composure. He was groaning. He was going to explode. “Let me *at least* help you get out of the mess you’ve gotten yourself into.”

“I showed you nothing you haven’t seen before.” I was behaving like a child, but I didn’t care. “You’re selfish,” I accused. “Nobody wants what’s good for me they all want what’s good for themselves!”

“Is this your opinion of me?” Stavros was shocked.

“Yes,” I yelled, but I wasn’t sure.

It was either calmness or confrontation with him and rarely anything in between.

“I see you’re upset.” Stavros had reclaimed his self-control.

I wanted to curse him, but Theodoros drew my attention. He had stopped searching for seashells. He was watching me and Stavros, petrified. Clumsily, quickly, I stood up, dusting sand off my dress and calling my nephew to come close. The little boy ran to me at once, giving me his hand.

“I’ll be across the street for a few more days,” Stavros said. “I hope you’ll change your stubborn mind.”

Walking away, I scoffed.

Stavros left for Berlin three days later.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and Rosa, Sofia and I were in Rosa and Andreas' bedroom, resting on their double bed, sheltering ourselves from the heat outside. The windows were open, but Rosa was waving a piece of paper in front of her face nonchalantly, nonstop, while the seashell bracelet on her wrist was clicking, chiming; it was a calming, pleasant sound. I had helped Theodoros make it for her. With a needle, I had poked a hole on each seashell, and with a white thread, we united them together.

Rosa was lying in the middle. She had stopped working a few days ago and was gathering her strength for the day of the labor. Sofia was on her right, reading an English novel she had borrowed from Sister Beatrix. I was on her left, softly singing along to the song that played on the radio; *Let It Be* by The Beatles. Sofia shushed me, but I sang louder. Rosa chuckled, while Sofia rolled her eyes and continued reading.

"*Breaking news!*" the broadcaster stopped the music. He announced there were two new bomb attacks, one in a police station and one in a politician's car. He went on to say how Archbishop Makarios' supporters and General Grivas' supporters continued to fight each other. Before he could go into details, I changed the station, searching for a secret one. When I found it, Lesley Gore's voice was heard through the radio.

"Don't tell me what to do, don't tell me what to say, please, when I go out with you, don't put me on display ..."

"Kiss me," Darling had demanded, when we visited London zoo one afternoon, and I had abided, humoring him, while his eyes scanned the crowd to make sure people were watching. On occasions, over the course of time, he took pleasure in testing my boundaries.

"EVA," Mama called from the kitchen.

Grunting, I got up. "I should go help Mama and Yiayia. It's such a sin not to be busy every second of every day."

Rosa pinched my arm and my skin turned bright pink in seconds. "Stop it," she said. "You take it too far sometimes."

Not regretting what I had said, I rubbed my arm and went to the kitchen.

Mama had floured the kitchen table, had placed a dough ball in the centre, and was ready to use her rolling pin.

"I'm here, Mama," I announced.

"What are your sisters doing?" She stopped for a second to catch her breath.

"Rosa's resting, Sofia's reading," I replied. "Why are you making biscuits?"

Mama was offended. "A good home always has treats at the ready for guests. I thought I had already taught you that."

I blinked. "Yes, of course. What can I help you with?"

"You should already know the answer. I trust you know how to hold a house." I was at a loss for words. Out of nowhere, I was under attack. More than a week had gone by since the day I had returned to the island, and even though my family was happy to have me back, things were back to normal. It was as if I had never left. Mama continued, "The flowers need watering, the laundry needs gathering from the rope outside, the floors need sweeping and moping, all other surfaces need dusting, and we need to bake the biscuits."

"I'll water the flowers first."

"Sometimes, you're incredibly idle, Eva," Mama accused me. "Frankly, I don't know where you inherited that trait from."

"I'll water the flowers," I repeated, but in an undertone. All of a sudden, I felt inadequate. Walking out the door, I heard Mama mumbling, and as I didn't want to hear what she was saying, I walked faster. I grabbed the hose, filling the watering can, and when it spilled over, the dirt absorbed it thirstily. Gardenias, jasmines, roses; surrounded by all the flowers' scents and colours, I felt as if I was the spectator of a little dreamland at work, but something spoiled the perfect picture.

"Mama, one of the roses has withered. I think it needs to be cut off." I walked in the kitchen, but she wasn't there. Sofia was standing in front of the telephone, staring at it. She wasn't blinking; her eyes were wide. She was gripping the receiver, which was pressed against her ear, and her forefinger was in one of the number holes, but she didn't rotate the dial circle. Our notebook with all the telephone numbers was open on the table. She was as white as a ghost. Her body was there, but her brain had been drifted elsewhere. I wiped my wet hands on the back of my dress. "Where's Mama?"

"Rosa is lying in a pool of water and blood," Sofia said in a state of shock.

It took me a few seconds to realize and react. When I ran to the bedroom, Rosa was sitting on the bed. Her hands were balled up in fists, gripping the sheet on each side of her, while her bare legs were apart and a circle of water had formed between them. Blood had stained her inner thighs and the sheet. She was sweating bullets and the look on her face reflected how much pain she was in. Seeing her in such a state, a ringing began in my ears.

Mama, in an agitated, frantic manner, was shoving items in a big brown leather bag; the maternity notes, a nightdress, a hairbrush, and other things that were within her reach and could be of use to Rosa at the hospital. "I was going to prepare the bag tomorrow." She blamed herself for the unexpected coming of the baby. "I should have prepared it sooner." The doctor was certain the baby wasn't due for at least eight more days. "EVA," she shouted. Her entire face had become red from the sudden stress. "Did Sofia call the coffeehouse? Your father's there. We need him to take us to the hospital."

"Mama, you have a driving license," I said. "You can drive us there."

Mama gave me a look full of contempt. I was sure she wanted to strike me across the face. "Are you suggesting we should go to the hospital without your father and Andreas?" At that moment, she resembled a roaring bear.

"Of course not," I replied.

"Eva, please find Andreas," Rosa begged, she cried, she was suffering. Yiayia was by her side, helping her out of bed. I nodded, returning to the kitchen. Sofia put the receiver back to its place. She was shaking.

"You have to be strong," I told her.

I rushed outside. Andreas had taken Theodoros for a walk around the village. They were gone for almost an hour, which was a good sign they'd return soon and were close to home. I ran into the street, looking around, looking at everything. I looked at the houses, at the cars, both the parked ones and the ones driving by, and at the sky. Why was I looking at the sky? I felt as if I was lost in the most familiar of places. Stavros' house looked teasingly empty and I wished he was here. He'd know what to do and I'd feel calmer in his presence.

"Where are you Andreas?" I whispered to myself. I must have looked like a madwoman to whoever was watching. Relief washed over me when I saw Papa. One second he was running, the next he was walking, but he was moving as fast as his aging heart and tired legs permitted him to. "They're inside, there's blood

everywhere,” I told him, and even though he was out of breath, he hurried to them. Within moments, Andreas came running, holding Theodoros underneath his arm. That afternoon, we were all running for Rosa.

“We were walking by the coffeehouse and the men there told me I’m needed at home because the time had come for me to be a father again.” Andreas was ecstatic and terrified at the same time. He put Theodoros down and the little boy wrapped his arms around me; just like Sofia, he was shaking. He was confused and had no idea what was happening.

Papa, Mama, Rosa and Andreas left for the hospital minutes later.

Andreas had an old blue bicycle, which he didn’t use anymore, but still took care of; checking its tires and brakes, cleaning it.

“I’ll ride Andreas’ bicycle to the hospital in Famagusta,” I announced to Sofia and Yiayia. Not all of us fit in the car, and I was left behind, but I wanted to be at that hospital one way or another.

“It’s almost nightfall, it’s dangerous.” Yiayia said. She was making lemonades.

“Don’t leave us, Eva,” Sofia said. She always reminded me of a lost, wild animal. She was sitting on a chair, while Theodoros was on her lap, eating a biscuit. He had calmed down by falling back into the oblivion of his innocence. Yiayia had baked the biscuits Mama had prepared. I grabbed my purse, put it over my head and shoulder, and kissed Sofia on the hair.

“You have to be strong,” I told her again. “I have to go.”

“We have dinner to cook and chores to do,” Yiayia shouted as I left.

In the garden, Mr. Brown was munching grass, while Grey was napping. I hopped on the blue bicycle and was on my way to Famagusta.

I had missed the beaches and streets of Famagusta, and had wished to revisit them under different circumstances, but that was no longer possible. I reached the hospital thirty minutes later. It was seven o’clock in the evening. I put Andreas’ bicycle on the ground, going to Papa. He was on the stairs outside, having a cigarette, but he

wasn't surprised to see me. He was composed; he had the tendency to stubbornly hold on to hope until the end.

"Go to your mother," my father instructed. "She shouldn't be alone."

I found Mama in a crowded waiting room. When I walked in, she got up from her seat to hug me. She was worried sick.

"What are you doing here? How did you come?" She attempted to complain, but it was obvious she was glad I was there, and became more at ease.

"I borrowed Andreas' bicycle." Looking around, I frowned. "Why aren't we in the maternity department?"

"It's Sunday evening, the doctor, who was normally seeing Rosa, not only isn't at the hospital, but they cannot reach him, and the nurse told me to wait here. They took her to the delivery room. Andreas is with her," Mama informed me. We took a seat next to each other, and holding hands, we fell quiet.

We weren't alone. The waiting room of the emergency department was flooded with people. A nurse in her white uniform stood out. She was surrounded by the worried families and relatives of the patients the hospital had behind the closed doors of its surgery rooms. They were demanding answers about their loved ones.

"We're doing what we can," the nurse kept repeating, unaffected. "One of the doctors will be with you soon."

When a doctor came out of the surgery rooms, he approached a middle-aged woman and her two adult daughters. "The patient isn't responding," he told them. He had a stethoscope around his neck. "I'm sorry, we did everything we could."

The unfortunate man's wife and daughters broke down on the floor, crying out in fear and agony. They sounded how wounded animals do, when they're shot down. Their relatives helped them to their feet, leading them to the chairs. While the two sisters were shouting that a miracle would save their father, their mother was lamenting. The doctor touched the nurse's arm, leaning into her ear, and asked her to bring sedatives along with the psychologist that was on call that night. After the nurse nodded, the two of them left, going in different directions.

There was too much pain in that small space. It was overwhelming, maddening. People were crying, praying. I didn't know what to do with myself. I felt as if I was a foreign body. Tears were flowing from Mama's eyes and I held her hand even tighter. She was afraid for Rosa and her baby, but at the same time, she felt sympathy for everyone there.

Soon, the nurse took everyone that was related to the unknown man away from the waiting room. Mama and I were left alone. A few more chairs were occupied. Silence was restored.

One hour went by... two hours ... then three ...

Papa, Mama and I were waiting for news about Rosa, but no doctor or nurse had come to let us know how things were going. They had all disappeared.

I was looking with glazed eyes at the dull, white wall. While Darling was gardening for the retirement home one day, he got a pebble in his eye, and I went with him to the hospital. We waited so long before a doctor tended to him. Hospitals were mazes of long, narrow corridors, while there was a never ending fight between the stench of sickness and medicine.

Darling's presence was permanent and absolute in my thoughts; in the airplane, in the taxi, when I went on a walk with Theodoros, when I was singing on the bed with my sisters, when I was riding Andreas' bicycle to reach the hospital. I didn't fight it I wanted him wandering in my mind.

It was past midnight when the doctor with the stethoscope around his neck approached us. "Are you the family of Rosa Andreou?" he asked. After Rosa was married to Andreas, she took his surname; it was tradition.

My parents and I jumped up from our seats simultaneously.

"Yes, we are," Mama replied. She was touching her chest.

"How's my daughter?" Papa asked. He looked fragile.

The doctor took a good look at the three of us before he said, "I have bad news and I have good news." Mama gasped, while Papa sat back down, and I felt a shiver crawl down my spine. The doctor broke his silence. "Mrs. Andreou gave birth at midnight. The bad news is the baby boy came to the world dead. The good news is Mrs. Andreou is physically well. I did, however, give her a sedative to calm her down. She's sleeping, regaining her strength. Mr. Andreou is with her as we speak. You can all see her in the morning."

"Why? What happened?" Mama asked, stricken both by grief and horror.

"She had dangerously high blood pressure, most probably due to excessive stress and fatigue, which didn't do good to the child she was carrying. Her immune system and stamina were worn out. I believe the baby boy died about a week ago,

and if he had stayed even one more day in her womb, he'd have killed her. Mrs. Andreou was lucky her body reacted the way it did today and had to be brought to the hospital. I'm sorry." His apology was apathetic. His eyes had seen too much. He was immune to pain.

My heart dropped. I felt sick to my stomach. Rosa was "lucky" the doctor had said, but at the thought my beloved sister could have died, I imagined vomiting on his shoes. I was seeing silver stars; they were tiny and they were everywhere. The nausea that had been pestering me had returned with a vengeance.

The doctor was wearing a long, white robe, with his nametag over the chest pocket; there was a hospital pen in it. I fought the urge to grab his stethoscope and throw it on the ground. He was an angel of death. He was taking people away from their loved ones. Where was that dead baby boy? Where was my new nephew? Where had the doctor taken him? Why did the baby boy die? Everything turned black, and I heard my body fall on the floor, but I didn't feel anything.

I recovered my senses minutes later. Papa and Mama were talking to me, I heard their voices in the distance, but I didn't understand what they were saying. The doctor helped me to my feet by putting his hand underneath my armpit and pulling me up. He insisted on examining me. I was at the hospital after all. He called for a nurse and talked to her close to my ear. While the doctor consoled my parents, the nurse led me away from there.

In a small office, the nurse instructed me to sit on the examination table and left, leaving me alone. The room was filled with books and medication. When the doctor came, he stood behind me and began moving the stethoscope around my back. I obliged every time he asked me to cough or to take a deep breath. The nurse kept coming and going.

"Breathe in ..." the doctor said. "Breathe out ... and now cough ..." Once he was done with my back, he stood in front of me. "Please lie back. I need to examine your chest, stomach and abdomen." I wanted to ask if that was really necessary, but I kept my mouth shut. Discreetly and professionally, he put his hand inside my summer shirt. "How are you feeling?"

"I feel fine," I replied irritably. I needed to be with my family, not there.

"Have you fainted again recently?" He was listening to my heartbeat. I replied that I hadn't. The doctor, whose surname I read was Angelou, continued his

work in silence. He touched my stomach and belly with his hands, massaging it intensely.

“It’s been a little bloated lately,” I groaned. I was squirming. I wanted him to stop it.

“Does it hurt? Where does it hurt?” the doctor insisted, putting pressure on my abdomen, and a couple of tears left my eyes due to the pain. When he noticed, he stopped and started pressing his stethoscope on my belly. He was stern, relentless. He pressed that sly stethoscope into my skin, below my bellybutton, and leaned over. “Stay still,” he instructed and I held my breath. He listened carefully. Finally, he stood up straight.

“Please lift your shirt over your chest,” the doctor asked.

“Why?” I foolishly objected.

“Stop resisting the examination, Eva.”

I did what I was told and the doctor saw what Stavros had seen that night through the bathroom window.

“You can sit.” He took a step back, folded his arms across his chest and studied me for a few seconds. “Are you aware you’re in the first trimester of your pregnancy?” he asked and it felt as if he had thrown a bucket of cold water on me. It was finally official, but what an ironic time the truth had chosen to catch up to me. I laughed. What else could I have done? “Your mother told me you were studying in London for four years and that you returned to Famagusta about a week ago.”

“Apparently, the moment I stepped my foot back here, my sister lost her baby.”

The doctor dismissed my comment. “Did an Englishman take advantage of you?” he questioned, and when I didn’t answer, he continued making assumptions. “It must be difficult for a young woman to be alone and unprotected in a foreign land.”

“I cannot believe it ...” I thought out loud, ignoring him. The realization started sinking in. How could I have been so careless? If the villagers found out, they’d crucify me, they’d eat me alive like the vultures they were, while dragging the name of my family through the mud. My parents would be distraught, devastated. I had to reach out to Darling and leave the island as soon as possible. It was the best course of action and there were no other alternatives. No matter how

dramatically or badly they'd react to the news of my departure, my baby had to be kept a secret from my family until further notice.

"You need to relax," Dr. Angelou simply said. He was an arrogant man, but it was his job to be understanding. He walked to his desk, sat on his chair, and sighed tiredly, flipping through his diary. "I want you to come see me in eight days, in the morning, and we'll discuss further. In the meantime, take care of yourself, you're pale."

"Doctor, can I rely on your discretion?"

"Of course," Dr. Angelou replied. "I took an oath on the matter after all."

The nurse knocked on the door, opening it, and the doctor motioned for her to come.

"I'll see you soon, Miss Adamou," Dr. Angelou said, not looking up from the papers the nurse had brought him. "And remember what I told you, take care of yourself."

My parents were waiting for me outside the room Rosa was in. The time was quarter after one. Low lighting and a dead silence were creeping in the hospital corridors. When they asked what the doctor had said, I told them half the truth; that everything looked fine, but he wanted to see me again soon.

"Can I see her?" I pointed at the room with the number 138 on the door.

"In the morning," Mama replied. "The nurses told us we've overstayed the visiting hours. You have to go right away."

I looked over my shoulder at the three cross nurses. They were watching us, waiting for us to leave, immediately.

"You're not coming with us?" I asked.

"No." Mama was whispering. "Andreas and I are spending the night at the hospital. Rosa shouldn't be by herself. We'll sleep on the chairs."

Papa and I set off for home.

The bedroom was stagnant because of the hot summer night. Sofia sobbed silently for a while before finally falling asleep. She was shocked and shaken by what had happened to Rosa, we all were. I was in bed, and in the dark, I thought about Rosa, myself, and everyone else. In the background, Papa and Yiayia were snoring.

“Where are my mama and my papa?” Theodoros’ little voice was heard from our open bedroom door, pulling Sofia out of her light sleep, while I quickly wiped away the tears that had earlier escaped from my eyes. He sounded scared.

“Come here,” Sofia said with open arms and Theodoros ran to her. With her help, he climbed into the bed, and she hugged him. “Do you want to hear a story?” she asked, kissing his hair, and he nodded. She took out of the nightstand drawer my old fairytale book of *The Brave Tin Soldier*. “There was once upon a time ...” my sister started reading, translating it in Greek along the way, and Theodoros was repeating some of the words. It was clear they had read the fairytale plenty of times. Theodoros was touching the drawings on its pages and I remembered how Sofia and I had coloured them when we were little.

What was I going to do? I had to stop making one mistake after another. My family needed me, and Darling needed me, and now the new life inside me needed me, and I felt torn in every direction.

Sofia had to read Theodoros the fairytale one more time before he finally fell asleep and soon she was sleeping too. I stored the story away before I closed my eyes, and while I was thinking of what to write to Darling in the letter I’d send him, I slipped into unconsciousness.

In the morning, at nine sharp, we were back at the hospital. I climbed the stairs to the third floor and grabbed the doorknob, eager to open the door 138 and see my sister, but a woman screamed at the top of her lungs.

It was a nurse. Her legs had given way and all the other nurses ran to catch her before she could collapse on the floor. The nurses’ faces were unfamiliar, they were the new shift. The one that had fallen down pointed at the radio with a shaking hand. One of the others turned the volume up.

The broadcaster was shouting into the microphone: “*Makarios is dead. Firearms should be surrendered. All movement in the streets is forbidden.*” He, himself, was in a state of panic. He never stopped repeating these three sentences. It was clear he was reading the script he was given. At the hospital, everyone who was within hearing distance of that radio froze before they all began asking the same single question.

“Archbishop Makarios is dead?”

“President Makarios is dead?”

“Is the president dead?”

But the broadcaster gave no answers. Fear and uncertainty were rising.

I looked at Papa. He wasn't as shocked as everyone else there. It took me only a moment to understand he was aware beforehand of what would happen that day. Papa was politically proactive since he was a young man. Besides, all the men at the coffeehouse always shared the secrets and whispers that went on around the island. No one was a saint. Papa went outside to have a smoke.

On the radio, a new broadcaster came on. *“The tyrant is dead,”* the man said. *“I repeat: the tyrant is dead. The army has the power now. We have the power now. We rule the police, the media, everything. Do not dare oppose ...”* Military music began playing.

“Change the station,” a teenage boy shouted. His left leg was in a cast and he was supporting himself with a crutch under each armpit.

“RIK is the only radio station in Cyprus, silly,” one of the nurses told him, patronizing him. “You’re tired, dear. Return to your room.”

The boy shook his head. He was irritated, upset, while there was a frown on his face probably due to the pain from his broken leg. “I need a radio. Do you have one?” He was addressing all the people, hoping, but no one responded.

“I have one,” Sofia told me, showing me her small orange Philips transistor.

“Go,” I urged her. “Take it to him.”

Sofia was hesitant, but she walked through the crowd to reach him. “Here,” she said.

“I’m Odysseas.” The boy introduced himself, searching for the station.

“I’m Sofia,” my sister said. She was wisdom and he was wrath.

Everyone was watching, waiting, and when Odysseas finally found what he was looking for, no one made a sound. The voice of the illegal broadcaster sounded young. He must have been a teenager. He must have been Odysseas’ friend.

Gravely, emotionally, the boy in the radio was saying, *“I fear for the future of our island. Today, on Monday the 15th of July, at quarter to nine in the morning, our National Guard, controlled by officers from Greece, along with EOKA B, encouraged and supplied by the Junta in Athens, began an assault with artillery and tanks on the Presidential Palace. The target of their coup was the president of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios. For many, many decades, we have been desperate*

for union with Greece, and unfortunately, some of us are blinded and determined to stop at nothing to pursue the elusive dream. I fear Pandora's Box has been opened. Nicosia is a dangerous place today; stay safe."

The people at the hospital were crying, praying, yelling.

Odysseas turned the transistor off, returning it to Sofia.

People were advised to stay inside. Everyone returned home from work by eleven o'clock in the morning, and the rest of the day was spent gathered around a radio, waiting to hear news announcements. In the afternoon, the unexpected happened. Archbishop Makarios spoke loud and clear to all the people from a pirate radio station in Paphos, a city on the southern coast of our island.

"Greeks of Cyprus," the Archbishop said. His voice was silky smooth, yet strong. *"This voice is familiar to you. You know who is speaking. It is Makarios, your elected leader. I am not dead, as the Athens Junta and its minions here would wish. I am alive and at your side."*

In the days that followed, the Archbishop fled to the safety of the United Kingdom, far, far away from poor, poor Cyprus, while the lives of its people were left in the invisible hands of their almighty God.

Summer 1974

III

An Infant Crying in the Night

Rosa had to go through the aftermaths of an eight month pregnancy and of giving birth, but she had no baby to comfort her and help her get through it. Her breasts were filled with milk, there were stretch scars on her belly, and she had gained five unwelcome kilos. She had dived into the baking of every creation she could think of to forget about the hole that dead baby boy left in her. She avoided Andreas, she avoided all of us, and she had fallen into a deep depression. She only bothered with Theodoros, and when she often broke out into tears, her gentle son gave her kisses and a lot of warm hugs.

In the meantime, I was drowning in guilt because there was a life, a soul growing inside me. What if I returned to England and the Englishman didn't want me anymore? These thoughts taunted me. What with what had happened to Rosa as well as the coup, I hadn't had the chance to write the letter to Darling so I postponed talking to my parents about my plans of leaving. I wanted to call Aunt Thea and ask if she was willing to take me in again. I'd promise to work hard at the tavern and help at the house as much as possible. Once there, I'd contact Clémence, too. But I was never home alone, someone was always around.

Nicosia International Airport had been closed by the coupists for a couple of days, but it was reopened to civilians, and the television and radio news reported that it was flooded by tourists and other foreigners, fleeing the island. Five days had gone by after the coup and there was an unsettling atmosphere hanging over the heads of everyone. People were restless as they acknowledged they had been poking three giants they feared for too long; Turkey, England, and America. Greece, on the other hand, had made a massive mess and went into hiding. For the naïve, everything was going to be fine, but for the wary, it was only a matter of time before consequences came knocking on the door. Cyprus had been a playground for too long.

It was after midnight, and we were all in our beds, but only the oldest and the youngest of the family were sleeping; Yiayia and Theodoros. The rest of us were lying in the dark, fighting with our thoughts and the heat. When there were knocks on the door, whispers were heard from the other bedrooms in the house, while the beds and floors creaked due to the sudden movements. More knocks followed, which were louder and more persistent.

"I'm Lieutenant Economou and with me is Private Georgiou," someone shouted from outside. "We need to speak with Andreas Andreou. It's about a time sensitive matter. No, in fact, it's about a matter of urgency. Please open the door."

There were footsteps in the hallway, and when Sofia went to see what was going on, I followed her. From a distance, we watched our parents open the front door. Mama was standing behind Papa.

"Hello, gentlemen," Papa greeted the two military men. "What can I help you with?"

"We're looking for Andreas Andreou," the one of the two soldiers replied. He had medals on his uniform, while the other one had none. "Isn't he home?"

"I'm right here," Andreas shouted, rushing by us in the hallway. We were all in our nightwear except for him. He had put on brown sandals, brown shorts, and a white short sleeved shirt, which he had left unbuttoned. Rosa was right on his heels.

"I'm sorry to disturb you so late at night," Lieutenant Economou said, searching the inside of the house with his eyes. "Can we talk to you outside?"

The Private was more discreet. He held a pen and a paper, and when he saw Andreas, he ticked on it.

Andreas followed them in the garden. Papa went with them too.

"I want to hear what they'll say to him," Rosa protested, but Mama grabbed her arm, preventing her from going after her husband.

"You're in your nightdress," Mama told her. "Do you want those two strangers, those two men, to see you like that?"

"I don't care," Rosa cried, yanking her arm away. "I want to be with Andreas. They want to take him away from me. I can feel it. I could feel something bad would happen all day."

"You're being paranoid." Mama was losing her patience. "Go to bed. All you girls go to bed. Let the men resolve whatever issue is at hand."

Rosa hugged herself, digging her nails into her bare arms, and pressed her back against the wall, sliding to the floor. She struggled to keep herself together. Ten long minutes passed in silence, and when Andreas and Papa came back inside, I helped Rosa get up from the floor; her body was still recovering from giving birth. Papa closed the front door with a sigh, but didn't lock it, and Andreas headed to his bedroom with his head bowed, not saying a word. Rosa ran after him.

"What did they say? What did they want?" Mama asked Papa, but he paid no attention to her. Instead, he went back outside to have a smoke. For the slightest second, Mama looked hurt, but then, she went to find Rosa and Andreas. Sofia, once again, was seeking my support.

Growing up, I learned to be quiet. I was taught to be afraid to think outside the box. I was taught to be afraid of my own shadow. I don't mind silence, I don't mind it at all, and I'm comfortable in it. I hate words as much as I love them. Look good and smile, puppet, and always hide your emotions, bravo, that's it, good girl.

"Come." I took my little sister's hand, leading us to the bedroom of the young couple. Andreas had pulled his wooden trunk out from underneath their bed and had picked the lock with his pocket knife because he couldn't find the key. Inside, there was his army equipment. All the while, Rosa was holding on for dear life from his arm. They were both kneeling on the floor, in front of the trunk.

"No, Andreas, please, don't leave me, too," Rosa was crying in hysterics. "I love you. I cannot lose you, too. I love you."

"Stop it, child, you're making a scene, the neighbours will hear," Yiayia told Rosa. "She'll lose her mind if she doesn't calm down," Yiayia whispered to Mama, but I heard.

"Take Theodoros away from here," I told Sofia, who for once in her life, obeyed without complaint. They had woken the little boy up with all their arguing. He had his own little bed in the corner of the bedroom, but he often slept on the double bed with his parents. Sofia picked him up, leaving and taking him with her.

"If I don't report for duty within the hour, I'll be arrested for treason," Andreas attempted reasoning with his wife. He was always patient with her.

"What if it's dangerous? What if you never come back?"

"They asked the army to gather up for precautionary measures." He was lying, I could tell. "I promise I'll come back."

"Am I to take your word for it?"

“Yes, Rosa. Nothing will keep me away from you and my son.” He held her face in his hands, kissing her forehead, cheeks, mouth, but tears continued falling from her eyes.

“Let’s give them some privacy,” Mama suggested, and we left them alone, closing the door behind us.

I went in the garden to find Papa. He was standing still, smoking.

“Papa, what’s going on?” I wanted the truth.

“I always trusted you,” he replied.

“Tell me then.”

“The radar has detected aircrafts and ships leaving from Turkey and heading to Cyprus, to Kyrenia. It’s a threat.”

Andreas came outside. He was no longer a citizen. He was a soldier. He was wearing the green helmet, the green jacket, the green trousers, and the black boots. Over his shoulder, there was a green duffel bag and a black rifle. Would he become a killer? A monster? And what would the fate of the rest of us be? The future was uncertain, but for the sake of my family, I had to remain calm and act strong. Weakness wasn’t an option. What a selfish life I led in London, where I avoided the reality of the island.

“I said goodbye to everyone,” Andreas said. “I’ll walk to Antony’s house. He’ll drive us to our destination.”

“Farewell, my son,” Papa told him. “Don’t worry about us. I’ll take care of everyone. I have my pistol.”

Andreas set off on his journey and I watched him until he disappeared into the night.

The Andreou bedroom used to be storage of family heirlooms, but that changed once Rosa and Andreas were married. I looked at the clock on the wall. It was two in the morning. Rosa was in a fetal position in the middle of her big, empty bed. She had her back to me, and even though I couldn’t see her face, I was sure she was crying. The pillow she had buried her face in must have been damp with tears. Her feet were dirty; she loved walking barefoot in the summer.

People are draining, people are exhausting, with all their problems.

I climbed on the bed.

Rosa sniffed, trying to breathe, but her nose was blocked, and she sighed from her mouth. She used the tissue I handed her.

We were both on our backs beside each other and we both had swollen bellies, Rosa because her pregnancy had ended, and I because mine had only just begun.

“I was nineteen when I met Andreas,” Rosa said. “I want to tell you a story.” She loved telling stories, everyone in the Adamou family did, and for whatever reason, I was always the person they told those stories to. “One morning, years ago, I went to Famagusta to chase after my dream. It was summer, as it is now, and I was wearing a red dress. I had bought it with money I had saved from my summer jobs. Papa, Mama, and Yiayia thought it was provocative, but I thought it was beautiful. It’s hanging in the wardrobe.”

“I remember the dress,” I said.

“I was holding the wicker basket I had made with Yiayia, when I was little,” Rosa replied. “I had in it glass jars with jams I had cooked. I had an appointment with a supermarket owner. He wanted to do business with me, but on my way there, I walked by a construction site. The builders were having a break. They were sitting in a circle, on plastic stools, drinking hot Cypriot coffee and ice cold water. At their feet, there was a radio and a RIK broadcaster was talking about sports. When I walked by, they threw at me what they believed were a bunch of compliments; they were shouting, whistling. Only one of them was quiet. It was Andreas. I gave them a small smile before I bowed my head, quickening my pace.”

While Rosa was narrating her story, Mama, Sofia and Theodoros had joined us. Mama sat on the edge of the bed, while Sofia put the sleeping boy in his bed before she stood by the wooden wardrobe. Rosa continued.

“Andreas followed me. I saw him in the reflection of glass windows, walking a few feet behind me. It irritated me and I turned round, putting a stop to the chase. He caught up with me right before I entered the supermarket. I let him know he was being intrusive. You’re beautiful, he told me, and you look like a woman with a good heart. He asked what my name was, where I lived, what I was doing there that morning, and I told him everything. A few weeks later, he showed up at our doorstep with some roses for me, asking Papa for his blessing and my hand in marriage. He didn’t give me the time to warm up to him and I never forgave him for it. Papa, on the other hand, was thrilled because he knew Andreas’ family, who were good people and lived in a neighbouring village. The supermarket owner

offered me a deal, but I refused as I had to prioritize. I was only nineteen. I shouldn't complain. Andreas is a good man, but ..."

Rosa stopped speaking. Mama was tearing up, Sofia was grim, and I was absorbing the words. She was confused, distraught. She loved him and hated him at the same time.

"It hurts," Rosa cried, clutching her belly. "It hurts everywhere. I'm in pain, inside and out." She turned to me. "Do you believe in love, Eva?"

"I don't know, Rosa," I replied. "I'll make us tea." It was forty degrees, my sister was suffering, and all I could come up with was suggest making tea. Rosa seized my wrist, preventing me from leaving.

"Answer me."

"Why is it important?"

"Do you think you're better than me?" she accused. "You never tell me what's on your mind!" She was gripping my wrist.

"ROSA," Mama intervened.

Rosa snapped out of whatever dark thoughts she had fallen into. She said, "I forgot to take my medication tonight." The doctor had prescribed sleeping pills and painkillers to assist her transition back to normalcy.

"I'll stay with you," I told her, pressing her hand against my stomach. "I'll sleep here tonight."

Rosa nodded.

At five thirty that morning, six thousand Turkish soldiers with forty tanks invaded Kyrenia, on the northern coast of the island, under the pretence of protecting the Turkish Cypriots and the independence of the island. The date was the 20th of July and their air attacks were nonstop. The Turkish called the invasion "peace operation", but peace was nowhere on the list of things they had in mind of doing.

The invaders even took the time that day to bomb Famagusta for three hours. From the village, we heard the loud explosions and saw the black smoke staining our otherwise bright blue sky. Theodoros spent many hours hidden underneath the bed, and even though Rosa pleaded with him, he refused to come out. The little boy was scared to death, but Grey was by his side. We had no news about Andreas' luck.

Nicosia International Airport had been bombed beyond repair and it was closed forever. I was trapped on the island, while a war was on the rise, with a baby in my belly, without its father by my side. There were a few limited escape routes, but how could I abandon my family during such a time? How?

In the days that followed, we were all glued to the television, telephone and radio. Greek and Greek Cypriot soldiers had no more than ten tanks and no aircraft, but they fought the Turkish, and Kyrenia held out for three days. The Turkish captured a small section of the island and the damage was irreparable. Five thousand Greek Cypriots fled their homes, while thousands were killed and raped. When rape victims from Kyrenia sought refuge in Famagusta, they told their stories that reached everyone's ears, terrorizing us.

Two days later, on the 22nd of July, the UN Security Council obtained a ceasefire and we believed the nightmare was finally over. But the Turkish resupplied their forces and violated the ceasefire, widening their territory little by little. In the midst of everything, and because the invasion had happened, the Greek Junta collapsed and democracy was restored in Greece.

The other cities of Cyprus attempted to help the refugees as much as possible, but no one could help the people who were trapped in Kyrenia, who didn't make it out in time. They were in the hands of the dark demons, which were out for blood, which sought to show their dominance. We heard numerous horror stories about the Turkish soldiers. They repeatedly raped the women and beat up the men. The rest of us never thought those things could happen to us, we thought we were out of danger, but the Turkish soldiers did a good job building up fear and spreading it throughout the island.

Meanwhile, I had stomach aches day in and day out, and my family thought it was due to stress caused by the current events. While we were growing up, Yiayia and Mama often told us how easy and uneventful their pregnancies were. Mama even bragged that no villager realized she was pregnant with Sofia until a lot later. I was worried my stomach aches were a sign something was wrong.

When it was time to go see Dr. Angelou for the second time, one of the nurses informed me that the young physician had volunteered to the army, and an older one saw me; Dr. Nicholas Nicholaou. Dr. Nicholas ignored all of Dr. Angelou's notes. He reexamined me himself, asked odd questions, sent me for blood

tests and arranged another appointment. He told me that he'd help me. I was sceptical about his approach, but I had no choice but to rely on him.

In the back of the garden, Sofia and Odysseas were sitting together, listening to that orange Philips transistor. They were out of sight, but I knew their hiding place. Sofia should know better than to try and hide from me. The two of them had come closer after that day at the hospital. They had become friends.

"Get up, both of you." I was firm. "We're late for church."

"One more minute, Miss Eva," Odysseas pleaded. "Listen." He turned the volume of the transistor up. Sofia was glaring at me, wishing I'd vanish. Lately, she was more careful with her appearance. She had come to terms with the fact she wasn't a child anymore. She was turning into a young woman and was beginning to accept it, along with everything that came with it. They were listening to the illegal broadcaster, whose name will forever remain unknown, and who, as the teenage boy that he was, had a head full of ideals.

"Britain, Greece, and Turkey have made a martyr out of our little island," the boy said. His voice was serene, he never shouted. *"We always belonged to someone else. We never belonged to us. Whatever little freedom we ever succeeded in gaining, we had to pay with our sweat and blood, and there were always crucial consequences. Hellenes of Cyprus today is the 28th of July ..."*

Before the broadcaster spoke more, I took the transistor from Odysseas' hands, turning it off. I told them again we were late for church and they got up from the ground. Sofia, Odysseas and I walked under the scorching sun and through the empty streets of the village, heading to church. Everyone else was already gathered there. Our pace was slow because Odysseas was using his crutches. He had broken his leg while he was working in his family's field. He had fallen off his donkey, landing on a big rock. Whenever I saw Odysseas' casted leg, I was reminded of Stavros.

Stavros adored his country so I often wondered how he had reacted to the news about Cyprus. I imagined him pacing up and down in front of a radio in Berlin, almost like a caged lion, listening to the latest information, choked by his powerlessness to do something, anything. His calculative, composed nature would be shaken to its core.

“I was going to volunteer to the army if I hadn’t broken my leg,” Odysseas said through gritted teeth. “I want to fight for my island, but I’m a cripple, I’m useless.” His forehead was sweaty, his cheeks were pink, and he was gripping the crutches.

Since the day of the Turkish invasion, on the radio and in the newspapers, all able bodied men were asked to join the army and defend the island.

“Don’t be too hard on yourself,” I told him. “Nobody can predict life. Be thankful it was your leg you broke on that rock and not your head. Besides, you’re only a boy.”

“I’m seventeen,” he said shyly.

“I’m glad you’re not fighting in the war,” Sofia said under her breath. “I’m glad you’re here with us.” Odysseas smirked, I smiled.

Almost all villagers were in the church that hot July morning. The three of us pushed our way through the crowd. Sofia and I found Yiayia, Papa, Mama, Rosa and Theodoros, who had seats somewhere in the middle of the church. Odysseas was with us the whole time. The liturgy would end soon.

Since I was little, the paintings on the walls and ceilings drew my attention. They told stories of the religion all Greeks grew up listening to; Virgin Mary going to church for the first time when she was only a girl, the birth of Christ, the twelve apostles, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the death of Virgin Mary. Darling wasn’t much of a believer and he often teased me about my need to believe in something bigger than myself. He asked me once what Stavros’ amulet was, but I only told him it was an accessory from back home. Everything in our village church was humble, except for the gold chandelier. I stared at it and all its burned out candles.

Theodoros was staring at the shiny chandelier too. His little brunette head was thrown back, and he was pointing at it, babbling words. Rosa took his hand and kissed it, calming him down. He was sitting on her lap. With Andreas gone and because of the stillborn, Rosa found comfort in food. She cooked, baked and ate all day long. Her body was bloated and she’d damage her figure if she wasn’t careful. Rosa was one of the prettiest women of the village, but now, she looked chubbier, older. The smile that had graced her lips in the past was gone. People didn’t look at her with admiration anymore. They looked at her with pity.

“Stop looking around,” Mama ordered in an angry whisper. She lost her patience a lot easier lately. “It’s sinful and disrespectful. Look at Father Heracles, listen to him.”

Father Heracles stood at the altar. He was singing psalms in Ancient Greek into the microphone in front of him. I didn’t understand a word. He was wearing a long black robe and a tall black hat. He had a beard and his silver hair was tied into a bun at his nape. There was a big, gold cross hanging around his neck. He was an old priest, he was incredibly opinionated, and he hadn’t aged a day since I last saw him. Behind him, there were the paintings of Christ, Virgin Mary, and a number of saints. I thought their faces looked calm, but other than that, they looked expressionless to me. Their frames were carved wood.

“Our father who art in heaven ...” Father Heracles shouted into the microphone with his arms open and a lot of people joined him. The liturgy ended with the prayer and everyone crossing themselves three times. People were eager to get out and breathe fresh air, but Father Heracles forbade us to. The church was very much like an oven by that point and we were all restless. After the end of each liturgy, he held us a few more minutes, lecturing, preaching.

“Let us pray for our island,” Father Heracles said, and for once, everyone hushed. Only infants and children under the age of five were still making noises as they were yet incapable of understanding what was going on. “Let us pray for our people, who were forced to leave their homes behind, along with all their other belongings, turning from rich to poor in seconds. They’ve lost everything, but their pain doesn’t end there. A lot of them have lost loved ones. Let us help them not to get hungry in these trying months and let us help them not to get cold in the coming winter. Lastly, let us pray for our people, who are trapped and suffering in the hands of our hostile intruders. Only God has the power to help those poor souls. Their bodies will suffer, but may their faith remain intact.”

Outside the church, people were chatting, while Father Heracles walked among everyone, greeting and giving his blessings. I looked around, not really listening to the conversations. They were all talking about the invasion, sharing their thoughts, opinions and fears. I was paying attention to other things.

Papa and Mama were speaking to their brothers and sisters; they had four siblings each and almost all my aunts and uncles had two or three children. Nearby, Yiayia was sitting on a plastic chair, resting her hands on her wooden walking stick. She had hurt her hip. Sofia was staring at Odysseas, who was with his family. Rosa was walking hand in hand with Theodoros, showing him the wild flowers and the stray cats. He was the only thing that gave her energy to keep going. She didn't talk to us anymore. She glared at us all the time. She blamed Papa and Mama for the ruins that were her life, she envied me for having lived all the things that I had, and she envied Sofia for her youth.

My eyes fell on Maria Papadopoulos, the wife of the former schoolteacher of the village, Leonidas Papadopoulos. She was with their four children, but he wasn't with them. A day after the invasion, everyone discovered the schoolteacher wasn't from Greece. He was a Turk and he was a spy. When he was a little boy, he was sent to Kos, a Greek island, whose location was mouth to mouth with the coasts of Turkey, and where he went to school and grew up. Once he graduated, he was taken back to Turkey, where he was trained in the army. When he was assigned in Athens, he met Maria, whom he married and had four children with, while his true identity was kept a secret from his family. He was positioned in Cyprus to spy on its citizens by pretending to be a schoolteacher in our village.

Leonidas Papadopoulos' real name was Emre Arslan, and ironically, it translated as friendly lion. He was a likeable man. Everyone had trusted him with their children and welcomed him in their homes. Once it was revealed who he really was, they all felt betrayed, they all felt like idiots. However, he had been a good teacher and no student had ever expressed they were in danger.

When Turkey invaded Cyprus, the Turkish spy gave his Greek wife an ultimatum. He told Maria she had the choice to follow him to the Turkish Cypriot village he had been assigned to, and if she decided to stay behind, she was on her own. The Greeks and the Turks were sworn enemies long before Cyprus joined in the rivalry and because of that Maria rejected his offer. Emre left, never looking behind him, never promising Maria a safe passage out of Cyprus, and never promising to provide for their children ever again. His dedication to his country and duty were above all else.

When Mrs. Stella had come over to our house to spread the news, Rosa was making watermelon spoon sweet. A war was going on on the north coast of our

island, her husband was fighting in it, and she was still grieving her stillbirth, but Rosa was determined to make dessert. She had sliced the thick rind of the watermelon into rhombus pieces and had put them in a casserole with lemon juice, lime powder, plenty of sugar, and the petals of a sweet scented geranium. When she heard the Greek man, who had once courted her, was actually a Turkish spy, she let out a laugh of mild hysteria, but didn't stop stirring the spoon sweet.

Maria was left all by herself. Her family and relatives were in Athens, and she only had her four very young children, whom she had to protect during a war. Her children were an eleven year old boy, two little girls of the ages of eight and three, and an infant boy. Some villagers sympathized with her, but some hated her. They blamed her for being victims of her husband, refusing to acknowledge that his biggest victim was her. I looked at the baby boy in Maria's arms, which was only a few months old, touching my abdomen. The world was a dangerous place for an innocent soul to come into.

"Each and every one of you is here, is coming to church, because you want to be saved," Father Heracles shouted, startling me. His voice was imposing and loud and I hadn't noticed he had joined our group of people. I was standing among my family and relatives. The priest was looking at me dead in the eye. "If you're here, it shows you want to be saved," he insisted. I put my hands behind my back, as if I were a mischievous child, smiled at him, and walked away.

"Good morning, Snow white." The voice that had spoken to me was a familiar one, but I hadn't heard it in years. It belonged to Artemis. She used to call me Snow white because of my pale skin. Hers, similar to plenty of other Cypriots, was quite dark.

Rosa had talked to me in her letters about how Artemis' life had turned out. She mindlessly threw her studies in the garbage by choosing to get engaged to Vangelis. She followed him to Thessaloniki, where he studied logistics, while she was at their flat, cooking for him, cleaning for him, and bedding him at nights. Once they returned to Cyprus, he ended their engagement because he didn't love her anymore and he found a job away from Famagusta, leaving Artemis in ruins behind. Word in the village was that her family blamed her for what had happened, considered her damaged goods, and were desperately trying to marry her off to a man in Paphos, who was unaware of her past. Paphos was as far away from Famagusta as it was possible in the enclosed geography of our island.

“I’ve missed you.” Artemis hugged me with all her strength. “How are you? How have you been?”

“I’ll tell you everything, but not now.”

Artemis looked as if I had shot her through the heart. She had so much to tell me, and I had so much to tell her, but I wasn’t ready yet to talk about the mess I had made of my life.

“Do you promise?”

“I promise.”

The following morning, I went to Famagusta with Papa. He had to go to work and I had an appointment at the hospital. People continued going to work because they believed what was going on in Cyprus was only a crisis. They believed it was something that’d be contained and the rest of us were safe.

In the car, Papa attempted to begin a conversation with me multiple times, but I either replied with a word or two or with nothing at all, and he was heartbroken. When he pulled the car to a stop outside the hospital, we both got out.

“Papa, you don’t have to, I can do it on my own,” I insisted, but he ignored me.

“What good is a father if he doesn’t help his daughter?” he told me, taking Andreas’ blue bicycle out of the trunk and backseats. He was struggling. It was visible he had grown old and tired, he wasn’t able to hide it anymore, nor did he try to. After he fixed the backseats into their upright position and closed the trunk, he turned to me. “Do you know what wish every old man has?” he asked, catching his breath. I held the rubber handles of the bicycle, waiting for his answer. “To be needed and helpful as he once was.”

“Papa, we all need you, always.”

When my father drove away, I went inside, asking the receptionists to keep an eye on my bicycle until I was finished. Andreas had given me permission to use it whenever I needed it, and that day, it’d be my ride home. On a sadder note, my family was unaware of the real reason why I was at the hospital. They thought I had to pick up my blood test results.

That morning, it’d be my second session with Dr. Nicholas. I was sitting outside his office. My appointment was at nine, but it was already nine thirty. An

elderly couple was waiting, too, and their turn was before mine. They looked grumpy, but when the patient that was inside left and the doctor showed up at his door, the old couple turned their frowns upside down. They greeted him in an exaggerated, loud manner, while they had brought him as a gift a big plastic bottle with halloumi cheese stored in brine. They either wanted to thank him or to ask him for a favour. Some people gave doctors such gifts, while some others bribed them with money.

On the wall, there was the painting of an owl, and while I was waiting, I tilted my head to the side, studying its dark colours. Once, I had pronounced the word “owl” wrong and Darling mocked me, which resulted to us having an argument. We were both on edge that day due to the fact I had a paper to write and my relatives needed help at the tavern, but he insisted he had to see me either way, not taking no for an answer. Darling was a selfish man and often asked from me more than I was willing to offer. But I was selfish, too, because I wanted my freedom. And yet, there I was, carrying his child.

Half an hour later, the old couple left and it was my turn.

“I have your blood tests here.” Dr. Nicholas went through the papers in his hands. “Everything looks great. You have iron deficiency, but because you’re pregnant, we’ll fix it with a good diet rich in iron. You should start eating liver, beef, lentils, chickpeas.” He was writing everything down for me. “And you should drink fresh orange juice because it helps with the absorption of the iron. The first three months are very important in a pregnancy and you have to be very careful.” I thanked him, standing up, but he stopped me. “Do you mind if I ask a few questions?”

Slowly, I sat back down. “No, not at all ...”

“Forgive my intrusion, but what are your plans for your pregnancy?”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Eva, I’ll be frank with you,” Dr. Nicholas warned. “The pregnancy will start showing during your fourth month and I cannot help but wonder what you’ll do, considering the father of your baby and your family are unaware of your situation. Cypriots don’t look upon an unwed mother, whose child is half English no less, with much kindness or understanding.”

I shifted uncomfortably in the chair. “Why are you telling me this?”

Dr. Nicholas joined his hands on his desk, leaning forward, and looked at me over his glasses, which were on the edge of his nose. "There's a monastery in Troodos, where I've taken a number of young women in your situation." Troodos was the tallest mountain on the island and was located right in the middle of it. "The nuns there helped these unfortunate women through their pregnancies, and once they gave birth, they were able to return to society with their heads held high."

"What about the babies?" I understood some women welcomed this option, but not me.

"The nuns took care of them until they turned five," Dr. Nicholas replied. "Then, they were taken to an orphanage." Theodoros was almost five. "Consider what I'm suggesting, Eva. It's the safest choice for you and the baby in your belly. Cyprus is a small place, a drop of land."

Dr. Nicholas looked like the image of Santa Claus which was being advertised on television and printed in children's books. His beard and hair were white, while his cheeks were pink and shiny. He had a big belly and wore suspenders. Unlike his magical counterpart, Dr. Nicholas was pragmatic.

"Doctor, I'll fight tooth and nail to keep and protect this baby."

He looked at me as if I was out of touch with reality before he humoured me, "I hope you will."

I rode Andreas' bicycle back to the village, but I didn't go straight home. I went for a stroll through the woods, pushing the bicycle along by my side, seeking shelter from the sun in the shade of the trees. On my left, there was the beach, and the scent of the sea was tickling my nose, while on my right, there was the path that led to the village.

By the beach, there was a family of carob trees. They were tall and old with thick trunks and clouds of deep, dark green leaves. The three carob trees were next to each other and their long twigs were intertwined.

Emre Arslan's eleven year old son was stealing their rich, ripe fruit pods. It was illegal to collect them before the first day of August, and if a coast guard officer saw him, the boy would be in trouble. With a long wooden stick, he was hitting the bushy leaves, forcing the black pods to fall down onto the sand. His old donkey was tied to one of the tree trunks. On its back, there was a big sack, which was already

half full with carob pods. I placed the bicycle against a tree and sat on a rock. From afar, I watched him. He was gathering all the pods from the sand, shoving them into the sack. He grabbed the stick and began hitting the trees again. A merchant must have paid the boy to do all the dirty work and he accepted as his family needed the money after what had happened with his father.

I wanted to eat a pod so I waited in the shadows. A brave ladybug had climbed onto my thigh, setting off on a trail across my skin, and I let it go about its day undisturbed. It was noon, the sun was high up in the sky, and the heat was tolerable and familiar. All in all it was a beautiful summer day. Somewhere in the village, children were playing in the streets. I heard their voices, which were full of energy and ignorance. In the safe environment of my village, where my family was only five minutes away, I was contemplating about my life, while a few hours by car away, in Kyrenia, thousands of people were malevolently being abused and robbed of their lives by the Turks.

Once the sack was full, the boy covered it with a blanket, hiding the evidence, grabbed the rope that was loosely tied around his donkey's neck, and walked away from the crime scene, dragging the old beast along. Animals never judged or criticized, they loved unconditionally, and they stayed around even after their owners took their masks off late at nights. The boy was finally out of sight.

Leisurely, I walked to the beach, but I didn't linger long in the sun because I had forgotten my straw hat. The boy left the carob trees bare. I picked two pods from the sand, putting one in my pocket and holding the other. If they tasted good, Theodoros would love them. He had a sweet tooth like me. I wiped the pod on my dress and took a bite. Its taste was honey and sugar combined, while there was syrup inside it. Nibbling on it, satisfying my craving for something sweet, I set off for the village.

In the village square, an army truck arrived and two Greek Cypriot soldiers jumped out. They had come last Monday too. They didn't look more than twenty years old and one of them was quite scrawny. They wore green berets, sleeveless, white t-shirts, green trousers, and black boots. They were sweaty and exhausted. Both soldiers were dark with a tan; the summer sun on the island was dangerous. The scrawny one leaned against the truck, lighting a cigarette, while the other, who was more muscular, was greeting the people that had already gathered. The villagers

were holding boxes with clothes and baskets with food; watermelons, jars with green or black olives, and everything else they were able to spare.

Once a week, the Greek Cypriot army had arranged for a truck to go around the Famagusta villages, gathering supplies for the refugees, and everyone was more than eager to help those in need. They donated clothes, food, and other things that were useful.

“Constantine, come,” the muscular soldier called. “Let’s begin loading everything into the truck. We have three more villages to go to today.”

Constantinos threw the cigarette on the ground, smashing it with his boot, blowing out smoke from his nose and mouth. He reminded me of a bull; he looked as if he wanted to punch a wall. Nonetheless, he did his duty.

“All right, Americo,” Constantinos said sourly. “All right.” He was mad at the world.

I walked by the crowd of villagers that had surrounded Americo and Constantino. They were asking them questions about what was going on with our military, the refugees, the Turks, but the two soldiers’ lips were sealed. Americos, however, was pleasant and polite, while Constantinos was loading supplies into the truck mechanically and sullenly.

The earth oven in our backyard was spitting out heat; its fire had only recently been put out. Wiping the sweat away from my forehead with my forearm, I entered the kitchen, finding Mama and Rosa in a panic. On the table, there was a large straw scuttle filled with freshly baked bread. They had also prepared a large jar with halloumi cheese in brine. Yiayia was sitting in a chair because of her hurt hip, but she was helping as much as she could, while Sofia was helping by keeping Theodoros out of the way.

“The soldiers are here,” I told them. “They’re in the village square, loading the truck.”

Mama and Rosa took their aprons off, fixed their clothes and hair, and left in a hurry. Rosa had grabbed the bread and Mama was carrying the halloumi. They wanted to make it to the square before the truck drove away and offer the refugees as much as they could.

“Is everything alright with your blood tests?” Sofia asked.

Theodoros was sitting on a plastic stool, playing with his toy soldiers.

“Everything’s normal,” I replied.

“The postman came by today,” Sofia said. “This came for you.” She handed me a letter. She was suspiciously staring at me. “It’s from England.”

There was no sender name, but I recognized the clear, rounded handwriting. Darling wasn’t a complicated man and it was evident even in his handwriting. I had stored someplace safe all the notes and letters he had written me on occasions in London. I wanted to keep a calm composure, but my heart was violently beating in my ears.

“Is it from Auntie?” Sophia asked. She was ready to start an interrogation, but Theodoros saved me.

“I’m thirsty, Sofia, I want water.” He was standing in front of her with his arm raised, holding his plastic cup, and Sofia sighed, taking him to the sink.

“Eva,” Yiayia called. “Your mother and sister will come back soon. They’ve been baking bread all morning and are tired. Help me make sandwiches for everyone. It’s lunchtime.”

“OK, Yiayia.” I put the letter in my pocket. It could wait a few hours. Besides, I wasn’t ready yet to read it. Mama and Rosa had baked extra bread for us. I handed it over to Yiayia along with a knife. She pressed the round loaf against her chest and started slicing it.

“We’re making halloumi cheese and tomato sandwiches,” Yiayia told me and I grabbed from the fridge the butter and the two main ingredients.

“I want watermelon for dessert,” Sofia said.

“Watermelon,” Theodoros whispered, licking his lips, rubbing his belly.

When Mama and Rosa returned, they were deep in discussion.

“What’s wrong?” Yiayia asked Mama.

“The soldiers revealed that the Turks are violating the ceasefire and are occupying more villages,” Mama said, sitting down, and we all fell into an uncomfortable silence.

“Where’s papa?” Theodoros remembered he hadn’t seen Andreas in days and was searching for him again.

“Come here, sweetheart.” Rosa buried him in her arms. “Your father’s at work,” she lied to him. “Let’s go see how Mr. Brown is doing.” She took him in the garden to distract him with the rabbit. Rosa had got bigger on the outside and emptier on the inside. It pained me to see her suffering in silence.

“The Turks are far away from here,” Yiayia assured herself more than she did us. “We’re safe.” She sounded so sure. “Don’t worry.”

When Mama saw the scared look Sofia had on her face, she put aside her own fears, for the time being at least. What Rosa did with Theodoros, Mama did with Sofia; she tried to distract her with happier thoughts. She smiled at her youngest daughter, “I think we’re all hungry. Sofia, grab a knife. These sandwiches won’t make themselves.”

It’s a small world and we all keep running around in circles.

Late in the afternoon, Mama and Rosa were cooking dinner, Sofia was preoccupying Theodoros, and Yiayia was sitting on that same chair, watching everyone. It was a routine they followed every day. They loved routine, they were comfortable in it, and they’d be lost without it. Papa was at work, and if it wasn’t for the war, Andreas would be too.

“Is it OK if I lie down for a while?” I asked for permission.

“Yes, go,” Mama replied. “There are plenty of us in the kitchen as it is.”

In the bedroom, I closed the door, climbed on the bed and took the letter out of my pocket. The past is written in stone, and more often than not, it comes back to haunt you.

“Why did she close the door?” I heard Mama complain and I rolled my eyes.

“Let her be, Mama,” Rosa defended me.

In the envelope, there was a letter and a photograph of Darling with his bulldog, Winston. Staring at the photograph, I smiled. Darling was sitting on a stone wall with Winston at his feet. Under a cloudy sky, on what seemed to be a drizzly day, they were on a picturesque hill with a castle in the backdrop. Darling enjoyed exploring the countryside and he had pled with me multiple times to join him, but I had always told him I couldn’t. He was smiling at the camera, but his sad eyes betrayed him. Wondering who had taken the photograph, I unfolded his letter. He had torn a page from the handmade notebook I had given him as a gift and had written on it.

Winston and I went for a walk today. I wanted to clear my head and forget that you felt the need to flee the country, but I failed because the only thing

I could think about was sharing this moment with you. You broke my heart, Eva. I cried the minute I left you that dreadful day, I cried all day. And how dare you go away without saying goodbye? What did you actually want from me? You were beautiful, but you never talked much. Was I not interesting enough? Did I bore you? But you must know how to show how you feel. The disregard, with which you treat your emotions, and mine, is disconcerting. I miss you and I am miserable without you. Words can never tell you how much you mean to me. Come back, I forgive you, but please, come back.

Yours,
David Darling

I pressed his photograph and letter against my stomach, and wanted to scream at the top of my lungs. Without shame, I cried like a little girl that had lost her favourite toy, but with restraint, because my family hearing my sobs was the last thing I wanted. My throat burned in the effort to be quiet. I grabbed a pen and a piece of paper.

My Darling,

I'm pregnant, in the first trimester the doctor said.

I'm sorry I haven't told you sooner, but we parted on such unfortunate terms.

I'll find my way back to you as soon as I can, I promise.

Eva

I had spent hours contemplating what to write to him, but I ended up composing such a short, cold note. Words, words, words, they were pointless, and I had run out of them. I wish I could say I could have penned a different response, a more reassuring or heart-warming one, but I was taught, to the best of my ability, not to allow myself be overwhelmed with emotions. Weakness wasn't an option. I put the note in my purse, along with his letter and photograph, because if I dared leave them

on the bed, someone in the Adamou household was bound to stick their nose where it didn't belong.

Sofia barged in the bedroom without knocking. She was ready to scold me for something, but when she saw me, my bloodshot eyes and wet cheeks, she panicked.

“Did Papa tell you?” she asked.

“Did Papa tell me what?”

“Oh.”

What was she hiding? What were they all hiding?

“What do you want, Sofia?” I was abrupt.

“Mama is asking for you,” she said. “She has chores for you to do.”

“Of course she has. I'll come right away.”

In the garden, I hung the laundry on the rope with mechanical moves. It was dusk, but they'd dry overnight. The wet white clothes smelled of cleanliness, while I smelled of sweat.

Aunt Thea had a washing machine in her house and used washing powder and fabric softener. In the village, we did our laundry by hand in a big wooden barrel with hot water. Mama had washed a basket of white clothes, and at the moment, she was washing coloured ones. We didn't have softener so Mama and other women made their own. Mama gathered the ash from our earth oven and put it in the large ceramic pot we had in the backyard along with warm water. Once the ash sat at the bottom, she used that water to wash white clothes in order to make them softer. Some women even used that water in their pastry making.

After I was done with the chores, I told them I was going to the post office to send a letter to Clémence, my friend and former employer. I was lying of course because it was the note to Darling I wanted to send. Mama objected, but I ignored her and went anyway. By the time I came back, Papa had returned home from work. It was dinnertime.

After I had a bath, I felt clean and calm, but the night was warm, and my skin started sticking as soon as I stepped out of the bathroom.

In the living room, the bulky, black and white television was turned on, but no one was there to watch what was on. It was a Greek film, which had come out in

the cinemas a decade ago; it was comedy, drama, and romance. Yiayia had fallen asleep on her armchair, and even though all the windows were open, her cheeks had turned pink.

In the summer, ants and mosquitoes were everywhere.

All year round, Yiayia wore a variation of the same clothes; a black mantilla, a long black dress, and black shoes. Her husband, my grandfather, my Pappous, had died when my mother was a child and my grandmother had been wearing only black ever since. Dressing in black all summer long must have been torture, but she never complained, she felt obliged to honour his memory for evermore.

Everyone else was in the garden, sitting on wooden chairs with straw seats. Papa was smoking a cigarette, Mama was flipping through a magazine, Sofia had Theodoros on her lap and they were looking at a photo album together, and Rosa was eating a big piece of galaktoboureko, which she had made earlier; the custard crispy pastry with syrup was one of the more popular traditional Greek desserts. The clothes which were loose on Rosa before were tight on her now.

"I'm going to bed," I told them.

"Eva," Papa called. "Join us. Please."

He shot down my wish to spend the rest of the night alone in the bedroom. When I took a seat, Sofia watched Papa, waiting for something. Mama became uneasy, while Rosa continued shoving galaktoboureko down her throat. Theodoros, once again, was protected by his age and had no idea what was happening.

Papa smiled. "It's time to tell you something. It's been three weeks since you've returned home from England."

"What is it?"

"A while ago, I visited Petros, the headmaster of our village school, to ask if he can offer you a job," Papa told me what I already knew. "He's an old friend of mine. We've known each other for more years I can recall." I wished he'd stop sidetracking. "He asked me about you; when you're coming back, how old you are, what you look like as a young woman." My stomach churned, sensing what was coming. "His nephew, Glafcos, lives and works in a prestigious private school in Nicosia. He has a doctorate from an American university, Yala or Yale I think it's called. Petros told Glafcos about you and the young man wants to meet you as soon as you're willing to."

Yes, they wanted to marry me off and chain me to the island. "NO."

Papa laughed, dismissing my reaction. “I want a grandchild from you before I die.”

“Glafcos’s a good man,” Mama said, supporting Papa, and I looked at Rosa, seeking support from her.

Rosa, without speaking, took Theodoros, who was half asleep, and went to her bedroom. All that food she was stuffing herself with was her medicine for the pain she felt and the pain she saw around her.

“I’m going to bed,” I told them again.

“We’ll talk about Glafcos tomorrow,” I heard Papa tell Mama as I walked away.

I turned and turned in bed as if I was a spinning top until I gave up trying to fall back to sleep with an annoyed grunt. Sharp stomach pain forced me to curl up into a ball. The embryo enjoyed torturing me. I rocked myself, humming a nursery rhyme, wondering how the baby would look like as well as when Darling would get my note; it was how I tolerated the pain.

On one of the scarce sunny days, Darling and I went for a walk in Marylebone. The sun’s rays and warmth was for the English what rain was for Cypriots; a luxury they had only rarely and absorbed every minute of. Darling had a smile spread on his face, which was starting to turn pink from the heat, and faint perspiration on his forehead. I didn’t often agree on going for a stroll at such busy streets, but he promised it’d be only for a while. On an *Evening Standard* billboard, the title was written with big, bold letters: “Hunting Down IRA Bombers.”

Two mothers, who pushed along their toddlers in their strollers, stared at how he and I held hands before they stared at my face, and finally, his. Then, they turned to each other, and whispering, they walked on by. Darling understood my discomfort and squeezed my hand, reassuring me there was nothing to worry about.

Later on that day, in Clémence’s flat, I was naked on my stomach on the bed, flipping through the French translation of *Odyssey*. Clémence had an extra bedroom, which was packed with piles of books, and unlike the rest of the flat, its each corner was covered with furniture or other objects. I asked her once what the purpose of that bedroom was.

“I like to think, if my son was alive, he’d enjoy spending time there,” Clémence had replied. “Gaspard was a gentle boy. He had no place fighting in that war.” Clémence didn’t talk often about her dead son and husband, but whenever she did, it was evident she hadn’t healed. Oftentimes, I wondered whether Clémence had taken a liking to me because Gaspard used to favour Greek literature.

Darling returned from the bathroom. He climbed on the bed and kissed from my thigh to my ribs. He hadn’t put on his clothes yet either. We settled on our sides, facing each other.

“I look different.” I was touching the fair hair on his forearm. “I feel different. I speak the language, I learned the Londoners’ way of life, but I feel like an outsider.”

“What are you talking about? There are a lot of foreigners working and living here.”

He didn’t understand. When I was on the island, I thought I belonged elsewhere, but in London, I thought I belonged elsewhere, too. He saw I was lost in thought and took action.

“You’re a little darker,” his thumb circled my areola. “And you have a little more hair,” he traced his fingers from my stomach to my abdomen. “But you’re perfect to me.”

“What are you doing?” Sofia asked, and I hushed, opening my eyes. I hadn’t realized I had been humming louder than before or that she was also awake.

“Nothing.” I yawned. “What time is it?”

“It’s after midnight.” She said, “I wasn’t sleeping. I don’t sleep much at nights. I have all these thoughts running around in my head.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” In the dark, and through sleepy eyes, I tried to focus on her face. For a moment, she considered the offer.

“I don’t think you can help me. Where are you going?”

“In the kitchen, I’m thirsty.”

Sofia switched side on the bed, turning her back to me.

After I drank a glass of ice cold water, I went in the garden. It was dark all around, but it didn’t bother me at all. I needed the peace and quiet. As always, the crickets sang their soothing sounds. I sighed, hugged myself, and looked up at the night sky, which was as black as coal with limited stars dressing it.

“What are you doing out here? Why aren’t you in bed?” Mama came closer.

“I’m worried about all of you,” I admitted. “You, Yiayia, Papa, Sofia, Theodoros, Andreas ... And God knows how much pain Rosa is in. Life wasn’t supposed to be like this. We have no control over what’s coming next and that’s distressing. How can Papa expect me to care about a stranger in the midst of all of our problems?”

“Eva, listen to me,” Mama began. “Whatever happens, life goes on, and we must be strong. I never had the luxury to sit around and overthink. I was thirteen when my father died. I was the oldest of five children and I had to take care of all of them because my mother, your Yiayia, had to work in the fields all day long. On top of everything, your Yiayia forced me to go to school every day with a black dress, which covered me from head to toe, and with a black mantilla no less. I was a bony adolescent girl and I felt as if all that black was devouring me. She didn’t even allow me to go on school trips because I *had* to grieve my father and to be having even the slightest of fun would be a sin. I was called an orphan by all the children in school and all the villagers. But I picked myself up because there were no alternatives. I had my four younger siblings to look after. I had to feed them, bathe them, and help them with their homework.” She finished the same way she started. “Life goes on, Eva, and we must be strong to deal with it.”

Mama told the story of her life every time she wanted to give advice. Mama spent her whole life running after everyone because she believed it was her duty to do so. She wasted her life away on everyone else but herself.

“Mama ...” I cried and my voice broke. I wanted to tell her what I had inside me, what I had done, but I was horrified of how she’d react.

Mama hugged me. “Something’s eating you up inside, but you’re here with us now and we’ll handle it together. Do you really think I don’t know what you’ve been up to in London?” My blood ran cold. Mama continued confessing. “The very minute you were accepted to study there I made your Aunt Thea swear to me she’d keep a close eye on you that she wouldn’t let you stray. She told me all about the change in your behaviour recently.”

Auntie was always kind to me. She offered me food, a roof over my head, and sometimes, even money for four whole years and I’d be forever grateful to her. She did keep an eye on me, but truth be told, she had Andrea and Elena to look after. Auntie had to make sure their future had a decently looking, decently behaving Greek Cypriot husband with British nationality in it.

“I’m proud of you for ending it and coming back to us,” Mama said. “Whoever that Englishman was, whatever he promised you, you’ll forget and move on. If not Glafcos, you’ll find another good Greek Cypriot man soon.”

The following few days, Papa persisted that the educated man from Nicosia was a catch and I shouldn’t throw away such an opportunity, but because of the talk Mama and I had, she persuaded him to give me time to think about it.

When Aunt Thea called to announce that Elena was engaged, she came to my rescue. Auntie was thrilled that her youngest daughter had found a wealthy *Englezo-Kypraios*. We called those that were born and raised in England by Greek Cypriot parents English-Cypriots.

Auntie trusted me so she insisted I should return to London because they needed help with the engagement party and an extra pair of hands at the tavern. She invited the entire Adamou family, in an attempt to remove us from the island until things had calmed down, I was sure. My bighearted aunt was willing to offer her hospitality to everyone, if need be.

Papa refused to abandon his siblings and parents, while Mama refused to abandon her siblings and mother. Yiayia was unable to walk let alone travel.

“I’m not leaving,” Rosa kept repeating. “Andreas is somewhere out there, fighting, starving. When he returns, he’ll find me and his son right here.”

As for Sofia, she wanted to stay where Theodoros and Odysseas were, even though she didn’t admit the latter out loud.

In the end, it was decided I was leaving for London, as it’d be disrespectful if none of us went to Elena’s engagement party after everything Aunt Thea had done for us.

August was the month of intense heat and humidity.

On the 13th, I met with Dr. Nicholas and had my first ultrasound. I saw the baby, which was as small as a bean, and heard its strong heartbeat. When I told him I was leaving, he looked sceptical, but wished me the best of luck. On the 14th, I woke up at five, after a peaceful night’s sleep. Mama and Yiayia were already up, moving around the house, starting off their day with little chores, while everyone

else was still sleeping. In the silence of the morning, I fixed my hair with two bee bobby pins, put on my favourite floral dress and pair of brown sandals, and sat in the garden, waiting for the rest of my family to wake up.

At eight, I had to take the bus that'd take me to Limassol, where I'd board a boat and travel to Athens. From there, I'd fly to London. It'd be a three day trip, but I couldn't care less. It took a month for posts from the island to England and vice versa to reach their destination, which meant there was a possibility I'd reunite with Darling before he'd receive my note.

My old leather suitcase was set against the wall outside and was once again ready for departure; she was almost an old friend. Mama refused to let me go empty-handed and had given me to pack three handmade lace tablecloths. They were white thick linen with geometric patterns. Yiayia was a skilled embroideress and used to make them all the time in her prime. The three embroidered veils were a gift from the Adamou family to Elena for her engagement.

Something abnormal caught my eye in the sky. I stood up, and covering my forehead with my hand, protecting my eyes from the sun, I stared at the military aircraft in the distance. It was mockingly flying over Famagusta. The time was almost six, and as always in the Adamou household, a song was playing on the radio in the background. A minute later, the aircraft dived, dropping at least eight bombs all at once. They exploded as soon as they hit the ground, leaving behind masses of black smoke rising. The big bad wolf had come to claim the sacrificial lamb. Another aircraft and more bombs followed.

I dropped to my knees. "No," I whispered with my hands in my hair. "No, no, no!"

The villagers rushed into the streets. It took them only a moment to understand what was happening. Some were still in their nightwear. The bombs were their alarm clocks that morning. Children, adults, elderly, they all were horrified. Every few minutes, their cries, shouts, and yelps were interrupted by the whizzing and exploding of a new set of bombs in the nearby Famagusta. Papa and Mama had joined the rest of the villagers in the streets, while the rest of us were in the garden, watching the helpless, panicked people. They reminded me of distressed ants that were about to be stepped on by a big, heavy boot.

Yiayia was immobilized on a chair, as her hip was worse with each day which went by, and was lamenting. Rosa was holding Theodoros with one arm and

hugging Sofia with the other. Theodoros had his arms locked around his mother's neck and was observing everyone without uttering a sound. How sad it was he was starting to get used to seeing people in pain. Sofia was as pale as a ghost. She was sixteen, and instead of worrying about school and falling in love for the first time, she was forced to worry about all these other things. As for Rosa, there was no emotion on her face. Still sitting on the ground, surrounded by ants, I witnessed a tragedy unravel before my eyes. The tickets in my purse were useless, because man plans and God laughs.

RIK had gone quiet for a few hours, but at noon, a male broadcaster broke the silence.

"We're under attack. I repeat; we're under attack. At six o'clock this morning, Turkish troops advanced from Kyrenia to Famagusta with tanks, guns, and aircraft, capturing more of our land as they go along. Now, it's a quarter after one, and the Turkish are bombing Famagusta nonstop. Famagusta villages are being evacuated. People are running for their lives. The war is lost. Our Greek Cypriot forces are limited. Greece has refused to send help and the British have chosen the role of the bystander. We're on our own."

The Turkish soldiers were spreading on the island like cockroaches in the hot summer. The villagers were fleeing. We had to take action.

Papa slammed his hand on the table. "I shed blood, sweat and tears to build this house, this life for my family," he yelled. "Bloody Turks," he spat out with absolute resentment.

Mama was sitting on a chair with her face hidden in her hands, crying, while one of her sisters was shouting in repeat, "we have to go; we have to leave."

A dozen relatives had gathered in our house. They discussed safe passages out of Famagusta and agreed the best course of action was to head to the British sovereign base in Dhekelia, which was a few hours away by car, and where no Turk would dare go near.

"It's final," one of my uncles announced loudly. "In half an hour, you must all be ready. We're leaving, but we'll be back in our homes soon. I'm sure of it. We'll be back."

After all the relatives left, each rushing to their homes, Papa and Mama gave us strict orders to pack one bag each and only the necessary. Our car trunk didn't have much space. Yiayia, with her walking stick, went to get the family jewels, which were worth a fortune I was always told, while Papa went to gather all the money he had hidden around the house. Meanwhile, Mama was packing water, medicine, food, clothes, blankets, bed sheets, toiletries, and everything else useful she could think of.

In the bedroom, Sofia and I were trying to render down the items we needed to take with us. Sofia was standing still. I noticed how silent and pale she was, but I had my own crisis to deal with. How can someone put their whole life in a single, small bag, and in thirty minutes no less; actually, in twenty minutes because ten minutes had already flown by. In the morning, I almost got away, but by noon, I was running for my life. There was no time to think about or cry for what was lost, survival was the priority.

"Sister Beatrix will want her book back." Sofia finally caught my attention. "I need to return the book. If I don't, she'll think I'm a bad student." Sofia never cried, but she often drowned in fears, and at that moment, she was on the verge of having a panic attack.

Grey was leisurely lying on the bed, licking her paw in absolute apathy. I felt as if she was mocking us; you silly humans with your silly wars.

"Sofia ..." I called, carefully reaching out to her, but she slapped my hand.

"Sister Beatrix is in Famagusta." She was shouting. "What if a bomb got her? What if the Turks got her? What will happen to her? What will happen to me? She'd help me go to a good college. It's not fair." I hugged her. She was shaking. "It's not fair," she repeated.

"We'll get through it," I told her. "I promise."

"Stop wasting time." Rosa was standing at the bedroom door. "We're leaving in fifteen minutes."

Theodoros came in, sat on the floor, and placed a photo album on his lap. He was looking at the photographs again.

It was the moment of truth, and in the end, I packed three or four dresses, I wasn't counting, and underwear. No shoes, only the ones I was wearing, no nightwear, no books, no nothing.

When we left, Grey was still unaffected, but unaware we weren't coming back.

The trunk of our Morris was filled up with the boxes of things Mama had gathered in the short time she was given along with our individual bags. In the car, Papa was the driver and Mama was in the passenger seat. Rosa, Theodoros, Sofia and I were sitting in the back. Theodoros was on his mother's lap, and on his own, there was the photo album he didn't leave out of his sight lately. Andreas' photographs were more than enough for the little boy to keep the memory of his father alive. Sofia had folded blankets on her lap. I was holding snacks and Mama was holding water. It was ridiculous how much it looked as if we were going for a prolonged picnic. The rest of the food and water were in the trunk.

Sitting in the Morris, waiting to abandon all I had ever known, loved and hated, I looked at all the people in the streets. Stavros' house was the only one that was already locked and lifeless throughout the crisis. People were locking their houses because they truly thought they would return soon.

"Look at Anna." Sofia pointed at a passing by car. Anna was her classmate and best friend.

"I saw them leaving their house," Mama said grimly. "They're taking no supplies with them. They're leaving with nothing."

In that big, bulky car, there were eleven people. Anna's uncle was driving and her aunt was next to him, holding their newborn baby. The couple had two more children, who were in the front with them. In the back, Anna was sitting with her four siblings and her mother; her father had died years ago. Anna was working towards a scholarship in Sorbonne. She wanted to study French literature, but that summer morning, her future had been crashed and she was running with no food or money for her life. In that big, bulky car, there were eight helpless children under the ages of sixteen.

Once all my aunts and uncles gathered round with their cars, we were on our way. We drove away, not looking back, as it was less painful that way. The windows of the Morris were open and the scent of the sea soothed me momentarily. When we reached Famagusta, the Morris slowed down and we tensed up. The only way out was through the town.

It was late in the afternoon and bombs had stopped falling from the skies. The Turkish soldiers had called it a day. Driving through Famagusta, Papa, Mama

and I burst into tears, while Rosa and Sofia looked as numb as ever. Theodoros' eyes were widened, but he didn't understand what he was seeing. The town was no longer a piece of paradise. The Turks had turned it into a hellish wasteland. What they did to Smyrna back in 1922, they did to our Famagusta that day.

The town was beyond recognition and was almost abandoned. People were fleeing in their cars, in buses, trucks, with their bicycles or on foot. The hotels, cinemas, cafes, and all other sophisticated, modern buildings were half-destroyed and licked by flames. There were craters in the streets. Our fast-growing western influenced civilization was a threat to the Turks and they had to put a stop to it. I looked through tearful eyes at all the places that had marked my childhood and adolescent years. Everything was now ruined. Everything was now gone.

It was eight in the evening, when we reached Dhekelia, but we hadn't spoken a word all the way there. Mama's occasional sobbing was the only thing that broke the dead silence, but other than that, everyone was lost in their own heads.

Everything about Dhekelia reminded me of England. The roads were smooth and clean, while there were red tulips planted everywhere.

"Sophocles," Mama gasped, grabbing Papa's arm, and we all looked straight ahead. "They're English soldiers," Mama whispered as if they could hear her. "Your gun ... If they pull us over and find it ..."

"Give me the gun," Rosa said.

"What are you going to do?" Mama was panicking.

"Give me the damn gun," Rosa demanded, extending her arm, and when they did, she grabbed one of the blankets Sofia was holding, wrapping it around the weapon. She put that on her lap and sat Theodoros over it. "Sweetheart, let's play a game," she told her son. "Let's both close our eyes and dream about your father. Don't open your eyes until I tell you, OK?"

Theodoros nodded. He was missing Andreas too much to say no. We were unaware of Andreas' luck, and based on what had happened that day, we feared the worst. Theodoros hugged his mother and squeezed his eyes shut, thinking about happier days. When we were pulled over by the English soldiers, Papa rolled his window down, while all of us kept our mouths shut. One of the two soldiers looked

inside the car, suspiciously studying us one by one, while the other soldier walked around the Morris, checking it out.

“Papa,” Theodoros cried, squeezing his eyes harder and hugging Rosa tighter. The soldier stared at Theodoros. We were aware English soldiers wouldn’t bother a crying, sleeping child. The Turks, however, were a different story.

“Have a good night,” the English soldier finally said in his mother tongue, and driving away from them, we released a sigh of relief.

“My little hero,” Rosa kissed Theodoros’ hair. He opened his eyes, looking up at her.

“Did I win?” he asked. “Did I do well?”

“Yes, sweetheart, you did,” Rosa replied, returning the gun to Papa.

Papa stopped at the first field he found and so did all our relatives. It was an olive tree field and it was already crowded by other people that had fled their homes. Papa got out of the Morris, lit a cigarette and walked about, mingling with the people there, gathering information. Mama went to talk to her siblings and Yiayia. Rosa and Theodoros went for a walk to stretch their legs. Sofia, however, didn’t budge from where she sat, in the middle of the Morris’ backseat. Gently, and with a smile, I elbowed her.

“I don’t want to.” She shook her head, drowning in deep denial. “I don’t want to be in this situation. I don’t want to be part of this disaster of a war.”

“You’re not alone,” I told her. “We’re all in it together.”

Outside our car, people were crying, shouting. I was afraid Sofia would lose her mind if I didn’t do something. I closed all four doors, shutting out as much as possible the excruciating noises and voices of pain.

“Sofia, look at me,” I demanded. “Listen to me. We’re all in it together.”

“You cannot help me.”

“Yes, I can,” I insisted.

Sofia put her head on my lap, curling up on the narrow seat, taking deep breaths, and I caressed her hair in an attempt to calm her down. For the time being, we ignored what was going on outside the fragile steel box we were hiding in.

It was almost midnight. I was outside, leaning against the Morris, staring at the stars, while everyone else were sitting inside, half-asleep and not talking.

“Karamanlis is giving a speech,” a stranger shouted, interrupting the silence in the field.

Immediately, Papa and a lot of other people turned on their radios.

“*War announcement,*” the RIK broadcaster said. “*The Greek Prime Minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis, is giving a speech.*” A few moments later, Karamanlis voice came on; RIK was transmitting from Greece. “*The war is lost,*” he said. “*Turkey has advanced too much and Greece is too far away to help. We have been defeated.*” His speech was over. Everyone in the olive tree field broke down in tears, but I snorted, having the unnerving urge to laugh. What a marvellous mess Greece had made before cowardly retreating into their poverty.

When I was in the university in London, in one of the lectures I attended, the professor talked about the five stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. With all the wailing in the background, I thought about them in relation to the Turks’ second invasion on the 14th of August 1974. In the beginning of the day, people refused to believe they were being attacked by the Turkish yet again; they were in denial. Then, came anger, but it was another useless emotion; they had no power over what was going on. The island was being invaded and violated by monsters driven by power and pride. “The Turks are coming,” people were shouting. “The Turks are coming and they have tanks and guns and bombs.” After they fled Famagusta, they sought safety in bargaining; “the Greeks will help us, our brothers and sisters in Greece will help us, they have to.” Once Karamanlis gave his speech that night, depression hit all of them like a wrecking ball; young and old were crying like infants in the hot summer night. When would acceptance come? When would resurrection come? When?

The days and nights we spent in Dhekelia were difficult, bad. We, the refugees, had camped out in the carob and olive tree fields. From one moment to the next, we were forced to go on living without a roof over our heads, without sanitation, without personal space. We spent our hours on the dirt, under the trees, seeking shelter from the sun; our sweat stench was unbearable. When we slept, ants climbed on us, biting on our skin, and mosquitoes sucked our blood, marking us with bright

pink pimples, while at all times, we were on the lookout for rats and snakes. We were vulnerable to hundreds of diseases out of which dysentery was the most common. On top of everything, water and food were scarce. The Turks had overthrown us, we were respectable people, leading respectable lives, but they had humiliated us.

English soldiers walked among the tents they had given us with their rifles over their shoulders, keeping an eye on us. Both the English and the Turks ignored the fact that they were the trespassers on our land, for years selling our island back and forth between each other. Nonetheless, once a day, the English soldiers had orders to hand out to all the people in the fields a small bowl of eggplant soup, and to the children, milk and biscuits.

When we discovered a well in the fields, we were thrilled. We could have as much cool, clean drinking water as we wanted. The government of the island provided a loaf of bread to each family once a day and promised to build temporary toilets and showers in the fields soon.

We were adaptable and accepted the new life that was thrown at us.

Some refugees were offered hospitality by Greek Cypriots that had a room to spare. They had selflessly opened their homes to grief-stricken strangers, taking them in and showing their good heart. Meanwhile, in the fields, once there were no more tears to shed, people paused their mourning and started taking part in everyday activities. Everyone was helping everyone, and for the time being, that was more than enough. We took one day at a time.

During the day, the women and children stayed in the fields. They washed their families' clothes in a lake and hung them to dry on ropes they had tied between the trees. The children played tag or hide and seek close to their families' tents. The men were at coffeehouses, discussing politics, the invasion, their refugee state and things that couldn't be changed. People were already looking for jobs. We were eager to stand tall, get through the misery and misfortune, and stand back on our feet.

Countries from all over the world sent boxes with supplies; blankets, clothes, food. Some even sent toys for the children. The boxes were put in a pile in the middle of the fields, where the refugees searched them. At first, I refused to scavenge them, I refused to feel as if I was an animal, but soon enough, I had no choice but to swallow my pride and do it too. I searched for long periods of time,

but to no avail. I had no luck finding food or anything else useful. The refugees had emptied almost entirely all the boxes and were waiting for the arrival of new ones.

During that first week, I wandered through the fields like a zombie; sorrow, the sun and hunger were taking their toll on me. I needed to find food for myself and my family because a small portion of eggplant soup and a slice of bread a day were hardly enough to keep anyone of us going. I was starving and the baby inside me was starving too. I thought I heard its heartbeat in my head day and night; thud-thud, thud-thud, thud-thud ...

On the eighth day, we found a half built-house a mile away from the fields. It had walls and a roof, but there were no doors or windows. Its owners must have fled, leaving their unfinished house behind. We took shelter in it; our family and a few of our relatives. In that hollow house, twenty people kept coming and going. It protected us from the sun at noon and the snakes on the trees. Surprisingly, most of our relatives chose to stay in the fields in order to be close to the other refugees. The house was on a little hill, which was blanketed by yellow wildflowers, and it was overlooking the beach. If its owners had the chance to finish it, it'd be a beautiful house, but life had other plans for all of us. Each day, we took turns and went back to the fields to bring the loaf of bread and water from the well.

On the thirteenth day, we received a surprise. While Papa was in a coffeehouse with his male relatives, the rest of us were at the house, which was beginning to grow on us. With us, there were my two aunts, Mama's sisters, and one of my aunt's twin daughters. The girls were ten years old and as different as day and night. One was tall, lean and dark, while the other was shorter, chubbier and with blonde curls, yet they were twins. Marina and Joanna were playing with Theodoros, keeping each other preoccupied. They had found a fat brown rabbit, which must have escaped from its owners. Theodoros was ecstatic and kept calling it Mr. Brown. We were starving, but decided to spare its life for one more day. The original Mr. Brown must have been a hearty meal for some Turkish soldier.

Sofia was sitting on the front steps. She was leaning forward, clutching her belly, rocking herself; she had period pain. Ever since we reached Dhekelia, Sofia stopped speaking altogether. Her whole world had crumpled all around her, and in her mind, her future was foggy. What was more, word in the fields was that Anna and her family were taken in by a relative in a coastal city on the other side of the

island. People kept tabs on each other. Sofia feared she'd never see her best friend again.

Rosa was boiling water in a copper coffee pot over a small fire. Once it was steaming, she poured it into a plastic cup, added a small spoonful of honey and stirred. A kind, old lady, who lived nearby, had given us a jar of her homemade honey; it was thick and golden with an intense taste. Oftentimes, she offered us food. Rosa handed the warm water with the honey to Sofia, who took it without thanking her. She blew on it and started sipping. My aunts were folding the blankets and sheets we slept on at nights, while Mama was sweeping the floor with an old broom we had found in the house. Sofia's little orange transistor was turned on and was playing American music. I was sitting on the stairs with my little sister. I was silent, we all were. Some days, we found no point in talking. My parents and their families, from a young age, were taught to take a beating without uttering a word of complaint.

The stomach aches had stopped, but my belly and breasts had grown bigger. I had found in the pile of boxes a large, black dress, and I wore it daily. It hid my changing body and didn't attract attention to me. I was lucky I had found it, but I had to argue with a middle-aged woman in order to have it. When she spotted a pair of plastic slippers, she rushed to grab them, and I disappeared before she realized it.

The paleness of my skin was in contrast to the blackness of it, but I refused to wear the only three dresses I had brought from Famagusta. I was saving them for better days. Besides, they wouldn't fit me anymore, their zippers wouldn't go up. When I wanted to wash the black one I was wearing day and night, because there was only so much dirt, sweat and tears it could absorb before smelling like a rotten egg, I had to borrow some clothes from Rosa, who was always a few pounds heavier than me. Oftentimes, I caught Rosa eyeing me with suspicion. She had sniffed my secret and was trying to see through that dreadful dress I was always wearing.

Since we fled Famagusta, I hadn't seen my reflection in a mirror and it distressed me. My body, face and hair were covered with layers of sweat and dirt; I felt disgusting, defeated. A couple of times, I bathed in the sea, which was refreshing, but once I was dry, the sea salt on my skin was barely bearable under the heat of the sun. One night, I dreamt I had sunk my fingernails into my face and had peeled my skin off in order to feel the remotest of coolness.

I thought about visiting the English hospital in Dhekelia and ask them for help. Maybe if I explained my circumstances, they wouldn't see me as another dirty, lost refugee. Maybe if I told them I had studied in London and was in a relationship with one of their own, they wouldn't see me as one and the same as all other Greek Cypriots. I was taunted by the thought I was one with the crowd. Maybe they'd even help me contact Darling, but maybe I was getting ahead of myself. I avoided being alone with my thoughts for prolonged periods of time because that invited depression and paranoia. I went on long walks in order to not spend every waking hour wondering if Darling had heard the news about Cyprus, if he cared, if he had received my note, if he'd ever receive it and if that'd make any difference at all. I had to keep my sanity intact. I scavenged the fields and the beach, observing others.

"PAPA," Theodoros screamed, startling all of us. Andreas and Odysseas were climbing the little hill in the slowest pace. Odysseas' leg was still in the cast so he still used crutches, while Andreas looked as if every ounce of his physical strength had diminished. The extra kilos Rosa had gained, Andreas had lost. The shirt he was wearing wasn't buttoned up and we saw his ribs sticking out. The worn out trousers he had on weren't even his size.

In order for the Greek Cypriot soldiers to walk on Dhekelia grounds, they had to change out of their army uniforms and into civilian clothes. Otherwise, the English soldiers didn't let them pass. That shirt and pair of trousers must have been the first pieces of clothing Andreas got his hands on. He was dirty, exhausted, and there were black circles beneath his bloodshot eyes. He was a shadow of his former self.

Theodoros ran to his father. Andreas dropped to his knees, allowing Theodoros to wrap his little arms around his neck. When Rosa saw Andreas, she dropped the coffee pot, and finally, she woke up inside. She, too, ran to him, joining her husband and son. She kneeled and the young couple kissed, while tears streamed down their cheeks, cleaning their faces.

"My love," Andreas caressed her hair.

"I thought I'd never see you again," Rosa cried, confessing. "I thought you were one of our thousand missing people."

A lot of us survived the invasion by fleeing to safer grounds, while a lot suffered in the hands of the Turks before they joined us, but a devastating amount went missing. The Turks didn't hesitate, murdering men, women, and children,

young and old, entire families. They vandalized churches and graveyards. They destroyed everything Greek, everything Christian.

“I told you I’d come back to you,” Andreas replied. “I promised.”

We all went closer to them, except for Sofia. She stayed where she was.

“I found him roaming the fields,” Odysseas said.

“You didn’t have to come with me all the way here, my brother.” Andreas patted Odysseas on the shoulder. “A few directions would have done the job.”

“I wanted to help you, my friend,” Odysseas replied with a grin and a wink.

That was how Greek men addressed each other; my brother, my friend.

We helped them walk the last few feet to the house.

“It’s time for that fat rabbit to fulfil its purpose on earth,” Mama whispered to me, as she didn’t want Theodoros to hear. “We’ll eat roasted rabbit today.”

When Theodoros wasn’t looking, Mama grabbed the rabbit and broke its neck. The next steps were to skin it, gut it, shove a wooden stick through it and roast it over the fire.

“Tell me everything,” Rosa pleaded.

“Not now, my love.” Andreas gently turned her down. “Not today, not tomorrow, not sometime soon, but maybe someday in the future ...”

Rosa was disappointed, but respected his wish.

A number of Greek Cypriot soldiers, who were captured by the Turks, were sent into mainland Turkey, where they were thrown into Turkish prisons. Some of them were set free and shipped back to the island, but some others were never heard from again.

We all noticed the cuts and bruises Andreas had all over him, and even if everyone tried to persuade him to reveal what had happened to him, Andreas kept his mouth shut. My mind went wild with images of him being tortured by the Turks. I pictured my brave brother-in-law staring Death in the eye and telling him to go to hell because he had a wife and a son to return to.

Fifty years later, Andreas took to the grave what he went through when he was away in the army.

It was my turn to go to the olive tree field for water and other supplies. Sofia had come along, but she was as silent as ever. We never travelled alone, we travelled in

pairs. We had one glass jug and one plastic jug, and after we filled them both with water from the well, we were ready to return to the house on the hill.

Walking through the field, we saw that things had calmed down. People were grieving, but they were coping. Wandering among the tents, we saw and heard things we shouldn't have. In one of the tents, a young mother was sitting on the ground with her legs crossed, breastfeeding her newborn, and next to her there were two black and white photographs. One was of her wedding day and the other was the portrait of her husband. The young woman was with her parents and chances were her husband was one of the missing.

In another tent, a middle-aged man was sitting on a small stool, grunting and pulling his hair. His wife was standing behind him, consoling him as best as she could.

"She's not pure anymore," the man scorned, pointing his trembling forefinger at his daughter, and continued complaining, "Who will want to marry her now? Nobody will want her. She's impure, useless. She brings shame to my family."

When Sofia and I walked by, his wife glared at us because we were overhearing their conversation.

"The Turks forced our daughter," the woman tried to reason with her husband. "They raped her. It's not her fault. We can send her abroad to live with my cousin in Thessaloniki or with my other cousin in Fulham." She had pronounced the "h".

Their daughter, who didn't look more than fifteen years old, reminded me of a porcelain doll. She was beautiful, expressionless, and empty on the inside. She was motionless and her gaze was unsettlingly blank. Her soul had been ripped out by monsters. The porcelain doll had cigarette burns and bite marks all over her arms and I was sure she had a lot more underneath her clothes. She must have put up a fight, and for some reason, I was proud of her. When I noticed the strangulation bruises on her neck, I felt even more infuriated. The Turks must have tried to suffocate her.

Accounts of abused females were flooding the fields. The Turkish soldiers had raped thousands of Greek Cypriot females; teenagers, young women, more mature women, even elderly ladies. They raped as many as they could get their hands on; especially, the younger ones. They were desperate to show their

dominance in all ways possible. They brutally and repeatedly raped their victims in front of their families or in public. In some villages, they created brothels, forcing them into prostitution. On occasions, the Turkish soldiers marked the inside of their victims' thighs with a branding iron, which had the shape of a crescent moon.

Later that year, in 1974, abortions skyrocketed as a lot of the sexually abused women were pregnant. The ones that decided to give birth gave the babies up for adoption as soon as they were out of their womb and into the world. Not only did the victims have to deal with the traumatic experience they had gone through, but also, with the narrow-minded society of the island.

"What if she's pregnant?" the father of the porcelain doll yelled. "She'll give birth to a bastard, to a Turk, and I don't know which is worse."

I touched my tummy, realizing how lucky I was the baby I was carrying was a creation of mutual affection and desire.

In a third tent, three women were having a cup of black, bitter coffee, discussing the young woman with the newborn and the missing husband, the teenage girl, who was raped by Turks, and other tragic stories of the people there. Cypriot, Greek and Turkish coffee was one and the same.

"The Turks raped every girl and woman they found," one of the three women said and the other two sipped their coffees loudly. "Have you heard what happened to the Agapiou sisters? The Turks raped all three of them, but because the youngest struggled more than it was arousing to them, more than they enjoyed, they killed her. They shoved their rifle into her stomach and shot her."

One day, while I was wandering through the fields again, I overheard a young man bragging to a group of other young men about how he and nine other Greek Cypriot soldiers had raped a Turkish Cypriot woman a month ago. He said she grew up in London with her parents, but had come in Cyprus in July to visit her grandparents. He never missed a chance to point out how beautiful and different she was and how the ten soldiers took turns in having their way with her in the barn they had dragged her by the hair into. They saw it as an act of retaliation. I wanted to spit in his face and tell him to go to hell. The unfortunate woman had found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time, but she was one out of so many.

Under an olive tree, Odysseas was resting in its shade. He was among a few friends. The five boys were dreaming about the future, while eating tomatoes, olives

and bread. Once Odysseas spotted us, the biggest, brightest smile spread across his face. Struggling, he stood up, but I nudged Sofia, and we met him halfway.

“Good news travel fast,” Odysseas smirked.

“Bad news travel even faster,” I replied.

“When are you leaving?” he asked. Sofia and I frowned, looking at each other.

“What do you mean?”

“Your father told a few men at the coffeehouse that you’re all leaving soon for one of the coastal cities in the west,” Odysseas told us. His blue eyes were glistening in the sun.

“When did he say that?” I questioned with wide eyes.

“A few hours ago, in the morning,” he replied. At the time, it was noon.

“We should head back to the house,” I told Sofia.

“I think you should,” Odysseas agreed; then, he shrugged. “Who knows, maybe we’ll meet again someday.”

I smiled at him, while Sofia was looking away, not uttering a word. Sofia and I hurried back to our family. The Morris was parked by the house, but it hadn’t been used in days. It had run out of gasoline and Papa was saving the little money we had for things of the utmost importance.

“Finally,” Mama said, seeing us coming. “Gather your things. We’re leaving.”

“I filled the tank,” Papa said, patting the Morris’ roof. “It’s a four hour drive, but we’ll make it.”

“One of my uncles found us a house.” Mama had tears falling from her eyes. “It’s over. We’re never going back to Famagusta, to our village.”

“We’ll return one day,” Papa stubbornly said. The two of them argued for a few more minutes, while the rest of us were getting ready for the journey.

Autumn 1974

Accept and Adapt

The morning after we reached the coastal city, Limassol, where the new house was, I went to the bathroom. Sitting down on the clean toilet seat, I appreciated the basic facilities we often took for granted. I hadn't used an actual toilet in weeks.

While I was urinating, sharp pain shot through my belly and I covered my mouth with my hand to smother the unexpected cry that wanted to escape my lips. Feeling as if someone had stabbed me right through the backbone, I stood up, but when I saw my tiny, curled up baby swimming in blood, mucus and urine, I dropped to my knees, staining the floor with my sticky, smelly blood. Before I had time to fully grasp and digest what I was seeing, I heard voices outside the bathroom, and as there was no lock on the door, I impulsively flushed the toilet, shouting, "It's occupied!" In seconds, I realized what I had done and began laughing and crying as if I was a madwoman; I had flushed my baby.

Brutally bleeding between my legs, I cleaned the mess I had made, and afterwards, shamelessly, and for hours on end, I bawled my eyes out in the corner of the bathroom floor. My family had no idea what had triggered my streaming tears, but I wasn't willing to share my secret. They tried to calm me down, but I pushed them all away. I cried to the point I thought I couldn't breathe. Dr. Nicholas had warned me that the first three months were crucial and how I should be careful, but the last few weeks, I suffered hunger, unhygienic conditions, and unlimited sorrow.

It was gone.

I had nothing left from him.

It was gone.

And I had flushed it down the toilet.

All the dresses I had sewed, all the beads and jewels Clémence had given me as gifts, all my favourite books, were in the village in Famagusta. I had lost all that

had ever mattered to me. And all I was left with were nothing more than memories, which would fade away.

Rosa stepped in. She came in and sat down next to me on the floor. She put her arms around me, pulling me towards her. I resisted, but soon subdued, placing my head on her lap.

“Oh, Eva, what have you done?” Rosa sighed, stroking my hair. “Do you really think I hadn’t noticed?” I didn’t speak. I didn’t care. I had lost my baby. My useless body didn’t keep it safe, didn’t keep it inside. “Oh, Eva,” she sighed again before she stood up, forcing me to my feet.

Rosa took me to Limassol Hospital, where we waited for hours before an apathetic, middle-aged doctor examined me. He told me I was physically well, that it was something plenty of women experience, and that my body needed time to recover. Finally, he gave me a packet of pills and sent me on my way.

When we returned to the new house, Rosa put me to bed. I had run out of tears and my head was throbbing.

“When you’re ready, we can talk about it,” she whispered before letting me sleep.

In the background, I heard her say to the rest of the family that it was a panic attack; nothing I couldn’t overcome. My emotional, romantic sister had toughened up; all around me, everyone and everything were changing.

Our days in Limassol were drastic and I didn’t have much time to grieve what was lost, but at nights, my neglected memories took their revenge. I had nightmares out of which I woke up crying, believing blood had stained the sheet beneath my hips. Once I’d make sure I wasn’t bleeding, I’d go back to sleep, each time a little more easily than the last.

In a house with two bedrooms, one living room and one bathroom, thirteen people coexisted. Papa, Mama and Yiayia had taken one bedroom, while my two aunts, my twin cousins and their father had taken the other. Andreas, Rosa, Theodoros, Sofia and I slept in the living room. No one was uttering a word of complaint because we had running water, mattresses and electricity again. We were positive we’d have hot meals on our plates soon too.

When we took Yiayia to the hospital, the doctors and nurses didn't cooperate with us. Blatantly, they said there was nothing they could do. Her hip hadn't only got worse, but there was a great chance of an eventual deterioration. They just gave her plain painkillers.

The sad situation we were all in had taken a serious toll on Papa. He had almost given up. He had become a helpless old man, while he sought support from Mama all the time. His wrinkles and white hair were more visible than before, while he was starting to slightly slouch. A few years ago, he was on top of the world. He had climbed out of the poverty of his childhood, he had worked hard to earn money, buy a car, build a house, and he had a family he provided for and protected. Now, he was struggling to survive.

Soon, Papa and Andreas found a job in an industrial factory, Mama began working as a florist in a small shop, and I became a teacher assistant in St Mary's, an all girls' school. Rosa stayed in the house, taking care of the cooking, the housekeeping, and of course, Theodoros. Soon, Rosa was pregnant and happy again. Everything she and Andreas went through throughout the years made their marriage, their relationship, grow stronger.

When Sofia finally broke her silence, we were all relieved, but it backfired, because she refused to return to school. She had one more year left to finish high school, but she didn't care. Papa, Mama and Sofia yelled at each other for days on end, while Rosa and I gave her the best advices we had to offer, but she wouldn't hear of it. Eventually, Papa gave his youngest daughter a warning.

"You *will* go back to school, you *will* receive your high school diploma, and afterwards, you *will* find a good man to marry or a job or both," Papa told Sofia. "No daughter of mine will stay uneducated. Do you understand? Respect the name we gave you. How can a girl called wisdom not have the knowledge she deserves?"

"I understand your scholarship was taken away from you because of everything that has happened, but life goes on, my darling," Mama told her. "Your father and I didn't have the same opportunities as you, and that's why we insist on the importance of education. I promise we'll do everything in our power for you to fulfil your dreams."

Finally, Sofia caved in, believing the words of our parents. In the end, my little sister didn't follow in my footsteps by studying abroad. I thought that was for the best even though I never voiced this opinion. I wasn't a good example and Sofia

had looked up to me for too long. In the end, my little sister found happiness in other things.

Limassol was far away from Famagusta and its people didn't completely comprehend the hell the refugees had gone through and were going through. The Limassolians were unwelcoming and unfriendly. Oftentimes, when we walked down the street, people pointed at us, glaring, whispering. Oftentimes, mothers warned their children, "eat your food or the refugees will eat it." One of our neighbours, every other morning, yelled at us from her balcony that we shouldn't have gone to Limassol that we shouldn't have left Famagusta.

The irony of it all was that they were extremely underdeveloped. We used to live a ten minute drive away from paradise, while most of Limassol was uninhabited. They only had one or two hotels, which was funny to us. There were a few very old buildings and a few unfinished ones, while the rest was dry, empty land with a few thirsty trees here and there. We had to compromise with that and start over.

The things at the school I worked at and Sofia was attending weren't better either. We encountered the same bad behaviour everywhere we went. There were only eight refugee girls against a hundred girls that were already there. The students refused to be friends with the refugees. They felt privileged and superior because tragedy hadn't knocked on their doors. They stayed away from them, refusing to be friendly or helpful or even polite. In the classroom, when a refugee girl made a mistake all the others laughed, while when one of their own made a mistake they let it go. The fact the refugee girls were more advanced, more educated than them, made them even crueller.

I was an assistant to one of their teachers, who had half the years of education I had, but also, who was the headmistress' niece. Yes, I was angry, but my family needed the money, and so, I bowed my head, keeping my mouth shut. The teachers favoured their spoiled students and didn't bother hiding it. Instead, they showed it daily. Only the nuns were indifferent because their mission was to educate. They didn't bother with the pettiness of the girls and teachers. I tried to protect Sofia and the seven other refugee girls, but there was only so much I had the power to do.

All the teachers and girls wore clean clothes, had combed hair, and smelled of soap and perfume, while we wore the worn hand-me-downs we were given out of charity, out of pity. And we were starving, always. Hunger was our new best friend; it embraced us like a leech every hour of the day, not letting go, sucking our energy out little by little. My stomach often gurgled in the classroom, embarrassing me.

Early in September, Sister Beatrix joined the school and the eight refugee girls, who were her former students, were the happiest they had been in weeks. Sister Beatrix became their saviour. She took them under her wings. She told us her story, how she barely escaped the Turks' bombs, how all the streets were spilling over with people that were running for their lives, how it looked very much like hell on earth.

Early in September, it was Theodoros' birthday. The little boy had turned five years old, but we had no money to spare to buy ingredients and bake him a birthday cake or to buy him a gift. Theodoros was too young to remember the day of his birth, and so, we let him forget. We were ashamed, but we hoped we'd make it up to him someday soon.

St. Mary's, or Nuns, as the Limassolians called the school, was the equivalent of St. Francis in Famagusta. The school was a sturdy, imposing building, and even if outside the sun was burning bright, it was constantly cold inside. Big wooden crosses as well as white marble statues of Virgin Mary and of Christ were everywhere.

I was a teacher assistant in one of the senior classes. There were thirty-two students in the classroom, out of which one was Sofia and another refugee girl called Giovanna. The Limassolian students permanently provoked them, but their teacher, Mrs. Michaela, let it pass, turning a blind eye.

Whenever I was in charge of the lesson, Mrs. Michaela sat at her desk, flipping through magazines, while she interrupted me frequently in order to let me know the way I was teaching wasn't the same as the way she was teaching. As for the Limassolian students, they were indifferent towards me. I wasn't worth their attention.

“I’ll be back in ten minutes,” Mrs. Michaela told me and the girls one morning in October. “I need to talk to the headmistress.” Everyone knew that was a lie. She often left in the middle of the lesson because she wanted to have a cup of coffee and a pastry.

Both in St Francis and St Mary’s, geography and history were taught in French. With my back to the students, I wrote with white chalk on the green board about the October Revolution. Clémence had a replica of a Fabergé Egg in her beads and jewels shop. She had said it was a gift from a friend. I wondered what a real Imperial Egg looked like, but Clémence had informed me they cost a fortune.

Our island was often a destination for rich Russians, who wanted to do business with the locals.

“Psst...”

I looked over my shoulder at the students in order to spot the troublemaker.

“When was the last time you two ate?” one of the Limassolian girls, named Maria, asked Sofia and Giovanna with as much cruelty as she could master, disregarding me entirely. I put the chalk down, turning round, but Maria wasn’t disconcerted in the slightest. “Did you have breakfast, or dinner last night, or lunch yesterday?” Some students sneered. Giovanna started crying, while Sofia glared.

“Stop it,” I warned, putting my hands behind my back to hide my clenched fists. The truth was that the last time we had something to eat was the night before. We had a bowl of the simplest vegetable soup with a paximathi each. The piece of hard bread softened in the broth and we ate as slowly as possible to make the meal last longer.

Maria seemed amused I had scolded her. She sat up straight and kept pushing.

“My father calls all refugees cowards.” She addressed me directly, making my blood boil. “My father says that if he was in Famagusta, he’d have stayed to fight.”

Having had more than enough, and not caring about the consequences, I charged towards the spoiled girl and smacked her across the face as hard as I thought she deserved. Shock and horror distorted her dark features, while the rest of the girls stared with their mouths and eyes wide open.

“What do you think you’re doing!?” Mrs. Michaela shrilled from the door.

On a happier note, Sofia and Giovanna looked at me as if I was some sort of a super heroine.

As soon as Sister Beatrix was informed by Sofia and Giovanna of what had happened, she rushed to the headmistress' office, where Headmistress Kaety, Mrs. Michaela, Maria, and I were. Sister Beatrix barged into the office, and out of breath, she fixed the strands of silver and blonde hair that had escaped from underneath her veil.

In St Francis, we used to bet on what colour our nuns' hair was. The winner received chewing gum from the rest of us. My dear Artemis, who I had lost complete contact with, was right; Sister Beatrix's hair was blonde after all.

"I'm afraid I'll have to dismiss you, Eva," Headmistress Kaety said, while Mrs. Michaela and Maria looked smug and satisfied. Mrs. Michaela was the headmistress' niece, while Maria's father was a wealthy Limassol lawyer, and unfortunately, my word against theirs meant nothing. The teacher had dramatically exaggerated what she had seen and the student had hidden the truth about what had happened, but I stood in silence, listening to their lies in apathy. I didn't have the power to react. Yiayia's relatives in Limassol owned a factory and they were in search for a secretary. I'd just go there.

"Nonsense," Sister Beatrix intervened. "From the beginning, Maria has been rude to all refugee students. She must be taught tolerance and acceptance."

"But her father ..." Headmistress Kaety began, but Sister Beatrix interrupted her.

"Her father will want his daughter to have the best behaviour and education, I'm sure."

Sister Beatrix was a respected nun and teacher, who had been living on the island for decades, and the headmistress was aware it'd be a mistake crossing her. Finally, to the displeasure of Mrs. Michaela and Maria, the headmistress asked me to return to my post.

"But she hit me!" Maria cried.

"Our Lord told us to turn the other cheek and forgive," Sister Beatrix said, leaving them speechless, leading me out of the office. After I thanked her, she assured me, "Don't worry, my dear, I'll deal with the lot of them."

After that incident and to avoid further conflict, the school created a separate class, where they placed all the refugee girls, and which they called “Special Treatment.” Under the supervision of Sister Beatrix, I was their teacher.

Early in October, Yiayia died. She suffered a heart attack and we all thought we had reached our breaking point. She had gone to sleep, forever. Her soul had flown away to better, happier places, while her body had been buried far away from home. But life goes on and we had to be positive that when we’d gather more money things would be better.

Across the street from where we stayed lived a woman with her two daughters. One was eighteen and the other was twenty-two. The youngest was a typical Greek Cypriot girl in appearance, while the oldest was an elegant young woman with playful eyes. The youngest was Aphrodite, the oldest was Rubini. One day, Rubini invited me to their house.

Papa, Mama, Andreas, my two aunts and uncle were at work, while the pregnant Rosa, Theodoros, Sofia, Marina and Joanna were at the house. I had gone to the supermarket to buy bread and milk, and in my return, Rubini reached out to me.

“Your name is Eva, right?” She was standing at her open bedroom window. When I nodded, she added, “It suits you.” I thanked her and was on my way, but she stopped me. “I’m Rubini,” she introduced herself. “You can call me Ruby. My friends call me Ruby.” Again, I nodded. I was tired from work and wanted to return to the house. “Keep me company,” she pleaded. “My mother and sister are out shopping and I hate it when I’m alone. It’s a dull afternoon.”

“I should go to my family.”

“Please, Eva,” she said. “I’m in a dilemma and I have nobody to talk to.” In the end, I accepted her invitation and she ran to let me in. “Leave your grocery at the floor by the front door,” she instructed, and I did what I was told, while looking at the inside of the house in awe. Their living room looked like a palace. There was a gold mirror over their lit fireplace and a gold clock on its mantelpiece along with family photographs. Their wallpaper was purple.

“Mama gave me permission to decorate the living room,” Ruby informed me. “That was a gift from my boyfriend.” She pointed at a porcelain statue of a half-naked girl, sitting on a rock and playing the harp. “He told me it reminded him of me and he had to buy it for me.” Ruby was in a relationship with a rich, older man, and the whole neighbourhood was gossiping about it; some said he was married. “Come, follow me,” Ruby urged me. “How old are you?” In the hollow hallway, I was facing her back.

“Almost twenty-two,” I replied, and she looked over her shoulder at me, smiling.

“That’s what I thought,” she said. “I’m twenty-two too.”

I didn’t reply. I didn’t have something to say.

Her bedroom was as royally decorated as the rest of the house. She told me to sit on her dressing table stool. Its seat was red velvet and its three legs were carved wood.

“My father was an antique merchant,” Ruby explained, adding with a wink, “He borrowed a few things, which he never returned. He used to earn a lot of money.”

“Where is your father now?” We stayed in that neighbourhood for almost three months, it was the beginning of November, and we never once saw him coming or going. And I noticed the photographs were only of Aphrodite, Rubini and their mother.

“My father left us a year ago for a woman my age. Dogs are loyal, men aren’t. They love options.” When she said that, Ruby was calm, cold. She was standing behind me with her hands on my shoulders. In the mirror, we were looking at each other. “You have a beautiful face. If you let me apply makeup on you, you’d look like a doll.” I smiled; the kind of people I always attracted. “I think about you and your family a lot;” she was melancholic. “I think about what if I was in your shoes. I might have died. You’re so strong.”

“What was your dilemma?” I asked, distracting her. She walked to her wardrobe, took out two dresses and lay them down on her bed.

“I have a date with my boyfriend tonight. Which one do you think I should wear?”

Both dresses looked expensive. They looked as if their price could have fed my family for an entire month. Ruby was a lean, graceful young woman with big

brown eyes and long red hair. Her eyes were dressed with thick wings of black liner and false lashes. She resembled a Greek cinema film star and I realized that was her aim. She had adapted the dramatic makeup and hairstyles. Her hair was dyed red; I guess she wanted to match her name. Ruby understood I was studying her.

“I love Greek cinema,” she admitted. “I think Alikì Vougiouklaki and Tzeni Karezi are fashion icons. I’m an actress too. I studied at the National Theatre of Greece in Athens. At the moment, however, I work as a secretary at a law firm. My boyfriend owns it. It’s where I met him. His name is Vasilis Vasileos.”

“I love Greek cinema too,” I told her as if I didn’t have a care in the world. My reply pleased her. “The red dress is beautiful.”

Ruby agreed. “I think so too. Come out with us tonight. We’ll go to a tavern.”

I stood up. “I can’t, I should return to my family.”

Ruby was sceptical. She didn’t want to pressure me. “What have you missed the most since you left Famagusta?” she asked and I withheld a snort as I didn’t want to offend her after the kindness she had shown me.

“A hundred things.”

“Tell me one.”

“A hot, uninterrupted bath.”

“Take one here.”

“I can’t, I shouldn’t.”

“You can and you shall.” Ruby took my hand, pulling me along. “Come; let’s prepare the bathtub for you.”

That evening, I had the longest, most peaceful bath I had in months. The water was warm, while I used an expensive shampoo and scented soap. Ruby was outside the door, talking to me about her life, but when the telephone rang, she ran to answer, leaving me alone with my thoughts. I saw Darling sitting opposite me in the bathtub. I hugged my knees, steadily staring at the ghost from my past. Little things he did in the way he carried himself sprang to mind. When I imagined I was bleeding between my legs in the water, I pulled the drain stopper and got out. I found Ruby in her bedroom. I was wrapped up in the soft towel she had given me. Having been through all that I had, I had become comfortable in my own skin. In Dhekelia, we all watched each other eat, sleep, have a bath, have sex, dispense body waste.

“You’ll look good in this.” Ruby presented a violet dress. “It’s my gift to you for helping me decide. I bought it last year, but I don’t wear it anymore.”

I shook my head, refusing her offer. “I cannot accept that. You’ve already done more than enough for me.”

“I won’t let you wear those rags,” Ruby objected, pointing at the bundle of old clothes on the floor. She was determined to make me listen. “Put this dress on.”

I didn’t have the strength to argue with her so I obeyed. Once I was dressed, Ruby asked me to sit on the stool again, where she fixed my hair, while urging me to talk about my life. Before I left, I thanked her for everything, and when I walked out in the street, a couple of neighbours looked at me with anger and jealousy.

By the time I returned to the house, everyone had returned from work, and when they saw me, they stopped what they were doing and stared. They were in the kitchen, sitting around the small table, having a small dinner. When I told them what had happened, my parents were eager to express their complaints.

“That girl is having an affair with a married man,” Mama told me.

“He’s not married, he’s divorced,” I corrected her. “Ruby’s my friend.”

“It’s my fault,” Papa said. “I should have cut your wings when you were little, when I had the chance.” His words cut me deeper than they should have and my eyes filled up with tears. I stormed out of the kitchen, but he shouted, “You’ll ruin yourself, you’ll ruin your life if you don’t change your ways.”

They had no idea I already had.

It was on a Sunday afternoon that I saw Ruby again. Everyone was at the house, and when she came knocking on our door, Papa and Mama opened. I was hiding behind a wall, listening.

“Hello, I’m Rubini, I live in the neighbourhood.” She was polite and charming. “Is Eva in? She told me she sews and I’d like to ask her to make a dress for me. I’ll pay her, of course.” Ruby, being the cunning girl she was, had struck a chord. My parents accepted as we were in no position to turn down money.

Walking down the street with Ruby was a breath of fresh air. People were judgmental, but they were also jealous. Ruby grabbed my hand, guiding me through her house again. Her mother and sister were in the living room. When I saw them, I

felt inadequate. I was wearing rags, while they were dressed as if they were posing for a painting.

Ruby introduced me. “Mama, Aphrodite, this is Eva, my lucky charm.” What did that girl want from me? Ruby acknowledged the puzzled expression I had on my face and explained. “The day I met you, an hour later, Vasilis proposed.”

“My daughter doesn’t believe in coincidences,” Mrs. Victoria said. “She believes in fate.”

“I believe in fate too,” Aphrodite joined in.

These three women lived their life in their very own bubble. They were nothing like my family and I. They were idle, dreamers.

“Ruby told me you studied in London for four years.” Mrs. Victoria demanded my attention. “You majored in education and also attended other classes for your pleasure; theatre, psychology, literature, art. Your family must be very proud of you.”

I hid the irony of those words behind a smile, while I felt as if my time in London was almost in another lifetime. “Yes ...” I trailed off, turning to Ruby. “Don’t you want me to sew a dress for you?”

Greek Cypriot parents’ aspirations and wishes for their daughters were to become teachers and for their sons to become doctors. If that didn’t work out, they wanted their daughters to work at the family business or be good housewives and mothers. As for their sons, they wanted them to be hard workers and lucky with money. I had deliberately side-tracked from all that, I used to be full of spirit, but I daren’t think about the life I had led before the invasion, before that first morning in Limassol, anymore.

“Oh, I do. I want you to sew the dress for my engagement party,” Ruby announced.

“That’s a big responsibility.”

“Don’t worry, dear, we’ll give you good money,” Mrs. Victoria assured me.

“Why don’t you buy one? I can help you pick one,” I told my redheaded friend.

“NO,” Ruby shouted like a spoiled child. “I want the dress to be dramatic, magical. I don’t want any other woman to be able to own it. I want it to be created only for me.” I was about to object, but she shushed me. “I won’t take no for an answer. Don’t forget, I’ll pay you. I have a good feeling about you.” She showed me

their sewing machine, which was gathering dust in the corner, and told me I could use it for the creation of her dress.

When word was out in the neighbourhood that I was sewing the dress for Ruby's engagement party, more people began accepting and approaching us. In the mornings, I was working at St. Mary's, and in the afternoons, I was sewing Ruby's dress. I barely had time to breathe, which was ideal because I didn't have time to think either. The engagement party was on the last day of November. What with all our salaries together and the payment in advance from Mrs. Victoria, we had gathered enough money to find a better house for the seven of us soon to be eight. Papa and Andreas were already looking for our new home.

On a late Saturday afternoon, one week before the engagement party, I was at Ruby's house. We had a dress rehearsal. As always, their fireplace was lit and a blanket of warmth had gently covered us. The house where we were staying was freezing night and day so I embraced every second I spent at Ruby's.

"Soon, I'll be Mrs. Vasileos." Ruby stood in the middle of the living room, in front of that gold mirror, never taking her eyes off of her reflection. She was the vainest person I had ever met. Soon, she'd be called Ruby King and I thought her new surname suited her well. The clock struck five; it was already dark outside. I noticed Ruby was studying me and I met her eyes in the mirror.

"What is it, Ruby? Don't you like the dress?"

"I love it."

The long, silk gown, which was as crimson as her hair, hugged her body beautifully.

"What's wrong, then?"

"Eva, I consider you my friend, and I constantly talk to you about my life, but you're always quiet. Why won't you talk to me about yours? Don't you trust me?"

"I'm focused on doing a good job, and on not pricking you with a needle, that's all."

Ruby sighed in mild exasperation before she fell into a pensive mood. She ordered me to stop, and I stepped back, gathering the tape measure around my

thumb. I watched her walk to their writing desk; the dress was flowing like fire on her trail. She opened the drawer and presented an envelope.

“A gentleman knocked on my door yesterday,” she said.

“Oh?”

“Yes,” she replied. “He was well mannered and well dressed. He was rather handsome.” I listened to her patiently. “And he held a walking stick.” That little piece of information sent shivers down my spine. It must be a coincidence, I thought. The woman in red went on, “I invited him in. I offered him a glass of lemonade. He introduced himself as Stavros Stavrou.” I thought my heart would beat out of my chest. “He explained he was a family friend of yours, how he had lost track of you after the war and how he spent whole weeks searching where you were. He arrived in our neighbourhood some days ago, and when he saw you coming in my house all the time, he concluded he should visit me. He begged me to give you this.” Ruby handed me the envelope.

I looked inside. He had put eighty pounds in there. Had he gone mad? I had to work months to earn such an amount. What did he hope he’d prove or achieve by doing that?

“I cannot accept this,” I retorted. “Return it to him,” I demanded.

“He did say you’d refuse his help and that I should say the money was from me.” Ruby revealed. “But I wanted to tell you the truth. When a man like him shows interest in you, you don’t turn your back on him, Eva.” I narrowed my eyes and pursed my lips. I was sick and tired of everyone. They all had expectations of me; men, the members of my family, everyone else I met. “He had to return to his family, but he promised he’d come back here as soon as he could.”

“It’s late.” My reply was curt. “I should return to the house. Please take the dress off, and be careful, it has pins on it.”

Ruby realized she had crossed the line, and for once, she didn’t speak another word.

It was the evening of the engagement party. The 30th of November was on a Saturday. Papa would drive me to the tavern it’d take place and I was allowed to stay for exactly two hours before he’d come pick me up.

We were careful with whatever money we had gathered, but Mama refused to let me go to the event with empty hands. Rosa created cherry liqueur chocolates; the little balls of chocolate with the cherry liqueur filling were her own recipe. She created the treats from scratch.

I was wearing the violet dress Ruby had given me as a gift the first time I met her, and after a few alterations and adjustments, it became the dress I had been dreaming about since I was a little girl. I was in the bathroom because I needed some privacy. Papa was waiting for me in the Morris. I was sitting on the bathtub wall with my most personal items on my lap; the fairytale book of the steadfast tin soldier, my university degree, Darling's letter and photograph. They had woken up so much in me over the years that had passed. How I wished I could have saved more things from my life before the war. It felt as if these beloved items belonged to the most distant past. All these other things had been lost.

"My whole life is only words on a few pieces of paper," I whispered. I didn't want them to hear me. There were knocks on the bathroom door.

"Eva, you'll be late if you don't hurry up," Mama warned.

"I'm coming," I replied, putting the fairytale, the degree, the letter and the photograph back into the black folder I was hiding them in. I looked in the mirror and all I saw looking back at me was the little girl I used to be, who used to dream about what she'd look like when she grew older. With a safety pin, I attached Stavros' amulet on the inside of my dress, close to my chest. Ruby didn't mention him again after our confrontation. There was a new life waiting out there and the time had come for me to exit my hiding place.

Le Panache was one of the most popular taverns in Limassol, and that frosty November night, it was packed with Ruby and Vasilis' guests. The atmosphere in the underground tavern was asphyxiating. The couple was standing in the middle of the small round stage. They had rented *Le Panache* for the night and had invited a hundred people. Vasilis was holding a microphone, while Ruby was clinging from his arm. She was his trophy and he was her bag full of money. The crimson gown I sewed for her was exactly what she had wished it to be; dramatic, magical. She was twenty-two and he was in his late thirties. Like father like daughter, I thought. Vasilis cleared his throat and Ruby was smiling like a film star next to him.

“Thank you all for being here,” Vasilis began, adding, “My dearest family and friends.” All the guests had found their way to their seats, while I stood by the door, watching. “Let us all eat, drink and celebrate. To our health and happiness ...” Vasilis raised his glass and all the guests raised theirs.

“To our health,” everyone shouted before they drank their wine. All the tables were piled up with food. On the stage, three men and a woman appeared. The three men sat on their chairs, playing their guitars and bouzouki, while the woman was dancing and singing songs of the Greek cinema. People were eating, drinking and having a good time, but I felt the deepest displacement.

“I’m so happy you’re here,” Rosa shouted, the music was loud, giving me a hug.

“My sister, Rosa, made these.” I presented the tray with the treats. Ruby took the cherry liqueur chocolates and handed them to a waiter, ordering him to circulate the dessert. Vasilis joined us.

“My love,” she spoke into her fiancé’s ear. “This is Eva. I told you all about her, remember? She sewed my dress.”

Vasilis extended his arm and we shook hands. “You’ve done an excellent job,” he complimented, and after I thanked him, Ruby grabbed my hand.

“Come, you’re sitting at our table.” When Ruby and I walked through the tables, I felt a number of curious eyes following me. “Eat, you must be hungry,” she said into my ear, standing behind my chair. A few people were staring, wondering who I was, while others went on enjoying themselves. “I have to greet a few friends. I’ll be right back.” Ruby walked among the tables again as if she was walking on a theatre stage and rejoined with her fiancé.

A thick cloud of cigarette smoke hung in the atmosphere. I was starving, but I didn’t drink or eat. Instead, I observed everyone. Those that tasted the treats Rosa had made had an exhilarated look on their faces. That made me smile. The man sitting beside me poured red wine into my glass.

“Drink,” he demanded. “We’re celebrating.” He clicked his glass with mine before he drank his own wine in one big gulp. He was intoxicated already. He was loudly laughing, clapping at the singer, who was dancing by our table.

“I hear you’re a refugee,” the man that sat on my other side said.

People talked; people always talked.

“I am,” I replied.

“You’re being rude.” He pointed at my filled up glass, and even though I didn’t want to drink the wine on an empty stomach, I sipped it. “You remind me of a fish out of the water,” he smirked and I wished he’d stop talking to me. “I’m Dimitris.” He offered me his hand and I shook it. “I’ll be Vasilis’ best man. I’m a doctor.” In those two sentences, he told me more about him than I needed to know; he was rich and entitled.

“I’m Eva. I’m a teacher assistant, and apparently, I’m also a seamstress.”

“You keep yourself busy.”

“One has to.”

“I’m a good doctor,” he insisted, handing me his business card.

“Thank you.” I didn’t want it, but I took it.

“Recently, I opened my own clinic at the centre of Limassol.” His breath stank of the cigar he was smoking. “It’s going well and I’m earning plenty of money.” He expected me to be impressed so my indifference irritated him. I wondered if all Limassolians were as arrogant and conceited as the ones I had met so far; I hoped they weren’t.

“You must be proud of yourself.”

“I am,” he snapped, sensing my sarcasm. Dimitris, deciding I wasn’t worth the trouble, turned away, put his hands up in the air, and clapped at the singer, ignoring me. The cigar was still between his lips.

That was what life was like for Limassolians, when they had money to spare and lived in town. The nightlife in Limassol was, of course, worlds apart from the one Famagusta used to have, considering the new coastal city had limited cafes, discotheques and taverns.

Looking at the Limassol elite, always thinking about my family and Famagusta, and remembering London, I had no idea where I belonged and I feared I belonged nowhere.

I regretted never going out at night with Darling, but I had to be with Auntie and the rest of my relatives, pretending to be the most decent of young women; Andrea and Elena had a curfew, which meant I had one too. Diaspora Greek Cypriot parents were even stricter with their daughters because they were threatened by the fact they were in a foreign land. If second generation Greek Cypriot girls wished to go out in the evenings, they were accompanied by their brothers or male cousins. If

they didn't have a wedding ring on their finger, the men of the family were responsible for them.

When I stood up to leave, Dimitris gave me one last glance. I sneaked out of the tavern before Ruby had the chance to stop me.

Papa was waiting for me in the Morris outside *Le Panache*.

"How was the engagement party?" he asked with a big yawn. He turned the engine on, while I locked the door as if that could keep me safe from all the monsters out there.

"Perfect," I replied, and as we were both exhausted, we exchanged no more words.

That November night, my heart yearned to remember.

An afternoon in London, when wind blew the heavy rain towards all directions and umbrellas were useless, Darling and I sought shelter in the first building we came across. It was a toy shop. People on the street were either running to escape the downpour or they had already found temporary refuge in bus stops, telephone booths, or random buildings, like ourselves.

I was shivering because my clothes and hair were soaked. While Darling was cursing under his breath and frantically wiping his coat as if that'd help it dry faster, I began wandering around. The employees weren't pleased that at least half a dozen people had entered their store in hopes of avoiding the rain, but they didn't drive us away.

I stood staring at the shelf with the view masters, while a boy and a girl were playing with space hoppers next to me. Children in Cyprus didn't have the variety or the quality of toys children in London did. I took the tester and viewed its slides; click, click, click, click. The pictures were a little blurry, but they presented a beach; children building sand castles, two men playing rackets, a mother in the sea with her toddler.

I missed Famagusta's golden beaches; the scent of the sea, the sound of the waves, the feeling of the sand between my toes. Once, Auntie, her family and I went on a daytrip to Brighton, but the beach there was only pebbles and the sea was brown; I didn't go near it.

When I put the view master back to its place, I saw Darling watching me with a smug smile, and I asked him what that was for.

“You make me happy,” he told me and I replied that he made me happy too.

Soon, the rain stopped, for the time being at least, and we bought a bag of mixed sweets with all the pennies we had. Walking down the wet street, we ate them all; some were sour, some were sweet.

I had to let the life I led prior to the invasion go. I could go mad if I didn’t.

When 1975 arrived, we moved to a newer and bigger house. Papa and Mama had a bedroom of their own, Andreas, Rosa and Theodoros had a bedroom of their own, and Sofia and I had a bedroom of our own. In the living room, there was good furniture along with a television, while in the kitchen, the appliances worked without problems. We weren’t hungry all the time anymore because we had money for decent meals, while we timidly began buying little luxuries, such as detergent for our laundry and scented soap for our baths. We also stopped going to the places where they offered supplies for the refugees. Soon, we’d begin buying clothes and shoes again.

We were all working hard, but after Ruby and Vasilis’ engagement party, a lot had changed for us. Women who were there asked Ruby from where she had bought her dress as well as where she had found those delicious cherry liqueur chocolates, and so, Ruby gave them our new address and telephone number. Rosa and I accepted the orders and offers from women, who had an event to plan or attend, and shyly, we began a small business of our own. I sewed the dresses of their dreams and Rosa created the most heavenly desserts. Ruby had generously given me their sewing machine, telling me to keep it for as long as I needed it. Meanwhile, Sofia was studying hard for her high school diploma.

One bitter cold evening in January, we were all sitting around an old cast iron gas stove in the new living room. No one was talking; absentmindedly, we were looking at the television, but we weren’t watching or paying attention to what was on. Everyone was lost in their own thoughts. Only when there was a knock on the door we stirred, climbing out of the daze we were in. Andreas went to open.

“I cannot believe my eyes.” My brother-in-law sounded shocked. In the living room, everyone exchanged looks, wondering who it was. A wall separated us from the door.

“Hello. Let me tell you, finding the Adamou family wasn’t easy.” I recognized the voice of the unexpected visitor the second I heard it.

I jumped up from the sofa, stared at my reflection in the mirror, and was devoured by dread. Since the invasion, and especially since the miscarriage, I had let myself go. Ruby tried to change my mind time and time again, but I didn’t care about the way I looked anymore at all.

“Please, come inside.” Andreas invited Stavros in. “We’ll be happy to hear news from a fellow villager. We all scattered everywhere after the war.”

When Stavros walked in the living room, I wanted to dig a hole and hide in it, but when our eyes met, I calmed down. Stavros had the talent of driving me absolutely mad sometimes, but it was always calmness with him in the end. Seeing him, I understood he had changed for the better and I had changed for the worse; how the tables had turned. He was wearing a suit and I was in the plainest dress I had ever knitted. He had money and I had not. As always, he was holding a cane, but he did it out of habit as his limping was almost gone.

“Mr. and Mrs. Adamou, good evening,” Stavros said. “Girls,” he addressed me and my sisters, taking his hat off. He knelt in front of Theodoros. The little boy was shy and confused. “Hello, little man.” Stavros put his hat on my nephew. “It’s yours now.” Theodoros laughed loudly because the accessory was too big for his head. When Stavros stood up, we looked at him as if we were all having the same strange dream.

“Please, sit,” Mama urged our guest, while Papa blatantly glared at him. “Would you like a KEO beer, a Coca Cola, a Cypriot coffee?”

“No, no, thank you ...” Stavros rejected her offers as kindly as possible. “You must be wondering why I went to all the trouble of finding your family.”

Papa laughed, but not in good humour. “I read you like a book since you were a boy.”

Mama tried to ease the tension between Papa and Stavros by changing the subject. “If I’m not mistaken, you weren’t on the island during the invasion.”

“No, unfortunately, I wasn’t, I was abroad,” Stavros said in a grim tone. “Sebastian and Melina Butler took good care of my family, bless their hearts. I

thought I'd lose my mind because I wasn't here during that time and had no power to help the people I loved." Stavros fell silent for a few seconds before he looked at me for support. "I'm here tonight because of Eva," he announced to everyone before he asked me, "Can I talk to you in private?"

"Why?" Papa objected, wanting to be an obstacle.

"Papa, please," Rosa pleaded for my sake, while Sofia was standing in silence. Andreas was preoccupying his son with Stavros' hat. After a defeated, resentful "fine" from Papa, Stavros and I went outside, but not before Mama forced me to put on a shawl.

I shivered in the cold night, while Stavros spoke, telling me his story, "I wasn't lying before. I almost went mad not knowing what had happened to you. No airplanes are flying in Nicosia International Airport anymore and I had to travel by train from Berlin to Athens in order to get on a ship from the port of Piraeus to reach Cyprus. I looked for you everywhere and I had to look after my family too. It took so long to find you. The wait was unbearable."

"And do you like what you have found?" I asked. "I've been broken."

"You don't need to worry about that," Stavros said, carefully coming closer. "We can fix everything in time." He touched my stomach like he had done months ago that summer day on the beach in Famagusta before the war. "What happened?" he asked in the kindest, softest voice. He was whispering, referring to the baby I had lost, but I had run out of tears.

"I had a miscarriage."

"I'm very sorry." He was sincere.

"Don't be." Before I could react, he hugged me, and I thought it was time to stop pushing my fate away. I let him warm me up, but I scolded, "You shouldn't have asked Ruby to give me your money."

"I wasn't sure how to approach you after everything that had happened," he confessed, breathing into my hair.

"We've had this story ending set from the beginning, didn't we?"

Stavros laughed before he replied, "Of course we did."

The Epilogue

Rosa, Sofia and I take turns to host Sunday lunch, and today, all my family is gathered in my home. It's early in the afternoon and we're sitting in the living room.

The men are drinking Cypriot coffee, discussing the war and having a cigarette. Eight years have passed, but they believe we'll return to Famagusta someday soon. They refuse to face the facts. They'll embrace hope until the end. Papa shouldn't be smoking, but he doesn't listen. Due to his poor health, he has had a number of operations.

Turkey is occupying one third of our island, dividing it into the northern and southern side. There's an overwhelming amount of Turkish soldiers, while thousands of civilian settlers were shipped from mainland Turkey in order to live in our land.

As for the Famagusta quarter, which was the pearl of the island, a little paradise on earth, they had other plans. They've sealed it off with barbed wire and all trespassers are shot on sight. They're letting it rot. My Famagusta has become a ghost town.

The women are eating dessert, talking about the Greek film that was on the television last night. The children are running around, playing together. In the background, there's a song playing on the radio. I'm watching everyone, writing.

My husband, Stavros, winks at me, smiling. He's a doctor and he owns a clinic in the centre of the city. Every day, I clean, cook, do the laundry, iron his work clothes and casual clothes, take care of our daughter, take care of him, but these things are unavoidable. It's all a matter of acceptance.

Rosa eats her piece of pie with a smile on her face. After five pregnancies and four children, she's a lot heavier than what she used to be. Her patisserie is one of the most popular in Limassol. I sewed some beautiful dresses back in the day, bringing my customers' dreams into life, but after a while, I chose to be a full time teacher. Because of the little business we used to run, Rosa had the opportunity to finally fulfil her dream. Andreas is a builder. Ruby's sewing machine is in the corner of my living room; I haven't used it in years.

"What are you writing?" Sofia asks.

“A letter to Ruby,” I reply.

An early morning, a year after Rosa opened her patisserie, Odysseas walked in. The news had reached his ears and he had to visit it. Sofia was there, helping Rosa. Sofia and Odysseas are married and have twins; a boy and a girl.

“How’s Ruby?” Mama asks. Mama hasn’t been sleeping well at nights and has headaches daily, but attempts to hide the pain behind a smile. She takes a lot of painkillers and often falls asleep the moment she sits on my sofa.

“She’s great,” I say. “She sends me a letter from Florence once a month.”

A year after Ruby and Vasilis married, they relocated to Italy, but we keep in touch.

Sebastian and Melina, who have been Stavros’ friends since childhood, relocated to England soon after the war, but they visit the island every summer. Whenever they’re here, they often stay with us. Stavros is godfather to their son.

The Englishman wanders across my memory from time to time. Far away, long ago, our paths crossed and our fates interlaced, but our story had an abrupt ending. It’s been eight years, but I never reached out to him. There was no use after that unborn baby slipped away. I disappeared from his life, letting him move on.

My two year old daughter comes to me. She has my brown curls and Stavros’ honey coloured eyes. She places her little hands on my lap and opens her mouth. She wants dessert. Carefully, I put a teaspoonful in it. My lovely little girl, what does life have in store for you, I think to myself, while I watch her run back to her cousins.

Words: 70,122

Critical Commentary

The Storyteller and the Truth

“To the historian the past is the whole process of development that leads up to the present; to the novelist it is a strange world to tell tales about.”¹

1.

Biographical Background and Language

What I am keen on reading and writing the most is historical fiction about the eventful 20th century.

When I began the PhD project in February 2013, I had a different tale in mind from the one I am presenting here. The original story was going to take place in Greece in the early 1970s and it focused on a drama student, who along with a group of friends resisted the Junta that controlled the country. The small resistance group was secretly spreading leaflets against dictatorship in the streets. They were planning on planting a bomb in an army barrack. The novel’s title was going to be *We Are All Heroes Here*; it would deal with depicting the misery and poverty Greece suffered for seven years (1967 – 1974) under the Regime of the Colonels.

At the time, cinema, newspapers, radio, television, and theatre were under the direct control of the Colonels and freedom of speech had ceased to exist. The strict censorship the Junta had enforced was one of the two reasons which drew me to that era. The second reason was what is considered by both Greeks and Greek Cypriots the Golden Age of the Greek Cinema, which began after the end of WWII and lasted for almost two decades. The character of Ruby in *Guilt* is partially created from remnants of *We Are All Heroes Here*. Ruby and her circle represent the great influence Greece has always had on Cyprus on a cultural level. Ruby loves Greek cinema and the life it portrays, and she follows the fashion of the famous actresses that star in those films.

¹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Historical Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924) 113.

I had written a few thousand words of *We Are All Heroes Here*, but by June 2013 I understood and accepted that I felt no attachment to the characters I had created or to the budding plotline. After a discussion with my supervisors, I reached the conclusion that the best course of action was to completely change the story. I decided that if I was going to devote the following four years to the PhD project, I wanted it to be as personal as possible; I needed a story which was closer to home and that is how *Guilt* came to life.

Guilt is a historical novel that takes place before, during and after the invasion of Turkey in Cyprus. Choosing to write such a story, I voluntarily engaged with an overused topic. I cannot say with certainty whether its political history is what represents the Mediterranean island worldwide most frequently or not, but national and international writers alike, when they choose to embark on the journey of writing a novel that is set on Cyprus, often focus on that topic. Two examples are *Small Wars*² by Sadie Jones and *The Sunrise*³ by Victoria Hislop; both Jones and Hislop are English writers. Jones sets her novel during the turbulent time period of 1955 – 1959, which was the liberation struggle against British colonization, while Hislop sets hers around the eventful summer of 1974.

I belong in the generation born after the 1974 invasion. I grew up listening to stories about the villages my parents and grandparents grew up, lived, struggled, and prospered in. More than four decades have flown by, but I see it in their faces that what happened all these years ago still saddens them. They were shaken on a personal and public level. They fled their homes only with the clothes on their backs, leaving everything they held dear behind, suffered poverty and hunger, while the island was forcefully separated into the southern side and the northern side. Their personal and national tragedy has come to be known as “the Cyprus problem”. For a long time, my parents, grandparents, and relatives believed they were going to return to Famagusta, to their homes and lands, but in time, they have come to accept otherwise. Since the 1974 invasion, Turkey has occupied Famagusta, Kyrenia and half of Nicosia; it is an ongoing occupation.

What they went through is only a story to me and what I am capable of feeling is an indirect pain. It saddens me to see them hurting, but I cannot

² Sadie Jones, *Small Wars* (London: Vintage, 2010).

³ Victoria Hislop, *The Sunrise* (London: Headline Review, 2014).

comprehend or conceive completely what they feel, I can only interpret their past and their pain in my own terms. My parents' villages and homesteads can never be real to me; they are only imaginary pictures I created in my head based on their faded memories and elliptical narratives. One of the reasons the novel is called *Guilt* is because I fail to feel exactly what they have felt during those times, what they feel today. The novel is about their histories and it is devoted to them. The second reason it is called *Guilt* is because it is the emotion that oftentimes overwhelms the protagonist, as she strays from the island traditions and from conformity. To my mind, *Guilt* is straightforward and honest, but in the future, a more evocative title might prevail.

Guilt tells the story of Eva Adamou. It is a coming of age novel and it follows her life from her childhood to her late twenties. It is a novel of maturation and personal growth. I was determined from the beginning for the novel to be in its current form and shape; to be separated into these sections, which move across disjointed segments of chronological time, allowing the reader to fill in the gaps. I wished to create a story built around the concept of life being an accumulation of mere moments in time.

Originally, *Guilt* took place exclusively in Cyprus. While I was working on it, one of my supervisors suggested more light should be shed on Eva's life in London in order to make the central character more rounded and convincing. I was hesitant because I did not have as much information as I would have liked to about how life in London in the seventies was, but having a section about Eva's four years away was a tempting thought. In the end, I agreed with this reasoning and the section "In a Land Far, Far Away" was created.

The narrative of the novel is structured around key, often short, scenes – a set of memories that are threaded together. It is almost a cinematic technique the story is composed of, a string of recollections narrated by the more mature Eva. Her cinematic memories explore the influence and importance of childhood and of adolescent years, the rebellion against the provincial life women used to lead, the ordeal by love, and finally, the return home to reclaim her roots. Her life narrative is, at times, and especially towards the end, a battle between her older and newer self. I am intrigued by historical films and film adaptations of novels and this, quasi-cinematic style, complements the disjointed, unpolished nature of memories.

“The Brave Tin Soldier” focuses on the innocence and magic of childhood. As a child, Eva feels marginalized within her family and village, and she befriends her neighbour, Stavros, who reminds her of the hero of her favourite fairytale because of his limping leg. The fact that Hans Christian Andersen is a famous writer of the western world symbolically shows how there is a war going on in her soul from an early age. “The Girl Playing with Fire” focuses on the angst and dreams of adolescence. Eva is toying with her budding sexuality and is rebelling against the norms and conventions of her community, almost rejecting their cultural and moral values. “Summer 1974” deals with the end of an impossible love affair, its consequences, and with the fear that being a woman puts her in a disadvantage. During the war, her fear blends into a much broader context due to the thousands of rape victims. In the final section, in the aftermath of the war, and while she is struggling to survive, she is burdened by the image of the long lost childhood version of herself.

In *Guilt*, more than anything else, fiction is formed around my parents’ stories about Famagusta. When he was young, my father was spending a day at the beach with his friends. When they decided to dive from the rocks into the sea, he hit his head against a rock at the bottom. His story inspired the scene where Eva has a similar experience. Most Cypriots enjoy the sea and have a connection with it. My mother attended the St Francis Terra Sancta in Famagusta, a high school for girls, run by nuns, across the street from a military camp. Sometimes, fiction cannot equal reality. My father often described to me the streets of Famagusta, reminiscing about the hotels, the nightlife, the sea; Olympia cinema was the biggest and most popular, and outside it, there was an old Turkish Cypriot man, selling his handmade *ayran*, which, as I explain in the novel, is a cold yogurt beverage blended with salt.

My parents lived in the Famagusta province, but they did not know each other before 1974; they met years later. My father fought in the war, while my mother fled her village with her family. Once it was clear the war was lost, my father and the other Greek Cypriot soldiers abandoned Famagusta. (My father was almost caught and killed by the Turkish soldiers twice.) My parents and their families sought refuge in the olive tree fields of the Dhekelia sovereign base. My mother and her family found a half-built house nearby, where they stayed for a few days before they were taken in by a relative in Limassol. My father and his family

lived in a tent in Dhekelia for almost two years before they were able to stand back on their feet.

Finally, when my mother moved to Limassol, she had as her neighbour a young woman her age, who was very beautiful and who was dating an older, married man. One day, the young woman invited my mother to her house, which was decorated with expensive items – clearly gifts from her lover. I based the character of Ruby on my mother’s stories of this acquaintance. Although, unlike Ruby, the young woman my mother had met was not kind. These are only a few stories from my parents’ past I fictionalize in *Guilt*. In that sense, mine is a semi-autobiographical novel: it is a way for me to make sense of, and see afresh, some of my family’s history. In her novel *From Famagusta to Vienna*⁴ the Greek Cypriot writer Niki Marangou similarly renders her parents’ memories in writing.

While working on this project, it has been important to me to locate and read novels by Greek Cypriots. Among the novels I have read are *A Watermelon, a Fish and a Bible*⁵ by Christy Lefteri and *The Cypriot*⁶ by Andreas Koumi. Both Lefteri and Koumi were born, grew up and live in London, and both wrote in their novels about Cyprus during the second half of the twentieth century. However, writers, who were born and raised in the UK by Greek Cypriot parents (who had fled Cyprus in 1974 or earlier), were not what I was looking for, for this project in particular. Lefteri, Koumi, and other second generation Diaspora Greek Cypriot writers had arguably been exposed to different environments and experiences throughout their lives than I was (regarding Cyprus’ everyday histories and national history). In the early stages of writing *Guilt*, this was important to me.

From Famagusta to Vienna, on the other hand, captivated my attention from the beginning. People say: “Don’t judge a book by its cover”, but that is what I initially did in the case of *From Famagusta to Vienna*. Its cover is a collection of stamps, while in its centre there is a black and white photograph of an old Cypriot man in white, sitting down and reading a book. I was drawn to it instantly. In Greek, its title is *Γιατρός από τη Βιέννη*, which literally translates as “A Doctor from

⁴ Niki Marangou, *From Famagusta to Vienna*, translated from the Greek by Marina Gilks (Nicosia: KOCHLIAS, 2005) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

⁵ Christy Lefteri, *A Watermelon, a Fish and a Bible* (London: Quercus, 2011).

⁶ Andreas Koumi, *The Cypriot* (London: Dexter Haven, 2006).

Vienna". It was only after I read *From Famagusta to Vienna* that I conceived of Stavros' desire to become a doctor in order to tend to his physical impairment on his own.

Niki Marangou was a painter, a poet and a writer, who respected the Greek language and wrote all her works in it. In her personal webpage, she has expressed how "the central point in my life has always been the passion for language, with the Greek language in all its forms, contemporary, ancient, Byzantine."⁷ And yet, despite my initial desire to connect closely with the everyday realities of my island, I purchased and read the novel in English translation. *From Famagusta to Vienna* was written in Greek and it was later translated into a number of languages; it was the first Greek Cypriot novel to have ever been translated into Turkish. The reason I did not read it in its original Greek version is because I was planning to write in English myself.

From Famagusta to Vienna follows the life of George, from childhood to adulthood, and his travels before it focuses on Kaety in its final couple of chapters. George and Kaety are representations of Marangou's parents. It is separated into five parts with the following titles: Famagusta, Vienna, Athens, Limassol, and Alexandria. Each city symbolizes a significant part in the two narrators' lives. The first four parts belong to George, whose story begins in the beginning of WWI, when he is only a boy, and ends almost a year after the end of WWII, when he is in his thirties. In the final part, the point of view shifts to Kaety, who is a Greek nurse he has an affair with; the two protagonists' lives are interconnected. Marangou writes with profound emotion about her parents' life experiences, and in the meantime, she offers the reader a taste of the Greek element and the Mediterranean. There are strong echoes of an autobiographical presence combined with its author's storytelling skills. While I was reading this novel, I was moved by a desire to provoke similar effects in my readers.

The novel is written in the third person, while the narrative voice is deeply personal, warm and melancholic. In the initial stages of writing *Guilt*, I experimented with the first and third person narration; I had written a few scenes in the third person before I fully shifted to the first person. What I believe brings to *Guilt* the first person narration is directness. It enhances the illusion of an

⁷ Niki Marangou, "Biography," *Niki Marangou*, 2012, Web. 2 Aug. 2016.
<<http://www.marangou.com/biography/>>

autobiographical element as it follows the life of one person only. I wanted the autobiographical impulse that drove me towards writing to be enhanced by fictional storytelling. The chronological order in Marangou's novel is not clear and the reader must connect the dots of the protagonists' life stories. The writer does not concern herself too much with dates because her focus is on the lands and places that George and Kaety travelled and connected to. It is not always necessary for the chronological order of events to be polished, which is an aspect I adapt in *Guilt*.

On her personal webpage, Heidi Trautmann shares Marangou's words: "There is a space closed to you most of the time for so many years of your childhood, your young years, occasional glimpses though, remarks between adults dropped, photos in many albums, the space being the past of my parents."⁸ In order to prepare for the writing of her novel, Marangou travelled to the places her parents had visited. She retraced their steps, attempting to put herself in their shoes to capture as best as possible their past.

In *Guilt*, I try to breathe life into the memories and past of my parents. Yet, in 2003, when the borders were opened (for the first time since 1974) and Greek Cypriots were allowed to cross to the northern side of the island and, my family along with thousands of others seized the opportunity to finally visit their hometowns, I chose not to travel with them to their villages in Famagusta. I did not wish to witness the decay of their childhood homes and of the lands they cherished when they were growing up. In *Guilt*, I offer my interpretation of their stories instead. I wished to tread the paths of history and bring their stories into life through a combination of my memory of their words and my own imagination.

The influence of Marangou on *Guilt* may be seen in part through the fact that the people of the island in both novels learned the news of the world through newspapers and the radio. She captures the everyday routine and reality of the people that grew up and lived through those troubled times; news from Greece and Asia Minor, news about WWI, as well as the consequences of Cyprus' colonization were threaded through the rhythms of their everyday life.

Her character George comes from a conservative, close-minded community and the moralistic nature that was imposed on him by his family is visible in his

⁸ Heidi Trautmann, "Cyprus Art News – In Memoriam Niki Marangou, poet, writer and artist ... and Cypriot," 2013, *Heidi Trautmann*. 2 Sept. 2013, Web. 2 Aug. 2016.
< http://www.heiditrautmann.com/category.aspx?CID=4112837786#.V7HpDTWt_Ct>

mannerisms. In the course of the book, the reader observes his physical and intellectual maturation; from a child to an adolescent boy, to a mature adult man. I wanted my characters to be perceived as intensely and effortlessly by my readers. I also admired how subtly she brought into the narrative the twentieth century history and politics of Cyprus, Asia and Europe.

And yet, while reading Marangou, I could not fail but notice how impossible and unthinkable it would have been for a Greek Cypriot woman to lead the life George is leading in the early and in the middle of the twentieth century. Women normally did not travel, explore and seek independence. They remained at home and learned the ways of their mothers and grandmothers.

“His soul searched for other things” (55) Marangou writes about George. My character Eva shares similar thoughts; they stray and struggle with their sense of belonging. Eva and George flee and travel, leaving momentarily behind the seemingly unchanging nature of the land they are from.

Marangou’s novel ends with the following lines: “I wanted to narrate this story to my grandson George, like a fairy tale, so that I could save what I knew, leaving the rest, what they hadn’t told me, to my imagination. But surely that’s more or less how they must have lived? Isn’t that how we all live?” (181) My own impulse in writing *Guilt* was not dissimilar, but the story I wanted to tell was differently gendered.

A further set of initial considerations I had to face as I began working on this novel has to do with language. *Guilt* is a text written in English by a bilingual author and it features a multilingual narrator; Eva and her mother speak four European languages. In Cyprus, as in other peripheral European locations, this is not unusual. My mother attended the St Francis Terra Sancta high school in Famagusta; she and all the other students there were taught Greek, English, French and Italian language and literature. The fictional character of Eva Adamou attends that high school, which is based on one that used to actually exist, and she acquires the knowledge of all these languages.

Cyprus has always had a varied mixture of identities with that of the Greek Cypriots being the more dominant; Turkish Cypriots, Turks, Greeks, British, Armenians, Maronites, as well as Italian and French descendants. The text aims to show signs and evidence of British colonialism and the permanent Turkish presence, but hint at the long line of occupiers and settlers, too. Finally, *Guilt* reflects the

impact of Famagusta being a tourist resort back in the day as well as the impact of American culture.

The multilingualism and multiculturalism are felt from the first few lines as *Guilt* begins with a Turkish Cypriot man, Murat, uttering a Greek word, “anathema”, within the Venetian walls, which were built in the capital city of the island centuries before. The inside of the walls was a *Turkomahalas*, a Turkish neighbourhood, where Greek Cypriots did not dare go near. Murat continues to contemplate the traditional Turkish drink and dessert his Greek Cypriot friends had offered him earlier in the night; *raki* and *baklava*. Turks, Greeks and Cypriots share a lot of cuisine similarities. The food in the text represents a *mélange* of cultures.

Guilt explores multilingualism further through postcolonial concepts, which are visible via Aunt Thea’s character. Julie Mullaney discusses how “Diasporas are a critical site of exploration and debate within postcolonial literatures,”⁹ considering they are an evident aftermath of a postcolonial era, and continues by citing Robin Cohen: “The term ‘diasporas’ describes communities shaped by histories of dispersion and migration between or within continents but for whom an attachment to the homeland, real or imagined, continues to provide a key site of identification, a compelling font of memory.”¹⁰ Through Aunt Thea and her family, I attempt to present how Diaspora Greek Cypriots might have lived in London in the 1970s, according to accounts family friends have sporadically confided in me, as well as their multi-layered attachment to their homeland and host land. Greek and English are competing in the expatriates’ household and tavern in London. One of the many ways Aunt Thea clings onto her origins is through language, as she insists on speaking her mother tongue every time she is addressing other Greeks and Greek Cypriots, while her family is content with talking in English at all times.

Over the last few decades, English has had a substantial spot in Greek Cypriots’ everyday life; the language is taught in primary schools, while almost all children attend extra English lessons in the afternoons from the age of eight or nine, which take place in private institutes twice a week. I was drawn to the language from early on, and when I was six years old, I enrolled in English lessons. When I was sixteen, I began reading Anglophone novels and I timidly began writing short

⁹ Julie Mullaney, *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* (London & New York: Continuum, 2010) 7.

¹⁰ Mullaney, 7.

stories in English. I studied English language and literature at Lancaster and, I was an English teacher for a few years in Cyprus before I embarked on my Creative Writing MA and then PhD at Southampton. Thus, writing fiction in English has come naturally to me, and is intimately bound with the cultural history of my country.

My projected audience is an international one, but I would enjoy experimenting with translating *Guilt* in Greek in the future; translating the novel into my mother tongue and promoting it in my home country has been a prominent thought. Having been an A level Modern Greek teacher, I have worked with translations from Greek to English and vice versa as well as Greek literature, while it is a subject I wish to teach again.

Guilt is intentionally crafted in a transparent style, although, on occasion, I toy with alliteration as well as with evocative and figurative language. One of my supervisors pointed out early on in the writing process that I tend to give the characters culture-neutral names; whether it was a conscious choice or not, Eva, Rosa, Sofia, are all names that are easily read by foreign readers. As for a number of the rest of the characters, main and minor alike, I chose names that I thought can be understood with a little effort by non-Greek speakers; names that can be related to Ancient Greek History (Leonidas, Sophocles) or Greek mythology (Artemis, Aphrodite, Heracles, Odysseas) or to countries (Americos) and flowers (Chrysanthé). What is more, I chose to spell them based on their English equivalent rather than their Greek one to further assist the reader.

I took time to explain names, whose meaning is not as clear as the rest – for example, Stavros, which means cross. Through the two young Greek Cypriot soldiers, Americos and Constantinos, who briefly appear later on in *Guilt*, I wanted subtly to show how the last letters, and consequently, the pronunciation of some Greek names change according to the context they are being used in. Finally, there are a number of names in several other languages in order to present the culturally complex city Famagusta once was, the permanent Turkish presence, as well as the variety of people Eva comes across in her travels.

Throughout *Guilt*, there are non-English words that are not translated. Sometimes, I explain their meaning to the reader and sometimes I do not. Through those words, I sought to create “the aroma” of the Greek language in my text. Finally, similar to the structure of the novel, the reader can put their imagination to

use to discover the meaning of the words through the hints provided. When I began writing *Guilt*, I was careless with the Greek words within the text; for example, in the beginning, I wrote the word Yiayia (“grandmother”) without clarifying its meaning, but once this was brought to my attention, I became even more aware of the needs of my English-speaking readers. I produced the initial drafts without putting too much thought into them as I used to write “Mum” and “Dad”, but after my supervisor pointed out that the two terms implied a western text, I changed these terms to Mama and Papa, which is closer to how Greek and Greek Cypriot children call their parents; Μάμα and Παπά.

While working on the penultimate draft of my novel, I re-encountered *Difficult Daughters*¹¹, a novel written in English by the Indian novelist Manju Kapur, which I had started reading, then abandoned, early on in the writing period. (I will discuss it in more detail later on.) When I first started reading it, one of the reasons I felt a little disoriented was the unfamiliar vocabulary. Kapur offers no explanation for the names of food she mentions or the character names she uses and I initially wondered if the novelist was originally addressing an Anglophone Indian audience rather than an international one. *The Book of Fate*¹² by Iranian novelist Parinoush Saniee, by contrast, devotes its first few pages to explaining the names of its characters, locations and vocabulary, easing the unfamiliar reader into the story; it is a beautiful book about fifty years of the heroine’s life in Iran.

While working on my own novel, I considered whether I should start the story with a glossary of terms as well as a historical timeline, but in the end, I concluded the information should come through in scenes and subtexts. It is my belief that food and fashion show countries’ culture and therefore they are presented throughout *Guilt*. I did my best to thread through my story fruit, food and nuts that represented the way of life at the time, and paid increasing attention to this kind of cultural detail each time I redrafted the story.

The reading that has accompanied me throughout the writing process comes from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well as from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As I will elaborate in the course of this critical

¹¹ Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

¹² Parinoush Saniee, *The Book of Fate*, translated from Persian by Sara Khalili (London: Little, Brown, 2013).

commentary, I have read novels from Europe, Asia, and Africa – all of them in English (either the original language of writing, or translation). Reading, while also writing, has accompanied, guided and helped form and finish my own story. I have enjoyed these novels: novels about civil wars, colonialism and post colonialism; novels with child narrators, adolescent narrators, and protagonists longing for impossible things. They taught me how to think beyond my parents’ stories in order to form a fluent fictional narrative, where a story set in the past is presented subtly and effortlessly. It is true that, in order to write well, one must be a fervent reader first. Throughout my PhD years, I have matured both as a writer and as an individual.

The logistics, mode and medium of writing have also been important. I typed sections one and two of *Guilt* on a laptop, while I handwrote sections three, four, and five. I took a break from using technology and it worked well because the story flowed and unfolded without much effort when I was writing it with a pen and a paper. I began handwriting the novel after the suspension I asked for between September and December of 2015, and after transferring to Distance Learning. Even if writing in English comes naturally to me, it is at times challenging due to self-doubt; at the end of the day, it is not my mother tongue. Nevertheless, I cannot imagine myself writing creatively in Greek. I think and write in English.

Butterfield, one of the first scholars to talk about historical novels, discusses how “the theme of a novel is human experience and the fate of human beings in the world.”¹³ *Guilt* is a narrative interpretation and representation of the past, but its primary concern is the intimacy of private lives; it focuses on how historical, national and societal forces form the fate of ordinary people. In addition, it is about a time and place that is oftentimes marginalized or forgotten. In *Guilt*, I share with my reader a fictional tale shaped by the stories my parents have shared with me over the years. In the following sections of this critical commentary, I will focus and expand on how I approached the broader historical and political background of my story.

¹³ Butterfield, 67.

History and Genre

Although the initial impetus of *Guilt* is formed around my parents' pasts, it is my interest in historical fiction that often leads me to what story to write.

My fondness for historical fiction first started after I read *Regeneration*¹⁴ by Pat Barker in the final year of my BA. While I was working in Cyprus as a teacher, there was a hiatus in my reading and writing, but my love for the two remained undiminished.

When I returned to my studies, during my MA, I wrote my first pieces of historical fiction. For the module titled "Writing for Children and Young People", I wrote a short story about a WWI soldier and his beloved cat. In the future, I wish to revisit it and shape it into a young adult's book. For "The Art and Craft of Fiction I", I wrote a short story that took place during Cyprus' liberation struggle from the British yoke; at the end of that academic year, it was published in *The Storytellers' Anthology*¹⁵. Finally, my dissertation was a novella named "Cyprus 1974" set in the time period between July and August in 1974. That was the first time I touched on the topic of the Turkish invasion.

Throughout the years I worked on the PhD project, I faced the challenge of subtly blending a representation of the politics of a country at war into the storytelling. I needed to embed, explain and literalize Cyprus' politics and history.

The island of Cyprus lies at the crossroads of three continents; Europe, Asia and Africa. In school, that is how geography and history teachers began their lessons. They explained how Cyprus' location rendered it desirable to a lot of politically powerful people, and consequently, how the island was conquered and colonized on multiple occasions. They never failed to mention how among the first settlers of the island, all those thousands of years ago, were the Greeks.

¹⁴ Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

¹⁵ *The Storytellers' Anthology* (Southampton: University of Southampton, 2012).

All this is embedded in my memory and in the memories of a lot of other people of my generation. Students are taught the Greek mythology and history, while Greek Cypriots celebrate all Greek national holidays. Finally, Cyprus' national anthem is that of Greece's. Jim Bowman writes that "the stories are transferred through family, the ideology reinforced through schools, media, and government"¹⁶ and I agree with him. Parents, teachers and the media are normally the first to shape the thoughts, memories and ideologies of children.

Cyprus belonged to the Ottoman Empire approximately for four hundred years before it became a protectorate of the British Empire in 1878. When WWI was declared, the island became a British colony, and during WWII, the Greek Cypriots fought against Germany alongside their colonizers. In 1955, the Greek Cypriots started the fight for the independence of the island. EOKA, a Greek Cypriot guerrilla group, fought a four year liberation struggle against the British. EOKA was the national organization of Cypriot fighters and they struggled for *Enosis* – full political union with Greece. The Greek Cypriots' desire for *Enosis* caused conflict with the Turkish Cypriots.

Guilt takes place between 1963 and 1975, after the liberation struggle, which I allude to through Stavros and his family. When I first started writing, Stavros did not exist, while in his place was an altogether different character. The boy across the street was a gypsy boy called Angelos, of unknown origins, from an abusive family. After I received supervisor feedback on the first full draft of the novel, I realized that Angelos did not belong in *Guilt*. He did not play well with the rest of the characters or with the themes I aimed to introduce. Ironically, Angelos' need to be accepted in the village, cast him out of my story, and Stavros was brought to life.

Stavros fit *Guilt* better, as his sole purpose is to be a patriot. Initially, Stavros' limping was inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale, "The Steadfast Tin Soldier". I attempted to add a layer of meaning to the mystery of his disability by connecting it to the history that precedes the storyline of *Guilt* to show how one action leads to another. Stavros is discriminated against because of his physical impairment, which was brought upon to begin with by the nationalist politics of the island, as well as his low socioeconomic status within the Famagusta village.

¹⁶ Jim Bowman, "Seeing What's Missing in Memories of Cyprus," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 18.1 (2006): 124.

In 1960, the island was granted its independence; however, in Cyprus politics, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, especially, when larger powers such as the British and the Turkish were provoked, something that the Greek Cypriots did not care to consider. *Guilt*, in its first section, alludes to the conflict caused by the liberation struggle and independence. Caesar V. Mavratsas argues:

The independence of 1960 was certainly an unorthodox solution to the Cyprus problem – a problem which emerged from the clash between the two opposing nationalisms and, perhaps more importantly, from the manipulation of this clash by the British administration. From 1960 to 1974, *enosis* continued to be the dominant Greek-Cypriot ideological orientation and in conjunction with Turkish-Cypriot nationalism, as well as the intervention of foreign interests, Greek-Cypriot nationalism fuelled intercommunal strife, culminating in the Turkish invasion of 1974.¹⁷

It is true that the Greek Cypriots' desperate desire for union with Greece brought upon them unresolved future issues. However, there still is a possibility that if Cyprus' history had not unfolded the way it did, the present situation of the largely bi-ethnic island would be similar to what it already is today.

In 1960, the island had a population of 448,000 Greek Cypriots (seventy-seven per cent) and 104,000 Turkish Cypriots (eighteen per cent).¹⁸ The president of Cyprus was Archbishop Makarios, a Greek Cypriot, and the vice president was Fazıl Küçük, a Turkish Cypriot. Seventy per cent of the government consisted of Greek Cypriots and the remaining thirty per cent consisted of Turkish Cypriots. In 1963, the Archbishop attempted thirteen constitutional amendments. Upon hearing this, the vice president and all Turkish Cypriot politicians abandoned their positions. A Turkish rebellion began late in December. It was followed by intense intercommunal strife.

Originally, the novel set off with Eva scribbling in the fairytale she found on the beach. While I was rewriting, I came across the term Bloody Christmas, which is how Turkish and Turkish Cypriots call the event that triggered the outbreak of

¹⁷ Caesar V. Mavratsas, "The Ideological Contest Between Greek-Cypriot Nationalism and Cypriotism 1974 – 1995: Politics, Social Memory and Identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20.4 (1997): 717 – 718.

¹⁸ Yiannis Papadakis, *Echoes from the Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005) 2.

violence between the two communities. Eric Solsten reports that “on December 21, 1963, serious violence erupted in Nicosia, when a Greek Cypriot police patrol, ostensibly checking identification documents, stopped a Turkish Cypriot couple on the edge of the Turkish quarter. A hostile crowd gathered, shots were fired, and two Turkish Cypriots were killed.”¹⁹ The current opening of *Guilt*, in which Gizem and Murat, a young Turkish Cypriot couple, return home from a dinner party at their Greek Cypriot friends’ house, is loosely based on this event.

In the rest of *Guilt*, the destiny of the couple is not elucidated, but Eva sees them in her dreams, foreshadowing the ugly fate of the island as well as the failure of her future love affair. I started my story with these marginal characters in order to establish the theme of national and political upheaval and unrest as well as to present the Turkish Cypriot Other. Throughout *Guilt*, there are glimpses of presence of the Turkish Cypriot minority as well as of the British and Greek influence, while later on in the novel stories about the atrocities of the Turkish soldiers lurk ominously in the background.

Once the intercommunal conflict began, the Turkish Cypriots, advised by their leaders, retreated into ethnic enclaves and lived without the support of the government. Rebecca Bryant explains that “in my own interviews with Greek Cypriots who had lived in mixed towns and villages until 1963, they almost always said their neighbours left due to pressure by Turkish Cypriot leaders’ intent on provoking an intervention by Turkey and dividing the island.”²⁰ While Greek Cypriots yearned for union with Greece, Turkish Cypriots yearned for dichotomy.

Some of what the minority lived through is portrayed through the characters of Melina Christou and Haluk Yilmaz, who are Eva’s classmates in primary school. Melina and Haluk were not part of the first full draft of the novel. Melina was created alongside Stavros and Sebastian because they complement each other, while Haluk was created after my mother recounted how the only Turkish Cypriot family that used to live in her Famagusta village was chased out of their home and the village altogether by the rest of the people there. After I heard that story, I imagined an abandoned house, overgrown and haunted by the echoes of its former residents.

¹⁹ Eric Solsten, ed, *Cyprus: A Country Study* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993) 35.

²⁰ Rebecca Bryant, “Partitions of Memory: Wounds and Witnessing in Cyprus,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54.2 (2012): 333 – 334.

Haluk and his family flee their home to escape the villagers' increasing hostility, while Melina and her family remain and endure it.

Cyprus is a small island, but it has had a strong military presence for some time now: the Greek Cypriot army, the Turkish army, and two Sovereign Base Areas. Perhaps one of the prominent reasons I am drawn to historical as well as war fiction is the fact I was born a little more than a decade after the invasion and grew up in such a place. The Greek Cypriot army was formed in 1964 due to the rise of the conflict between the two communities. In *Guilt*, I present its early stages and the important part it played in the ensuing events, especially through Lieutenant Andreas Andreou, Rosa's husband, who has to fight in the summer of 1974. In the course of redrafting, I realized Stavros should be enlisting in the second section of the novel and I rewrote his final scene with Eva, as he has to delay his dream of becoming a doctor for two years. Each new draft was more carefully thought out than the last and each time I added further historical scenes.

In 1971, EOKA-B was formed by former members of EOKA, aiming to revive the pursuit of *Enosis*. Between 1971 and 1974, a bomb was planted in my mother's Famagusta village, destroying the Archbishop's statue in its square, and I used that piece of information by adjusting it accordingly into the novel. When the bomb goes off in the village in *Guilt*, Eva is still in London, and the event is dramatized in order for her to finally return to her homeland. Eva has to put aside her rebellious relationship with the foreigner because political danger is imminent on the island.

On the 15th of July 1974, EOKA-B along with the assistance and guidance of the colonels of the Junta in Greece staged a coup d'état in Cyprus against Archbishop Makarios. After the coup, Makarios fled to the United Kingdom, the Junta in Greece collapsed, and Turkey invaded the island with the pretence of securing the fate of the Turkish Cypriots. Turkey captured thirty-seven per cent of the island and all interaction between the two ethnic communities ceased. In a research paper, Huw Halstead has concluded how Greek Cypriots "have experienced Greek and Turkish nationalism at their most intense and most frayed."²¹

²¹ Huw Halstead, "Harmony and Strife in Memories of Greek-Turkish Intercommunal Relationships in Istanbul and Cyprus," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 32.2 (2014): 412.

The atrocities and the war crimes, which took place in the summer of 1974, stained the lives and the psyches of the thousands of Greek Cypriots that lived through it.

There are a number of descriptions for the devastating events that occurred in Cyprus in the summer of 1974; “invasion”, “intervention”, “peace operation”. The parties involved tell their story depending on their political, religious and ethnic background. They choose their omissions and their emphases according to their side of the coin. Everyone has their own truth. Truth is not absolute; especially, when it is tangled up with the most painful memories. Madeleine Leonard explains that “both sides may provide different versions of past events and that neither version may be wholly accurate.”²² *Guilt* is my own representation and interpretation of the island and its people’s past, yet I wanted to avoid concentrating on the grand historical narratives, and foreground instead the story of everyday lives, as lived by a handful of intimately portrayed characters.

Guilt is a historical romance that may be related to the *Bildungsroman* genre. It seeks to capture the daily routine of the Greek Cypriot way of life. The novel shows the daily activities of women, who were working in the fields, taking care of the family, grocery shopping, gardening, doing household tasks, baking. It also shows the daily activities of men, who went to work during the day and to the coffeehouse in the evenings to engage in political discussions. Cultural and social identities, gender roles, and memories all come into play in the telling of a story such as this one.

Researcher Huw Halstead has collected testimonies from Istanbul Greeks and Greek Cypriots. His interviewees have narrated a peaceful coexistence with the Turkish or the Turkish Cypriots as well as violent strife; some of them offered varying narratives in different contexts. Reading through the accounts of the Greek Cypriots that Halstead has interviewed I recognized a number of similarities between them and my parents’ words. Memories are faulty and fragile and they are altered through the years; at times, I have caught my parents patching up the gaps of their memories with the words they thought I wished to hear, with more accurate versions of events, or with silence. Halstead discovers and discusses Greek Cypriots’ “complex relationship with both their “Greek” selves and their “Turkish”

²² Madeleine Leonard, “Echoes from the Past: Intergenerational Memories in Cyprus,” *Children & Society* 28.1 (2014): 74.

Other”²³; “My Greek-Cypriot informants variously referred to themselves as Greeks/*Έλληνες*, Greek Cypriots/*Ελληνοκύπριοι*, or Cypriots/*Κύπριοι*.”²⁴ Oftentimes, and depending on the context, I have caught myself using all three of these terms of self-identification. The same stands for Turkish Cypriots; again, oftentimes, and depending on the context, I have referred to them both as Turkish Cypriots and as Turks. It is a peculiar matter for Greek Cypriots and we attempt to understand it and negotiate meaning through those terms.

It was always my ambition to write a text that would be as plausible and as honest as possible. I realized, however, “honesty” and “plausibility” are fraught concepts. *Guilt* is my interrogation of the reality of that time. I sought to recreate the conventions and incidents of everyday life: the long, hard hours people worked and the gap between the salaries men and women received, the Greek romance magazines Rosa religiously reads (*Romantso* and *Domino*), the fabric softener created from scratch by women with the ash they gathered from fireplaces or earth ovens, the tale about the snake that beats up the villager with its tail, the Turkish spy’s son, who loads his donkey with forbidden carob tree pods, Eva working at the glass house, picking flowers, which was what a lot of teenagers and children at the time did to earn a little extra money for themselves or for their families and so on. All these images were appealing to me, and in my mind, they are drawings of daily activities that no longer exist.

In *Guilt*, history and fiction come together, and through the fictional narrative, I attempt to offer an understanding of the past. Novels that dwell in the past should present events and characters that can represent history with respect. The author of *Guilt* is a product of the twenty-first century, its narrator is a woman in her twenties, living in the twentieth century, who is reminiscing about her past, and its protagonist is a child, who grows up during turbulent times. On occasions, the narrator’s perspective clashes with the point of view of Eva, and both are, of course, distinct from me – the author.

Throughout the years I have been writing this story, I sometimes wondered whether I should divide the narrative between the points of view of Eva and her sisters, Rosa and Sofia, as well as maybe show some scenes through the eyes of

²³ Halstead, 397.

²⁴ Halstead, 397.

Grey, their cat, and have even more diversity in the points of view. The Adamous, as I imagined them, are a typical Greek Cypriot family, in appearance and personality, living in a typical Cypriot village. Eva is central because she is a difficult daughter: she wants to be different.

The *Bildungsroman* is the literary genre concerned with the intellectual and psychological development of the protagonist; it is a novel of personal development. While writing *Guilt*, I was unaware of what *Bildungsroman* was, and after it was brought to my attention by my supervisors, I understood I had unintentionally and unconsciously completed a novel complying with almost all the basic ingredients of the genre. *Guilt* is a coming of age novel. It begins in childhood and follows the protagonist's path to maturity. The young heroine questions the female role she is soon to be assigned, and when she receives the opportunity for education, she moves far away from home, eager to explore. After her search for some meaningful experience and after undergoing a process of maturation, she returns home, but she is consumed by a sense of incompleteness because she was unable to emotionally free herself from familial bonds, and consequently, from the cultural and social ideologies of her homeland.

Tobias Boes explains how Bakhtin has “defined the *Bildungsroman* as a type of novel that constructs “an image of *man* growing in *national-historical time*”²⁵ (Italics in original text). Eva is a *girl* (i.e. woman) growing in such times, and after I read critical writings on the genre, becoming familiar with it and its national implications, I grasped how *Guilt* had a much more dense set of implications than I ever believed it would have, back when it was mere glimpses of scattered scenes in my head. Critics have identified *Bildungsroman* with the connection between the national experience and the life of the protagonist. I have come to the realization that the attraction to my parents' stories was due to the need to tell a female-centred story against the backdrop of national and historical emergence. I cannot say with certainty if a female Cypriot *Bildungsroman* such as *Guilt* has ever been told in fiction before. I am certainly not aware of any.

Apart from the plot, *Guilt* deals with a number of topics the *Bildungsroman* genre normally does, such as alienation, gender roles, nationalism, religion, sexuality, the historical factor and the questioning of society. In the earlier drafts,

²⁵ Tobias Boes, *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the “Bildungsroman.”* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2012) 6.

one of my supervisors commented that the cultural landscape of Cyprus had not been made sufficiently clear to readers, and to overcome the obstacle, I worked on foregrounding the theme of religion, in order to distinguish one community from the other more clearly. Each section in *Guilt* has small scenes dedicated to religion, which were added in the third draft and onward. In the first few pages, Eva hears the church bells echoing throughout the village and crosses herself, revealing her religious affiliation. When she is a teenager, Catholic and Maronite nuns ran her Famagusta high school (Orthodox nuns are in monasteries). In London, Aunt Thea and her family never miss a Sunday service. And finally, after the invasion, Eva works at St. Mary's school in Limassol, which is the equivalent of St. Francis in Famagusta.

The fictional life story of Eva Adamou, similarly to a lot of other stories, is formed by a fusion of the past and the present, while it is navigated by her memories. Earlier, I alluded to the idea of how my narrator's storytelling sometimes clashes with the personality of my heroine due to the fact that they exist in different moments in time. Every now and again, the narrative voice of the younger Eva clashes with the narrative voice of the older Eva; they are both present throughout the novel, but sometimes, they are indistinguishable, and sometimes, one overpowers the other. Eva reflects on events, especially in the final few sections of the story, where her present, more mature narrative voice finally takes over.

In its final form, *Guilt* is narrated in the past tense. However, in the early stages, when I had only yet written her childhood and adolescent years, I experimented by adding small scenes written in the present tense. In those scenes, Eva was in the stage of her life she is in the current epilogue of the novel. She was in her late twenties, married to an unknown man, had a child and was pregnant with her second. The compromise-filled ending was my intention from the beginning. Yet I changed my mind and did not continue with that way of writing because I believed it disrupted the narrative flow by revealing the future too early in the text.

Michelson lists the characteristic conventions of the *Bildungsroman*: "the use of the past to explain the present, and vice versa; memory as a form of psychic coherence; and a double plot that has an echo in a split protagonist."²⁶ I now see that

²⁶ Elana Michelson, "If the Self is a Text, What Genre is it? Structure and Ideology in Narratives of Adult Learning," *Adult Education Quarterly* 63.3 (2012): 206, *SAGE Journals*, Web. 7 July 2016. <<http://aeq.sagepub.com/content/63/3/199.full.pdf+html>>

Eva may be such a split heroine and her adult self collides with her younger self towards the end. Eva is narrating the novel from a position of psychological maturity, losing herself in memories from her rebellious younger years. She recollects and reflects on her actions, experiences and former naivety; she has reached an acceptance she was avoiding at all costs earlier. In the discussion to come, I offer my observations, comments and interpretation of a number of novels that belong in the *Bildungsroman* genre, while drawing upon what other critics have said about them, in order to further contextualize the processes of my own writing and rewriting.

An influential historical novel, which belongs to the genre of *Bildungsroman*, is *School of the Sun*²⁷ by Spanish writer Ana María Matute. *Primera Memoria* is the original title of the book and it translates as “primary memory”, while the narrative illustrates the traumatic transition of the adolescent heroine from childhood to adulthood. The protagonist is the fourteen year old Matia, who is sent to stay with her strict, rich, maternal grandmother on one of the Spanish islands. Her mother is dead and her father is fighting in the Spanish Civil War. In the house, along with her grandmother, there is her wicked fifteen year old cousin.

Throughout, a mature Matia reminisces her teenage years, describing the emotions she felt and the events she experienced until the moment she loses her childhood ignorance and enters the corrupt adult world. Matute uses stream of consciousness and writes in the first person. Her language is often evocative and poetic. I read Matute’s novel in the beginning stages of working on *Guilt*; her child narrator and elliptical plotline have helped to guide my own child narrator and elliptical plotline. Matute grew up during wartime and her past experiences, fears and thoughts are pouring out through Matia; for that reason, her influence on my writing was twice as strong. Matute’s young heroine rebels against social norms, while dealing with the first stages of womanhood.

Emilie Cannon explains how the child characters in Matute’s works “fear adulthood and are driven to seek ways to avoid it by prolonging immaturity – through literature, play, and imagination.”²⁸ Matia comes face to face with gendered

²⁷ Ana Maria Matute, *School of the Sun*, translated from the Spanish by Elaine Kerrigan (London: Quartet Encounters, 1991) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

social norms as well as a sense of estrangement and entrapment that they entail. Eva has a similar challenge to deal with within the Greek Cypriot society of her village, her island.

Matia's thoughts are often preoccupied with the fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen as well as the story of Peter Pan, while she constantly carries with her Gorogó; "my black boy rag doll – Gorogó, Chimney Sweep" (9). She is an adolescent girl, holding on to her childhood toy, seeking comfort from it. In *Guilt*, Eva is obsessed with the fairytale of the brave tin soldier; she daydreams about it, and at times, she identifies with it. Her old fairytale book is one of the very few items Eva manages to take with her after she flees Famagusta.

*Nada*²⁹ by Carmen Laforet is one more Spanish historical novel that engages in the development of its young heroine. *Nada* is a novel about the effects of the Spanish Civil War on the people of the country. It is also a coming of age novel; it focuses on the mental transition of the naïve narrator to maturity. *Nada* and *School of the Sun* share similar themes, and they are both semi-autobiographical. *Nada* shows social injustice, postwar horrors, impaired familial and social relationships, as well as an obsession with existentialism.

Nada and *Primera Memoria* are allegorical commentaries on the destiny of Spain during and after their civil war. They belong in the wave of first reading I did for my PhD project, long before I was aware of what *Bildungsroman* was and what it stood for as well as that these novels belonged in its genre. The two Spanish novels showed me how to work with a young heroine, who is growing up during tough times and in a strict society. They were my starting point and my points of reference.

The narrator of *Nada* is eighteen year old Andrea, who moves to Barcelona to study literature in the university. Andrea is an orphan; her mother has recently died and her father is not mentioned. She moves in with her maternal grandmother and the rest of her extended family, and she joins a dysfunctional household, where its inhabitants, in the aftermath of the civil war, are being devoured by filth and

²⁸ Emilie Cannon, "From Childhood to Adulthood in Ana María Matute's "Primera Memoria"," *Letras Femeninas* 17.1/2 (1991): 37, *JSTOR*, Web. 6 June 2016.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23022020?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>

²⁹ Carmen Laforet, *Nada*, translated from the Spanish by Edith Grossman (London: Vintage, 2008) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

violence. Catherine Davies argues how *Nada* reveals “the misery and dreadful psychological scars caused by the War.”³⁰

In *School of the Sun*, the grandmother is the one that bestows on herself the role of the patriarch, forcing her beliefs and the tradition on Matia, while in *Nada* it is Angustias, Andrea’s aunt. Angustias takes it upon herself to force Andrea into obedience by imposing on her niece the patriarchal tradition that was once imposed on her. The day after Andrea arrives, Angustias tells her that “a young girl in Barcelona must be like a fortress” (14). Chown offers her critic on the matter: “Mothers and older women are frequently described as perpetrators of repressive values, inhibitors of youthful struggles for freedom.”³¹ In *Guilt*, it is Eva’s mother that tries to restrain her at every turn.

Laforet’s novel has been a reference point in that, while I was writing, I was reassured about the nature of my own narrator. Eva, too, is a guarded heroine and a distant, observant narrator, and at first, she did not often allow the reader into her mind. Apart from the fact that was a writing technique I wanted to adopt, it is also the result of the circumstances under which the two girls have grown up in as well as of the events they have experienced. In the process of the redrafting, I understood I should not make the reader work harder than they should in order to figure out what is going on, considering that the entire novel is from Eva’s point of view.

Both *Nada* and *School of the Sun* are retrospective novels, while both Laforet and Matute use first person narration as well as stream of consciousness. Bergmann explains how “*Nada* and *Primera Memoria* both depict adolescent girls confronting the social restrictions of conservative families during the Civil War and the postwar period.”³² *Guilt* is similar in meaning and in atmosphere to these two novels.

Genres are not mutually exclusive. A book of a growing up, which entails romance and happens against the backdrop of history, combines all three. This is true in the case of *Guilt*, considering the novel is composed of these three elements.

³⁰ Catherine Davies, *Spanish Women’s Writing 1849 – 1996* (London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1998) 186.

³¹ Linda E. Chown, “American Critics and Spanish Women Novelists, 1942 – 1980,” *Signs* 9.1, *Women and Religion* (1983): 104, *JSTOR*, Web. 6 June 2016.
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173665>>

³² Emilie L. Bergmann and Richard Herr, eds. *Mirrors and Echoes: Women’s Writing in Twentieth-Century Spain* (California: University of California Press, 2007) 6.

Radway reasons that “an unhappy ending is the most depressing thing that can happen in a romance.”³³ I did not want to foreground romance at the expense of the other components. I hope it does not overwhelm the primary centre of interest, which is how the fates of people living in a village of a tiny Mediterranean island in the 1970s are shaped by the currents of national and world history. Considering *Guilt* follows the life of a little girl growing up into adulthood, some sort of romance seemed almost inevitable.

Until very recent drafts, there was a tension in the novel between history and romance. While I was writing, I often did not think in a fully nuanced textual way. I was penning down the story I had in my head in an unpolished, rough around the edges manner. It was only once I had finished that I understood I had not treated either history or romance as carefully as I should have, and began making more nuanced textual decisions and changes. While I was rewriting, I had my focused attention on history, neglecting romance. It was only later I realized the two, in *Guilt* at least, were interconnected, because Eva is equally affected by both. They had to be reconciled and balance each other out. After I had altered the passages about history and politics by polishing them and embedding them more smoothly into the storytelling (third draft), I started shedding light on her love life (fourth draft), as up until that point, it was hidden from the reader. Initially, I wished the novel to be set entirely on the island and for her experience with Darling to be a mystery, but these were choices which, my initial readers (my supervisors) advised me did not work well.

I had one more important challenge to face. I had to show how Eva was changed by the encounter with Darling and the war. I strived to show the change with her pregnancy, because similarly to her life in London, I had chosen not to engage too much with it, fearing it would take the focus away from Cyprus. In the end, it was difficult to leave that part of her life unrepresented. Previously, Eva was indecisive about the baby because I was indecisive about how to handle it; however, the miscarriage was preplanned. In the final form of the novel, Eva is desperate to keep the baby, unrealistically hoping that the war will end and she will reunite with Darling, and distraught with the miscarriage. She loses everything and has to start anew.

³³ Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance* (London & New York: Verso, 1987) 99.

In the last few decades, there has been an increase in the sales and in the popularity of the historical romance. Historical romances can be written by women writers purely for a female audience, or they can be written by both men and women and they can be equally enjoyed by readers of both genders. Two of the more popular examples of the second notion are *Atonement*³⁴ by Ian McEwan and *Memoirs of a Geisha*³⁵ by Arthur Golden. The audience I am aiming at is men and women of all ages. *Guilt* is not a children's text, even if there is a child narrator in the beginning, and it is not *only* a young adult's text, even if there is an adolescent narrator in one of its sections.

In the introduction of her book on the historical romance, Helen Hughes argues that if a historical novel has a romantic story at its core it should be considered a historical romance.³⁶ Historical romances should not be thought of as or be rendered to merely romance stories, which just so happen to be set in the past. With a historical romance, as with novels of all genres, the writer can present a variety of themes (gender roles, social class, cultural identity and so on). The historical romance novel, depending on who its writer and target audience are, can either exaggeratedly focus on a love affair or it can be a social critique of a past period alongside a romantic relationship. Historical romances written by women purely for women normally have as a sole purpose the union of the hero and the heroine by the end, and therefore, their plots revolve around that single goal.

In *Guilt*, by contrast, I wanted history and romance to complement each other. I did not wish *Guilt* to be considered as just a romantic love story. Alternatively, the novel could have been about a young man, who had grown up in Famagusta, leading the average urban life, enlisting in the army in 1964 and fighting against the Turkish soldiers in the summer of 1974. If the novel had been about a young man fighting during the Turkish invasion, I would have focused on the sexual war crimes soldiers commit. *Guilt*, then, dwells in the cultural/textual space between the national history of an island and its everyday histories, whether these are portrayals of restrained romances or of domestic daily lives.

³⁴ Ian McEwan, Ian, *Atonement* (London: Vintage, 2002).

³⁵ Arthur Golden, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (London: Vintage, 1998).

³⁶ Helen Hughes, *The Historical Romance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993) 2.

In 2004, *Suite Française*³⁷ by the French writer Irène Némirovsky was published. Némirovsky was born in Kiev in 1903 and was of Russian Jewish descent; however, she lived most her life in France and wrote her novels in French, but was denied French citizenship. She converted to Catholicism, but she still was arrested by the French police in 1942 and was deported to Auschwitz, where she died of typhus a month later. Before her arrest and during the first few years of WWII, Némirovsky wrote drafts of her first two novellas, while she wished *Suite Française* would have been a novel made up of five novellas. David Carroll contends that *Suite Française* “is the story of Irène Némirovsky’s own struggle to come to terms with the German Occupation of France.”³⁸ After her death, her notebook came to the possession of her older daughter, Denise, who was instrumental in publishing it.

What attracted me the most in *Suite Française* is the circumstances under which it was written. Its author penned it down during the ongoing WWII, while she and her family were in great danger, and that is the true tragedy of the novel: she is writing about historical events that were still unfolding, and which were threatening her survival. The way she describes the Paris exodus reminded me of the stories my parents shared with me about the days, weeks, and months after they fled Famagusta. Némirovsky captures the chaos and confusion refugees live through during wartimes. *Suite Française* has been an inspiring novel to me, as it concerns itself with the inescapable intrusion of state and world history into the private lives of civilians, who are often the main casualties of war.

The first novella is called “Storm in June” and the second “Dolce”. “Storm in June” depicts the Paris exodus in the summer of 1940, when the German army invaded France, while “Dolce” depicts the life of the French during the German occupation in Bussy, a small village outside the capital. “Dolce” describes the relationship between the Frenchwoman, Lucile Angellier, and the German Lieutenant, Bruno von Falk, who is billeted in her house. Madame Angellier, her mother-in-law, is a conservative, stern older woman, who intends to keep Lucille in her place by enforcing her (and the nation’s) repressive principles.

³⁷ Irène Némirovsky, *Suite Française*, translated from the French by Sandra Smith (London: Vintage, 2007) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

³⁸ David Carroll, “Excavating the Past: *Suite Française* and the German Occupation of France,” *Yale French Studies* 121 (2012): 98, *JSTOR*, Web. 6 June 2016.
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23645855>>

The budding, forbidden romance between the Frenchwoman and the German Lieutenant is short lived. Bruno leaves France because Germany intends to invade Russia, while Lucille rejects him, ending up embracing her embedded national identity. She refuses to succumb to her desires and thinks the refined restraint of her feelings for him is what defines her as a civilized woman. In *Guilt*, Eva experiences a similar event. She is caught between David Darling and Stavros, and consequently, what each man stands for. She is caught between London and Famagusta, between the foreign and the familiar. Lucille conceals her close relationship with her occupier and Eva conceals hers with her former colonizer; however, Lucille's mother-in-law and Eva's mother sense their secret. Gossip could be deadly for a woman in a village or in a small town and sleeping with the enemy was the biggest national (and therefore moral) crime a woman could commit during a war occupation or colonization.

This similarity is not the result of direct influence of Némirovsky on me, but reading *Suite Française* and thoroughly thinking about it later on, helped me to further imagine the relationship of Eva and Darling, their scenes together as well as Eva's flashbacks and thoughts about him. Finally, Rosa plays with fire too (the second section of the novel is titled after her), as she becomes friendly with the new schoolteacher of the village. Similarly to Némirovsky's heroine, Rosa strays and Eva strives to put her back on track before she ruins her reputation within the narrow-minded community of their village.

A good illustration of romance's cultural malleability is *Half of a Yellow Sun*³⁹ by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It is another historical novel, which played an important part in the process of revising and rewriting *Guilt*. It is written in English and it takes place before and during the Nigerian civil war. Of all the novels I discuss in this critical commentary, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Difficult Daughters* are the only ones originally written in English. Both, like *Guilt*, emanate from the sphere of influence of the former British Empire.

There is strong sexual presence in Adichie's novel, while Laforet, Matute and Némirovsky write about young women who are sexually restricted by societal norms. In the early stages of writing *Guilt*, I was leaning towards the refined

³⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

restraint that the latter list of texts demonstrate, but by the end, I became more open to the idea of writing more clearly articulated passages about my heroine's sexuality.

I read *Half of a Yellow Sun* halfway through my PhD. After I had finished the first draft of *Guilt* and was rewriting, I revisited it because I wanted to take a second look at how it combines romance with history as well as the personal with the public, and shows the scars left on people by war. Adichie's novel concerns itself with ethnicity, politics and violence, while at the centre of it there are the drama and fate of familial and romantic relationships. The language is evocative and detailed, while the structure jumps back and forth between the various stages of the Biafran conflict, adding mystery to the several plot strands of the novel.

The storyline follows the lives of the educated, middleclass twins, Olanna and Kainene, their family, friends and lovers, while the narrative time is split between three characters. Olanna, Richard and Ugwu come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Richard is an expatriate Englishman, who struggles with his sense of belonging, and Ugwu is Olanna's loyal houseboy, who commits war crimes after he is forced to fight. Olanna is a privileged Lagos woman, who undergoes physical hardship as she builds a family life in the territories that seek to secede from the rest of Nigeria.

Zoe Norridge notes that "Adichie offers sensual and detailed accounts of sexual desire and intercourse between her principle adult characters and a tender and yet disturbing description of the houseboy Ugwu's awakening sexuality."⁴⁰ Adichie, as well as Manju Kapur (whom I had also started reading and then returned to) and the Croatian novelist Olja Savičević (who I will mention in the upcoming section), are not afraid to write sexually explicit scenes as they show the rise and fall of their characters' relationships before, during and after wartime. Initially, as I have said, I intended to keep Eva's love life a secret, but to solve the mystery I had created around her and Darling, I decided to emulate these novelists' practice.

In the "In a Land Far, Far Away" section, I inserted erotic passages to shed further light on Eva as well as to create a bold contrast between the consensual and the sexual violence that occurred during the invasion. As I mention in *Guilt*,

⁴⁰ Zoë Norridge, "Sex as Synecdoche: Intimate Languages of Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*," *Research in African Literatures* 43.2 (2012): 21, *JSTOR*, Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/reseafirilite.43.2.18>>

abortions skyrocketed after the summer of 1974. Raping Greek Cypriot girls and women in masses was a tactic of war for the Turkish soldiers. I touch on the subject obliquely, when Eva is a refugee and walks through the tents in the fields in Dhekelia, overhearing conversations about rape victims. What is more, these girls and women had to not only come to terms with the barbaric experience they lived through, but with the shame and stigma within the narrow-minded community of the island.

Towards the end of her novel, Adichie touches on another important topic related to war and that is the missing people. Kainene, Olanna's twin, goes missing right before both the end of the war and the end of the novel. By keeping Kainene's fate unknown, Adichie does not offer Olanna, Richard (who was her lover) or her family closure, while the reader is left with a big question unanswered; what happened to strong, pragmatic Kainene? Adichie succeeds in creating that permanent feeling of unfulfillment, which haunts the family of a missing person. As a result of the Turkish invasion, over a thousand Greek Cypriot soldiers and civilians of all ages were reported as missing. To this day, their fate remains unknown. I allude to the subject through Andreas, who was missing in action for two months before he returns to his family after the war is lost because I wanted to give Rosa a positive ending.

Meredith Coffey discusses how Kainene's disappearance does not only testify to the tragedies of war, how her character allegorically corresponds to Biafra, and what political possibilities that might allow.⁴¹ Whether Adichie wrote about Kainene and her disappearance with national and political implications in mind or not, certain critics and readers cannot help but think so. When reading and revisiting *Half of a Yellow Sun*, I paid close attention to the characters' relationships and the way in which national and historical circumstances were developed and shown through them, which is what I am most interested in, as is apparent in my novel. In the following section of the critical commentary, I discuss further the role of the nation in *Guilt* and its relation to the public and the private spheres as well as its relation to gender.

⁴¹ Meredith Coffey, "'She Is Waiting': Political Allegory and the Specter of Secession in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*," *Research in African Literatures* 45.2 (2014): 65, *JSTOR*, Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/reseafirlite.45.2.63>>

Nation and Gender

In the backdrop of my novel, there are nationalisms and politics clashing in the enclosed geography of the island, so that the public sphere (the grand political events), sometimes, inevitably interferes with the private sphere (the events that involve Eva's family, friends and lovers) – just as in Kapur and Adichie. The reflections on genre contained in the previous section lead me to consider the concepts of national allegory and imagined communities, as well as the relationship between nationalism and gender. These concepts became a part of my thinking about writing at the very end of the drafting process, partly as a result of conversations with one of my supervisors.

Fredric Jameson writes: “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*”⁴² (Italics in original text). In his influential 1986 essay, the American literary critic suggests how the protagonists of novels and the authors of those novels from the so called third-world must be interpreted as representations of their nation states. Jameson suggests how the literature that is produced by the third-world has one vital structural difference from the literature that is produced in the western world: it is incapable of separating the private from the public, the individual from the cultural, social, and political elements.

Jameson names the literature that comes from countries that have lived through colonialism and imperialism in recent years as “alien text”⁴³ and as “west's Other.”⁴⁴ According to Jameson what distinguishes the dominant western world from the countries that are distinctively different from it, is contemporary history (the clash of the colonizers and the colonized) as well as geographical and cultural

⁴² Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (1986): 69, *JSTOR*, Web. 7 July 2016.
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/466493>>

⁴³ Jameson, 66.

⁴⁴ Jameson, 85.

aesthetics (the cosmopolitan as opposed to the exotic, the disciplined west as opposed to the oriental mentality). Jameson argues that all third-world texts are national allegories because they, necessarily and unavoidably, fuse the political with the personal and can only be perceived from that perspective, and that for that reason, they are alien to the western world.

I read Jameson's essay after initial drafts, which caused me to reflect on the question of whether *Guilt* is a national allegory. I wondered how Eva's story may be related to the historical narrative of Cyprus, and whether I initially intended to subconsciously separate the private from the public aspects of her story. The concept of national allegory defines the story of an individual (in this case – an individual's Bildungsroman – maturing) against the background of metaphorical national maturing or liberation and that is undoubtedly the case with *Guilt*.

Cyprus is an island located in the Mediterranean Sea as well as in Eastern Europe. It is one of the smallest countries of the European Union, and it is, at times, marginalized within it. It is a divided country, dominated by larger, more influential countries. Eva's story too, is a story about domination, breaking out and a bid for personal sovereignty. Countless countries have suffered because of nasty nationalisms throughout the years, and Eva's aspirations bring her difficulties and suffering, too.

What the nation should stand for has been twisted through the centuries and nationalism is a prickly thorn with harmful effects. Szeman discusses how the nation is "conflated with the "political" and, when it is not, it becomes a term that seems to make reference to a kind of collectivity or community that is idealized when it should be placed into question."⁴⁵ The story of Eva's life with and in opposition to her family both celebrates and interrogates notions of community, loyalty and individuality.

In *Guilt*, I transferred my parents' stories into the narrative, while attempting to imagine what the people that lived through that time experienced and felt. Through imagination, which has textual and historical implications, I am offering my interpretation of the past. Despite the fact that the nation is not in the foreground, the truth is that there is a national background in the novel, and

⁴⁵ Imre Szeman, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 814, *Project MUSE*, Web. 2 Aug. 2016. <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/30727>>

sometimes, it comes together with the protagonist's plotline, while some others, it diverges. When Eva is a child, she cannot comprehend why the adults fight all the time. She does not distinguish between the two Cypriot national communities, because in her eyes and untainted mind, everyone looks the same. She overhears adults talk about politics and she listens to breaking news on the radio, but she is not directly affected by the conflict. When she is a teenager, the people on the island live during a transition period; it is the lull before the storm. To my mind, it is a heartbreaking moment, when Haluk sneaks in the village late one night to secretly revisit his old house, but comes across Eva and Stavros. All three teenagers are terrified. Finally, when Eva is a young woman, national and political extremities become more and more intense and demand to be dealt with. A bomb is planted in her village, while a few hours after Rosa loses her baby, the coup takes place.

If *Guilt* had been a *Bildungsroman* about a man instead of a woman, the hero may have been a patriot and politically proactive because that was how many male Cypriot youth used to be at the time I am writing about. Eva, however, represents the place of women on the island and the national history comes through "small" everyday histories. Eva does not voice her objections to the conflict and its many consequences because she has to care about her role in her house and village. As she has no voice or power over how Cypriot politics is unfolding, she grows distant from it and indifferent to it.

With a heroine, who is growing up in a village, there were restrictions to how I could have her behave. National allegory does not necessarily mean that Eva should have been involved with politics. In *We Are All Heroes Here* I wanted to write about young adults, who were full of ideals and a need to fight for a better future. In *Guilt*, I have touched upon this concept only slightly through Odysseas and his illegal broadcaster friend. If Eva had grown up in the cosmopolitan Famagusta, she could have been a bolder character. I would have liked for her to have reacted and rebelled for the greater good, but the life of women in villages was different.

"All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous,"⁴⁶ Anne McClintock writes, theorizing the link between nationalism and gender.

⁴⁶ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge: New York & London, 1995) 352.

McClintock stresses women's frequent separation from larger questions of nations: "women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency;"⁴⁷ I will discuss this point further shortly. Even after the invasion, in the Dhekelia fields, in between mourning for what has been lost, the women in my novel begin washing clothes and preparing small snacks for their children. They drink Cypriot coffee and gossip. Eva's mother is pointlessly sweeping the floors of the half built house they find refuge in. The women find the remotest of comfort in their daily domestic activities, which take them away from the hardship caused by competing nationalisms.

Nationalism and patriarchy are dangerous, which is one of the points *Guilt* makes. Szeman argues that "the nation-state has long represented the specifically modernist political project of creating citizen-subjects defined through their attachment to national identities"⁴⁸; and right in the middle of it, there is the exploitation and the victimization of the civilians, as I tried to indicate via fictional means in my novel.

Consciously, yet carefully, I reflect on Cyprus' history through the distant narrative of the heroine's social context. *Guilt* may be read, I hope, as a subdued but distinct critique on the dangers of nationalism. In the first section, I show how children in the primary school village change their attitude towards Melina and Haluk because of the negative things they hear at home, from their families, who in turn, are affected by governments. It was a decision that developed over the course of the redrafting. My attempted aim was to show the thoughts of the young people. For example, the unknown Greek Cypriot youth, who broadcasts illegally and is passionate about the future of his county, as well as Odysseas, who wishes to enlist and fight, but because he cannot he feels as if he is nothing more than a useless cripple.

Benedict Anderson, who studies the subject of nationalism in his famous book *Imagined Communities*⁴⁹, suggests that the nation is imagined as "*limited*," as "*sovereign*," and as a "*community*"⁵⁰ (Italics in original text). Anderson discusses

⁴⁷ McClintock, 354.

⁴⁸ Szeman, 818.

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso: London & New York, 2006).

how people feel a connection to the community they are living in, arguing however that the sense of community has to be imagined. Tom Phillips explains this element as “the multilayered nature of personal attachment.”⁵¹ Anderson is concerned with the sacrifices as well as the crimes the citizens are willing to make to satisfy their countries.

My novel highlights the importance of familial bonds and the role they play in these imagined communities. People feel connected to their family, their friends and their circle of acquaintances, and more often than not, the connection is extended to the wider context of their country. People have the need to identify with others and they often do so with those that are in geographical proximity to them as well as with those that share the same culture, language and religion with them.

In *Guilt*, I wished to present “the people” as god-fearing patriots, who often lead patriarchal lives. However, I presented only a portion of the Greek Cypriot community, only a deliberately nameless village. I have tried to write a novel that does take sides, because both parties expressed extreme nationalism at the time and the innocents took the blame.

*Farewell, Cowboy*⁵² by the Croatian poet and writer Olja Savičević is a critique on the dangers of nationalism, too. It is one of the last novels I have read and it is also a female Bildungsroman. Similarly to my book, it is situated in politically troubled peripheral Europe. Savičević as well as her novel’s narrator, Dada, grew up during the Yugoslav wars and experienced its consequences. Savičević does not dwell directly on war, but there are references to it, it lurks in the background and its aftermath lingers in the atmosphere.

Savičević’s prose is poetic and often conversational, while Dada and her sister often speak in slang and local dialect (which I could access only indirectly, since I read the book in translation). The author of *Farewell, Cowboy* experiments with language and structure in a way that I chose not to. I wanted the story I was writing to flow effortlessly and transparently. *Farewell, Cowboy* is a brooding,

⁵⁰ Anderson, 7.

⁵¹ Tim Phillips, “Imagined Communities and Self-Identity: An Exploratory Quantitative Analysis,” *Sociology* 36.3 (2002): 602, *SAGE Journals*, Web. 7 July 2016.
<<http://soc.sagepub.com/content/36/3/597.full.pdf+html>>

⁵² Olja Savičević, *Farewell, Cowboy*, translated from the Croatian by Celia Hawkesworth (London: Istros Books, 2015) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

melancholic modernist novel. It is similar to *Guilt* in the sense that personal and national histories and tragedy are intertwined.

When Dada returns from her country's capital to her hometown, Split, a tiny coastal town in Croatia (she, too, has been away), she rejoins her mother and sister. Her mother is distraught due to her son's suicide and is surviving on sleeping pills and soap operas, while her sister is a fearless woman, who has accepted her place in the world. Attention is paid on the relationship between women, that of the mother and her daughters and that between sisters, as well as on the relationship between a person and their hometown; *Guilt* is concerned with these topics, too, and a portion of Cyprus' national history is represented through them.

I could see the resonance between the novel I had written and *Farewell, Cowboy*. Both in *Guilt* and in *Farewell, Cowboy* the influence of the western world is shown through American cinema, with the difference that I refer to the influence of Greek cinema on Cyprus, too. At the centre of Savičević's novel, there is the heroine's quest, as she plays the detective, which is another popular notion of the western world, in order to discover the truth behind her little brother's death.

Cyprus, both before and after the war, has been seen as a tourist destination, while it has the label, along with Ireland, of the only divided countries in Europe. Croatia, too, is a country that has been identified as a tourist destination and has political problems. Dada caustically comments on how her hometown is pouring over with tourists, who are eager to enjoy the exotic Mediterranean, the warm weather and the sea, while the country and its people are still struggling to recover from the war. Dada paints the picture of a dirty, decaying town, with wild, eccentric locals; all of Savičević's characters are troubled and as destroyed by the war as their country is. Dada defines Split as a place drowning in dust, which is how my Eva in *Guilt* and George in *From Famagusta to Vienna* define Famagusta. The dust is familiar and permanent. Dada, on a larger scale, is struggling with acceptance, seeking redemption. Savicevic's novel confronted me with the kind of bleak and ironic narrative ending I did not want to write myself.

Is it the case, then, that a person without a sense of national solidarity, even an imagined one, is almost a human without a name, without an identity? Another

good example is Eel, the narrator of the Italian novel *The Moon and the Bonfires*⁵³ by Italian poet and writer Cesare Pavese. Eel is the expatriate protagonist, who wastes the entirety of the novel seeking to reconnect with his hometown, but his nostalgic quest ends in failure. He is nameless and reveals to the reader only his nickname; Eel. He has no physical appearance and nobody remembers him once he returns. While reading the novel, I imagined him with a blurred box over his face.

The original title of the novel is *La Luna e i Falò* and I read it halfway through writing *Guilt*. It is Pavese's final novel and it is "considered by critics as his masterpiece or credo."⁵⁴ In August of 1950, five months after its publication, Pavese committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. His death occurred after his love affair with the American actress and model, Constance Dowling, came to an end. The novel takes place after WWII, capturing the tragedies of a torn postwar Italy, as well as its author's broken heart.

The novel relates to a semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman, and concerns itself with the lives of the urban middle and working classes, as *Guilt* also is. Pavese's protagonist dwells on the impossibility of belonging in his hometown and of an unfailing love affair. Memories have an essential role, while the past and the present are interlaced. The enigmatic narrator offers the reader small scenes, hints and flashbacks, urging us to weave the bits and pieces of his life story together; it is up to us to connect the dots of his disjointed narrative.

The novels I am discussing in the critical commentary toy with memories and time. *The Moon and the Bonfires* was one of the first novels I read which worked with a complicated chronological order of events, considering its protagonist's life. After reading *The Moon and the Bonfires*, I felt much more confident proceeding with the elliptical plotline and cinematic technique *Guilt*'s shape is fundamentally based on, believing that it can potentially work well in the future, and which it did during the writing and the redrafting process. Eel is a depressed, detached narrator, while Eva is not. It was never my intention for my

⁵³ Cesare Pavese, *The Moon and the Bonfires*, translated from the Italian by R. W. Flint (New York: New York Review Books, 2002) All other references to the text will be given parenthetically.

⁵⁴ Antonio Viselli, "Between Myth and Mythology: The Multiple Ulysses in Cesare Pavese's *La luna e i falò*," *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 46.2 (2012): 403, *SAGE Journals*, Web. 7 July 2016. <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001458581204600207>>

narrator or for my writing to be disorienting, as Pavese's so skilfully is. I wanted *Guilt* to be an accessible, transparent text.

"It was strange how everything was different and still the same" (29), Eel says and his thoughts are those of an expatriate. On their return to Cyprus, the same thoughts go through the minds of my Eva in *Guilt* and of George in *From Famagusta to Vienna*. The landscape and the traditions remain the same, and the people forever come and go. Dada in *Farewell, Cowboy* shares similar thoughts on her return to Split. Dada, Eel, George and Eva feel either lost or trapped in their homelands. Aunt Thea in *Guilt*, which is a character I developed further once the section "In a Land Far, Far Away" was formed, represents I believe a good portion of first generation expatriates. Aunt Thea has lived more decades in London than she has in Famagusta, but she reminisces about her birthplace, longing to return to it. If she had done that though, she would have found it difficult to reconnect after all those years to the land and its people.

A macabre atmosphere surrounds women in *The Moon and the Bonfires*. Santina lives in the small town of Canelli, where Eel is from. She is beautiful and untamed. When Eel asks about her, Nuto, his childhood friend, replies that she was "a bitch and a spy" (64). Eel and the reader discover her tragic fate in the final pages. During WWII, Santina works at the Fascist headquarters as she is determined to climb the economic and social ladder, but the community of Canelli condemns her for it. Her every move is scrutinized and endless gossip goes on about her. "They think that the only life for a girl is the life of a fool" (150), Santina says, referring to the people of Canelli, "I should kiss the hand that hits me. But I bite the hand that hits me" (150). In the end, the partisans kill her and burn her (as men would lust after her soulless body).

It is no secret that women all over Europe, who were accused of sleeping with the enemy during WWII, were abused by their own, and were even killed, once the war was over. Regarding *Guilt*, if Eva's pregnancy had been discovered, she would have committed two crimes in the eyes of her family and community; one, she would be an unwed mother, and two, because she had an affair with an Englishman, an Englezos, as the Greek Cypriots used to call them during the colonization and onwards.

Regarding Darling, one of my supervisors wondered what Eva truly feels about *him*, rather than him being English. The source of Eva's strange attraction for

him, however, is what he represents in her eyes and in the novel at large: European education, dominance, and culture. Julie Mullaney writes: “Postcolonial literatures encompass that complex and various body of writing produced by individuals, communities and nations with distinct histories of colonialism and which diversely treats its origins, impacts and effects in the past and the present.”⁵⁵ *Guilt* begins in the first few years following the independence of Cyprus, and at times, it hints at the colonial era and its consequences; therefore, it would be beneficial to consider how my novel is partially a postcolonial Bildungsroman.

Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez discusses how the postcolonial Bildungsroman “often makes the hero a representative of his community, or at least, emphasizes the pernicious effects of the dissociation between the protagonist and the society to which he belongs (a divorce generally caused by Western education).”⁵⁶ Eva’s story begins once she discovers the English translation of “The Brave Tin Soldier” on the sandy beach of her Mediterranean island, a former British colony in peripheral Europe. Eva feels marginalized within her community, which is a trait of the traditional Bildungsroman novel; however, the English translation of her favourite fairytale book, which is the reason she wants to study in the West in the first place, fuels these feelings of marginalization further.

“In a Land Far, Far Away” is in the middle of the novel, and even if it is one of the shorter sections, it serves symbolically, as it is a milestone in Eva’s maturation process. The reader is offered a glimpse of her life in London and it is obvious she is caught between the former colonizers’ culture and her own deeply embedded cultural roots. What often defines the postcolonial Bildungsroman is the protagonists’ journey away from their parent culture and their absorption into the colonizers’ environment, through which the contradiction of the two civilizations is established. In London, I paint Eva as the exotic foreigner, unruly in appearance and character. Her national solidarity is shaken because she has familiarized herself with Western values, but ultimately, her inherent loyalty to her support system in Famagusta (her sisters and mother) shines through. Eva both detests and sympathizes with her community, but the latter emotion increases after the Turkish

⁵⁵ Mullaney, 3.

⁵⁶ Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez, “Subverting the *Bildungsroman* in Postcolonial Fiction: Romesh Gunsekera’s *Reef*,” *World Literature Written in English* 36.1 (1997): 34, *Taylor & Francis Online*, Web. 23 October 2013.
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449859708589260>>

invasion. By the end, Eva reaches a final recognition of belonging to the culture she emerged from.

Piret Peiker points out that the postcolonial Bildungsroman “often draws upon the exogamous romance trope, but it is re-emplotted as accounts of illicit loves and twisted desires across ethnic or racial lines, which end in tragically or ironically presented fiascos.”⁵⁷ There is a general prohibition of English men by the Adamou family, who are reluctant to permit Eva to study in London because they want to protect her national identity from the Western culture and tradition. As far as Darling’s feelings for Eva are concerned, it is evident he wishes to dominate and mould her according to his way of life. I painted him with a seemingly harmless personality, yet one perhaps could consider him to in some respects have the attitude of a colonizer; he is drawn to the exoticness of her appearance, yet wishes to alter her mentality. Their affair, even though meaningful, is a transition period for Eva to satisfy her attraction to the Western world.

Suite Française, Primera Memoria, Nada, La Luna e i Falò, Farewell, Cowboy, Difficult Daughters as well as my *Guilt* all study the consequences of love, conveying its sterility; only the French novel can be given the benefit of the doubt because we will never find out Irène Némirovsky’s fully realized version of her two characters, Lucile Angellier and Bruno von Falk. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the only one in which the characters do not give up on each other or their relationships. They work together not only to survive, but to prevail. The characters go through a number of hardships; they are tested during the war, but they stay together and conquer the difficulties. In *Guilt*, I wish to show humans, especially women, overcoming obstacles, as Adichie does in her novel. I cannot say with certainty whether I wished to do that from the beginning because it was only after I had finished the first full draft that I began thinking about the topics more thoroughly. When I was in the process of rewriting, it became apparent that female solidarity is a key aspect in my novel.

Postcolonial and feminist studies found a connection in the figure of the colonized female, who is doubly marginalized, who experiences oppression both by colonialism and patriarchy. In the 1960s and 1970s, the women’s movement was

⁵⁷ Piret Peiker, “A.H. Tammsaare’s *Truth and Justice* as a Postcolonial Bildungsroman,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 46.2 (2015): 202, *Taylor & Francis Online*, Web. 11 November 2017.
< <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2015.1009132> >

preoccupied with patriarchy and the history of women's oppression by it as well as the silencing of their voices. Western feminism, however, was criticized for adopting a universal approach, and as a result, for patronizing Third World women by speaking on their behalf. As Cheryl McEwan argues, Western feminism neglected to take into account "divisions among women based on nationality, race, class, religion, region, language and sexual orientation;"⁵⁸ therefore, considering the layered nature of women's experiences, gender began to be considered in conjunction with a number of other determining, diverse specificities.

In *Guilt*, I write about Cypriot women, who exist in a once colonized country, in peripheral Europe, and their femininity is not separate from that fact, but more specifically, I write about a rebellious daughter, who rejects the role of the mere emblem of national tradition and culture. The heroine in my novel confronts what it is to be labelled a difficult daughter by the patriarchal family, community and nation at large. In *Guilt*, women's personal histories are overshadowed by an interlacing of the national with the feminine.

In her book, *Stories of Women*⁵⁹, Elleke Boehmer explores postcolonial women's writing in relation to the nation. Postcolonial women writers, Boehmer writes, "confronted the symbolic inheritance that is the peripheral figure of the postcolonial national daughter."⁶⁰ Boehmer explains that these writers concentrate on the daughter figure in order to explore her relationship to her father-led family, community, and nation-state. *Guilt* begins once Eva has her first period, once she officially becomes a symbolic bearer of the nation; she is now bound by her fertility, rising sexuality, and tradition. Throughout the novel, Eva is caught between the need to become a woman with an individual identity, independent of patriarchal and cultural codes, and being a good daughter. She strives for selfhood, while her story unfolds in parallel with national history.

In *Guilt*, moreover, marriage and tradition are threatened by education and modernity. When Eva is in London, she embraces her sexuality and explores her desires, while she witnesses women in empowering positions (i.e. the two

⁵⁸ Cheryl McEwan, "Postcolonialism, feminism and development: intersections and dilemmas," *Progress in Development Studies* 1.2 (2001): 96, *SAGE Journals*, Web. 30 October 2017. < <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/146499340100100201> >

⁵⁹ Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ Boehmer, 106.

policewomen patrolling on their horses, the first female bus driver). In London, Eva becomes a student and a reader, and her mind is stretched and shaped by Western education. The roles, however, which concern her the most, are those of the daughter and sister. It is a deciding moment, when Eva confesses she cares about Cyprus' fate, and chooses to return to the island to be by her loved ones' side.

In the twentieth century, Greek Cypriot women, and especially the ones living in villages, were defined by their docile roles as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters. The oppression and marginalization they patiently tolerated and accepted were translated as humility and virtue. They were stripped of their voices and they were presented as the perfect paragons of domesticity. They were the bearers of life and the creators of new citizens and that was their sole purpose in life. I now realize this entire theoretical and historical complex looms behind and beyond my initial inspiration by my family history. I previously pointed out my need to have the women triumph, to overcome obstacles, and that is the location of my novel's political potential.

Women who rebelled against the stereotypical female role that had been allocated to them since birth came face to face with the disapproval and hostility their community showed and treated them with. Their sexuality was attacked and their morality was questioned. As Vassiliadou argues, "the dominant, patriarchal discourse of nationalism becomes adopted by most women, who rarely challenge it, thus ensuring an 'easier', more secure position within Cypriot society."⁶¹ Her insightful essay was written in 2002, two years before the island joined the European Union.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, to which I now return, was relevant to the writing of *Guilt* in ways I was initially only partly aware of. The book (which I started reading early on, abandoned, then returned to while working on the final drafts) is a female postcolonial Bildungsroman as well as a historical romance, and it is one of the last readings I completed during the work on my PhD. The novel is set against the backdrop of WWII, as well as India's colonialism, her craving for Independence, and the eventual, eventful Partition, while the novelist concerns

⁶¹ Myria Vassiliadou, "Questioning Nationalism: The Patriarchal and National Struggles of Cypriot Women within a European Context," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 9.4 (2002): 461, SAGE Journals, Web. 7 July 2016.
<<http://ejw.sagepub.com/content/9/4/459.full.pdf+html>>

herself with the identity and destiny of women. Just like *Guilt*, it is a novel about women and their support networks.

Kapur's novel presents three generations of women, but focuses on Virmati. Ida, who is her daughter, retraces her estranged mother's steps in order to reconstruct her past in hopes of finding relief through it herself. Kapur's novel is framed by the daughter of a rebellious daughter. Similar to *Guilt*, it shows the important role a father figure and a mother figure play in one's life, their presence or lack thereof.

When I was rereading *Difficult Daughters*, I was surprised at how alike Kapur's Virmati and my Eva were. Both girls are burdened by the expectation of being the perfect daughters and by their guilt to be freed from it. They rebel against the conventional, but they fail and end up embracing compromise. Finally, they are well aware of what it means to be a woman; to lead a life defined by sexuality and the female body. Both in Kapur's work and in my own, this topic is enhanced by the pregnancies, miscarriages and abortions the women characters experience; they scar their body and soul.

Guilt is not only about Eva's maturing, but also about the maturing of her sisters. Even if Eva is the protagonist and narrator, the reader witnesses the physical and mental maturing of all three girls. That is one of the reasons I dwelled on whether Eva should have shared the narrative with Rosa and Sofia. In the background, there is Rosa's relationship with Andreas, her unfulfilled dreams, and the loss of her second baby, which was a stillborn. Over the course of the novel, Rosa turns from a dreamer to a pragmatist. In the background, too, there is the growing up of Sofia, who struggles with her adolescent body and the idea it would soon mature into that of a woman's. Eva's story is framed by her sisters, her mother and grandmother, and that was one of my initial intentions, which developed and expanded further overtime.

Returning to *Difficult Daughters*, when the Professor returns to India from England, Virmati's Golgotha begins. The Professor and Virmati (and Eva) are drowning in duties, yearnings and guilt. The Professor dominates Virmati throughout and the reader witnesses a cat chasing a mouse. What the Professor sees in Virmati is a naïve girl, who is thirsty for education and love, and who he can mould as he pleases in time. Virmati is trapped in an illicit affair with the Oxford-educated Professor, a characteristic plot of the postcolonial Bildungsroman.

Boehmer argues how the reader is “preoccupied with the affairs of Virmati’s heart and her conflicted quest for education – that is, her negotiation, central to many Third World women’s lives, between the apparently opposed points of tradition and modernity, which repeatedly threatens her social position and her peace of mind.”⁶² Women’s education is a key theme in *Difficult Daughters*, as well as the struggle of taking authority over one’s destiny and identity, which run parallel to India’s need for Independence. Women’s education is shown as rebelling against tradition and marriage, and in some respects, the same stands for *Guilt*. Education and the wish to control her life are two factors, which on occasions set Eva almost as an outcast within her family and community.

In *Guilt*, there is a constant conflict and reconciliation between the mother and her daughters and between the sisters due to the different mentality each female character has as well as due to the expectations they have of one another. Nevertheless, they continuously help and support each other. This resonates with my need for a plot that resolves itself in an optimistic equilibrium. Perhaps, because *Guilt* is my first finished novel, I believed that my readers deserved to have an altogether positive outcome (even though possibly a compromising one). *Guilt* is a novel about the relationship of females within a family and about how women are marked by their mothers.

In subtle language, Kapur paints the picture of colonized India. The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is presented, while the British influence is shown in a number of ways. One detail that took me by surprise is the mention to a Morris Minor, which is similar to the vehicle Eva’s family owns in *Guilt*, while the same car is mentioned in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, too; Cyprus, India and Nigeria were British colonies, and Morris cars were popular there in the middle of the twentieth century. The most evident example of post-colonialism, in my opinion, is how Kapur wrote *Difficult Daughters* in English, and as I have pointed out earlier, the same stands for Adichie and myself.

Anindita Chatterjee writes: “The very title of the novel *Difficult Daughters* subtly alludes to the patriarchal convention that a woman, who undertakes a quest for an individual identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the

⁶² Boehmer, 213.

society as well.”⁶³ I wanted to write Eva as a difficult daughter herself, even before I finished reading Kapur. Throughout *Guilt*, her desire to differ collides with her duty to be a good daughter, a good little soldier (as she says). Rosa had the potential of being a difficult daughter, too, but she was permanently restrained by everyone, even by Eva.

Women’s solidarity is a key topic that *Guilt* addresses. By the end of the novel, there is no great declaration and no great resolution. What I set out to write was a historical novel and I can only hope *Guilt* will find readers who will appreciate it as such. To my mind, now that it is done, my novel tells the story of the growing up of its female protagonist, while touching upon intriguing topics such as nation and gender. My projected audience is readers interested in the genre of the historical novel in general.

The memories that were used and the story that is being told in *Guilt* are intimately connected to myself. *Guilt* and the novels I have discussed show how writers can be inevitably influenced by their own life, seeking catharsis through words. The process of writing and rewriting both the novel and the critical commentary has caused me to reconsider and reevaluate my parents’ pasts. When I began the PhD as well as when I began writing this novel, I did not see myself as a writer. Four years ago, to my mind, I was an individual, who enjoyed reading historical fiction and writing short stories. Now, I have completed *Guilt*, and writing it has hopefully helped me develop into a better reader, researcher and writer. Parts of my parents’ pasts have taken form through my fiction and have acquired additional meaning through the topics, genres and concepts discussed in this critical commentary. Finishing my first novel has given me a pleasant sense of closure. I wish *Guilt* could have given my parents the closure they deserve, too.

Words: 18,589

⁶³ Anindita Chatterjee, “A Study of Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*: Virmati, Ida and Shakuntala,” *Humanicus* 8 (2013): 8.

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