

DIARY OF A HUMAN TARGET

[From the Beginning to the End]

Includes all three books of the series

“Diary of a Human Target”:

Book One (Tainted Youth)

Book Two (The Path Towards the Inside)

Book Three (Homestretch)

written by

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Phase One: Distant Innocence

I don't know when I first started feeling like a target; maybe on the day I was born, on 21st June 1963, a Friday with a new moon, after an eight-month-gestation and artificial throes. Everybody was taken by surprise because, as it is known, babies born at the end of eight months don't survive.

But maybe not; anyway, my first years were very innocent. My infancy memories fade away in a hazy nirvana, as time seemed flexible and non-linear and space stretched languidly to infinity, since children of that age can hardly tell the difference between dreams and reality.

Back at those times, my parents and I often used to go to the local cinema. I was particularly fond of watching Greek of foreign movies, although I had a small problem: I always got scared when the screen lit up, the moment when the blackness of the dark canvas was dispelled by the blinding light of the projector. For this reason, just before the film started, I stood up on my chair, turned my back on the screen and waited for the movie to begin. In the meantime, those sitting behind me were pretty annoyed: "Turn round and be seated!" I often heard but paid no heed. My parents told me the same but I just couldn't face the screen unless the film had started for good. *What was I really afraid of? What did I fear that would flash before me on the black screen?*

I was about three and a half years old when a doll of mine lost a leg, which made me very upset. I took the toy in my hand, got out in the yard and threw it away with might and main. The doll flew over the two adjacent building plots and bumped against the wall of aunt Penelope's garden, about thirty metres away. That

seemed strange to me and I ran into the house to fetch my mother. I told her what had happened, but she did not at all believe that I had managed to throw the doll so far. “That's impossible! Don't tell lies!” she scolded me and got into the kitchen again.

During those years I was quite innocent and credulous, always ready to trust anybody about anything. I also had no problem giving my toys away to other children, although they usually didn't let me even touch theirs. Pretty soon, they all started calling me “stupid” and I could not understand the reason why.

It was a warm spring morning and I was walking along the street, together with my mother, when two boys of my age, sitting quietly in their garden, called me: “Hey you, come here, we want to give you a present!”. My mother attempted to dissuade me but I wouldn't listen.

“So, where is the present?” I asked.

The two boys giggled but said nothing.

Then, a sudden slap on my face gave me quite a jolt.

“This is the present!” one of the kids said and then they both burst into wild laughter. I started crying and got away at once, more bewildered than sad. *This was just a prank, alright, but why don't I ever come up with such tricks? Why can't I ever think of making fun of anybody?* I wondered. I was only four years old then, but I could already sense I was different from the other children.

In the mornings I used to play alone and carefree in the open field next to our house. However, there were two older girls who passed by quite often. As soon as they saw me, they always stopped and sought to scare me, telling me that they were witches: “We come from Africa and we know all about magic! If you don't sing to us, we shall make you like this!” they hissed and showed me an olive-tree leaf. Fearing that I would be either beaten up or turned into a leaf, I started singing immediately.

One day, when I was four and a half years old, my mother and I

paid a visit to Mrs Daphne, who lived nearby. While the two women were chatting in the balcony, I spent my time exploring the garden, the yard, the stairs. I had ended up on the terrace, when I saw a girl of my age playing in the next garden. I smiled to her spontaneously; she looked at me angrily and called me “pig”. I didn't get it at once; I thought I had heard wrong.

“Hi! How are you?” I asked politely.

“You, pig!” she cried again.

I walked away sad and returned to my mother in the balcony. Ten minutes later, the bell rang and the hostess went to answer the door. It was another friend of Mrs Daphne, together with her daughter. I was really taken aback when I recognized one of the two African girls who took pleasure in frightening me. Hardly realizing how it started, we soon had a bad fight; she pushed me down and hit me, shouting in a strident voice: “I am African, I know how to cast spells and I can kill you!”. I burst into crying and I wanted to leave at once.

One winter night, as I was riffling through my father's medical book, I saw a picture that shocked me more than anything else in my life till then: It was a drawing of a human skeleton. I was scared out of my wits at the thought of some horrible illness that could reduce a man like this! I asked my father immediately and he explained to me that all people are like this inside and this is what remains when they die. Speechless with terror, I ran to my bed at once, determined to fall asleep at once and forget all about it. However, when I woke up next morning, I realized that a traumatic experience is never forgotten.

On 12th November 1967 my younger sister was born. She was brought home a few days later; I remember, the weather was incredibly cold and the wind was blowing with a vengeance. Some months later, she took her name, Alice.

At first I didn't have any particular problem with her. Nevertheless, as time passed, I could see that our parents and relatives liked her more than me because she was “such a smart girl”, “all airs and graces”, “a cutie”. Moreover, no matter what

mischief she was up to, she was always excused because she was “the little one”. I, on the contrary, was often thrashed over a trifle and nobody ever excused me for anything. Let alone I almost forgot my name: I was no longer Yvonne. I was “the big one”.

My best friend was Gregory, my father's godson, who was two years younger than me and lived in the same neighbourhood. Sometimes I can still hear his shrill voice ringing in my ears: “Let's go out and play!”. I also used to play with Urania, the baker's blue-eyed daughter, who was two years older than me. The three of us had great fun together playing in the fields every day, living the most wondrous adventures in our imagination. I reminisce a scene, when I was about five years old and I was leading four other children into a field, all of us holding thin twigs in our tiny hands, as though they were scepters.

In contrast to the other girls, who could hardly wait to grow up, get married and have children, I openly expressed my aversion to the role of housewife and mother. I simply liked running around and exploring the fields instead of helping mum with the housework. I used to avoid dolls; I preferred playing “Indians and Cowboys” with the boys rather than “mother and children” with the girls. For this reason, the housewives of the neighbourhood disliked me a lot and had no problem in showing it to me. In fact, they foamed with rage anytime they saw me playing in the streets and called me “tomboy”. Especially aunt Pauline, Gregory's mother, kept on trumpeting forth that when she was at my age she could manage the whole housework by herself. As about her mother, a fat old hag always loaded with fancy gold jewels, she literally hated me. She called me names and threatened me to beat me up, whenever she saw me. One day, while Gregory and I were playing quietly in his yard, the old hag rushed out and took him quickly inside the house, shouting to me: “If you don't disappear at once, I will tear you asunder!”

My father was seldom at home because he worked as a captain in the merchant navy. I remember, it was a sunny summer day when he and I paid a visit to a colleague seaman. First, we gathered olives in a green field. Then, we went to the seaman's

house, which was a nice traditional cottage with a spacious whitewashed yard. As soon as I entered the bedroom, I saw an old rifle hanging on a wall. I raised Cain to make them give it to me. After a lot of hesitation, the host's black-dressed mother took down the gun and handed it to me. Beaming with happiness, I took it out to the yard and started aiming at stuff. The old woman brought me a chair. "Oh, the girl may faint!" she exclaimed full of concern, but I couldn't understand why I may faint. Because I'm a girl, maybe? Anyway, I found out soon that I couldn't hit anything because the rifle had no bullets. I definitely wanted bullets, I made a song and danced about it, but they refused to do me that favour. In all probability, they didn't have any bullets at all.

Another day I was feeling bored because my friend Gregory was nowhere to see. Namely, I was looking forward to playing with some impressive cowboy pistols he had -a recent gift his aunt Calliope had brought from America. After lunch, I decided to visit him. I entered the house through the back door and found nobody in the kitchen. I slowly walked to Gregory's room, there was no one there either. I peeped through the ajar bedroom door and saw that the whole family was fast asleep inside. Being very careful so as not to make a sound, I searched among Gregory's toys, found the two shiny golden pistols, took them in my hands and went off at a run. As soon as I arrived home, my mother saw my new toys and she started shouting:

"Tell me right now, where did you find these guns?"

"I found them on the road!" I replied quickly, with my most innocent face.

"These pistols are too expensive to be Greek! Start talking, did you steal them from an American boy?"

"No, no, I found them!" I insisted.

A little later, aunt Pauline rolled up; my mother showed her the guns and aunt confirmed that they belonged to Gregory. I awkwardly excused myself that I had taken the toys "by mistake", I said I was sorry and gave them back. "Never mind,

but Yvonne left the back door open when she left!” aunt Pauline said calmly.

A few days later, I met Gregory in a big building plot next to his house; we decided to play stone-throwing battle and barricaded ourselves behind two opposite heaps of gravel. All at once, I grabbed a huge flat stone and hurled it at Gregory. Yet, borne along by my own impetus, I didn't aim well; the stone flew really high and landed behind a two-metre wall at the far end of the field. Right then, a pained woman's voice was heard: “Oh, my head!”. Gregory ran quickly and disappeared behind some thick leafage; I didn't find the time to escape, so I just hid behind my heap of gravel. In no time, an old man appeared and yelled at me angrily: “I know you are hiding behind the gravel, show yourself or I'll come and beat you!” I hesitated for a few moments, but I finally exposed myself and was obliged to get a blasting from the old man, for ten long minutes.

It took me many years to realize the oddity of the event: the stone had covered a distance of about 30 metres, at a height of 2,5 metres. Even as an adult, I doubt whether I could throw a stone that far...

Wondrous things used to happen to me back at those years: Sometimes I emptied my mind from all thoughts and spontaneously had a strange feeling that I were hollow inside, as if my body were devoid of inner organs; or I felt like sinking in a dark vortex, only for a split second, before I started up agitated. Some other times, I had the odd impression of being cut off from the world that surrounded me; everything and everyone else seemed to turn up around me in coordination, like a sinister three-dimensional kaleidoscope. Almost every night, when I went to bed and closed my eyes, I had a weird yet delightful experience: I felt like whirling deeper and deeper under a vertiginous night sky; at the zenith of my virtual universe, thousands of colourful stars sparkled like fabulous treasure.

Too bad that such experiences will become rarer and rarer as years go by, and they will disappear for good with the advent of adolescence.

Class A Junior

My first day at elementary school, in mid September 1969, proved to be a rather disagreeable experience: I had never been with so many children together before, and I felt like a fish out of water. However, the other pupils seemed to have no problem at all. As soon as I realized that I was going to be glued to a desk for hours, away from my friends and my games in the street, I decided to play truant in the very first break. I approached a girl and told her to come home with me. She was worried that a teacher might see us (*so what?*), but I finally persuaded her. “If the bell rings, we are finished!” she kept murmuring all the way home and I couldn’t understand why she was so afraid. When we arrived, the girl left at once and I lied to my mother that classes had been dismissed. However, after an hour or so, a boy from the sixth class showed up and took me back to school.

A few days later, when I returned from school, I noticed there was something different about our house: Until the previous day, we had been living at 30 Nereid st., in the north of Glyfada. However, all the numbers in our street had just changed and from then on we would be living at number 13. I knew the superstition about the unlucky number, I felt a little uneasy, but I refused to regard that as a sign of fate.

Anyway, I soon got used to the school routine. I particularly singled out Fotis Armaos, a boy in my class, whom I liked a lot: He was a tall, blond, nice kid and an excellent student. Two or three times I ran to him and hugged him, but he found it strange and tried to avoid me. Once he shouted at me: “Leave me alone! I’m Captain Kirk! Captain Kirk!” I preferred to keep a distance ever since.

Nevertheless, I am sure that the feeling of being targeted got

stronger and stronger ever since I started school. For some strange reason, it was not easy for me to get into groups of children and play with them. In fact, they didn't show any willingness to include me in their games. Once, I spent the whole break watching a group of girls playing skipping-rope. More and more girls joined the game, I kept on asking them to let me play too, but they didn't even deign to answer. Only when I went to the teacher and complained, did they finally let me play -just for a few seconds; then, the bell rang.

The first friend I got at school was Duchess, a very beautiful girl with voluminous black hair falling to her shoulders. I had not at all noticed her worn out clothes and shoes, nor did I care about her complete incapability of learning. Three months had already passed, but she could not write a word, not even the alphabet. All the other children avoided her -and me as well.

One day, another classmate approached and talked to me during the break: it was Louise Hoidas, a short, chubby, curly-haired girl, who suggested I should get rid of Duchess and join her large party. She explained that the other children didn't want to play with me because of Duchess and that if I left her, I would find lots of friends. Soon I became the object of a funny tug-of-war: Louise was pulling my right sleeve and Duchess the left one, until I decided to follow Louise.

Some days later, Louise didn't want my company anymore, although we still sat together, at the same desk. As about Duchess, she was never seen at school again. I didn't manage to find any other friends during the rest of the year, so I spent most of the breaks wandering alone in the schoolyard; and more often than not, I bumped upon those nasty African girls who never lost a chance of making fun of me.

I am not at all sure whether the teacher liked me or not. Once, Louise and I were talking continuously during the lesson; at a moment, we both laughed at a picture of a crab in our reading-book. The teacher was annoyed, she yelled at both of us but whacked my palms four times with her wooden ruler. It hurt a lot, a lot more than I had expected; I burst into tears and didn't

stop crying for the rest of the lesson. For the next five days, that painful experience kept coming into my mind again and again, filling me with fear and agony.

Despite the above mishaps, I managed to pass the class with full marks. As I was walking up Hymettus Avenue together with my mother, both feeling happy about my success, a red-haired boy suddenly darted out of a yard, pointed a finger at me and shouted maliciously: “You, shit!”

“Isn't he a fool, mum!” I said loudly and kept on walking, as if nothing had happened.

Just for a moment it occurred to me that the incident might have been a bad omen for my future, but I dismissed the thought immediately.

That summer, my grandma Jane, my father's mother, came from Cefallonia and stayed with us for two months, because she wanted to see some doctors in Athens. One day mum grumbled to dad over the wine that grandma drank all the time (for she was too fond of the bottle), and then she went on an errand. When she got back, my father told her that in the meantime he had asked his mother to leave and return to the island as soon as possible. So, the very next day the old woman packed up and got ready to set off.

“Are you leaving, grandma?” I wondered, as I saw her in our veranda with her luggage in hand.

“Yes, I'm leaving because your dad sends me away!” she replied.

“But why?”

“It seems that he doesn't want me here,” she answered frigidly.

A few days later, my father signed up as a captain on a merchant ship. Soon mum received a letter from him, commanding her to send her mother off too, otherwise he would never return home. My mother obeyed at once. However, grandma Alice didn't have her own house, so she ended up in an old people's home in Athens. A month later, she had a stroke and died. “Because of too much happiness,” said mum bitterly.

On the day of the funeral, the coffin with the dead body inside was left on the big table of the sitting room, according to the custom. The lid of the coffin stood by the front door, as a sign of mourning. From dawn till dusk relatives and neighbours came along to pay their respects to the dead woman. As about me, I showed a paradox frivolity all day, playing with Gregory in the yard and stealing flowers from the wreaths. It is not that I didn't care about grandma Alice; she was a quiet woman, who never bothered anybody. Yet, it was impossible for me to feel sorry for her loss, as if I refused to accept the reality of death.

In general, my mother has always been the model of self-sacrifice, constantly occupying herself with the household chores and the increasing demands of my father and his family: From the very first day of their marriage, my father's relatives (usually his parents or his six sisters) used to land on our house and stay for months each time, even when my dad travelled abroad because of his job. While they were here, my grandpas demanded to be taken to a different doctor every day; as about my aunts, they came just for fun and tourism. They were all obsessed with Athens, the capital of Greece, maybe because they had all grown up in an isolated mountainous village of Cefallonia.

Note: After the above dramatic event, the long lasting visits of my father's family became even more frequent.

Class B Junior

Thursday, 12th November 1970

Most pupils still find difficulty in reading and writing, but I'm quite fluent. Starting from this month, I will be keeping a diary; I feel the need, maybe because my problems have begun to accumulate: Day by day, the other children prove to be more cunning than me, with a natural inclination to deception. Since I've never had such qualities, I have already become a sitting duck for many rascals. As I am rather credulous, it is very easy for them to talk me into giving them my toys and stationery. On the other hand, I never think of fooling anyone. I have no gumption, they often say.

During the breaks, I usually stand alone in a corner and watch the others playing around and having fun. The only classmate who talks to me is Dimitri, a neurotic mischief who accosts me because he wants my pens, rubbers, pencils, or toys. As soon as he gets what he wants, he disappears. This morning he told me -probably sincerely: "Yvonne, If anyone annoys you, come and tell me!". I don't intend to do so, of course.

Tuesday, 24th November 1970

During the first break, Penny and I were walking and talking in the schoolyard, when a party of four children hastened towards us, shouting: "Look, stupid Yvonne is friends with Penny!" They all started hitting me, then they pushed me down and mocked: "Now Penny is coming with us!" Finally, the gang went away, laughing ironically. Penny let them take her off without saying anything, as if she had not realized what was happening.

Monday, 14th December, 1970

I was a little late today at school. When I arrived, the bell had already rung and the pupils were in their classes. As soon as I sat at my desk, I realized something was wrong: There was no lesson; all the children were crying, shouting, bewailing. I was told immediately that two of our classmates, Penny and Helen, were run over by a car on their way to school this morning. They were in hospital now and they were about to die. Yet, what astonished me most, was the fact that I couldn't feel any sorrow.

A little later, we were informed that Helen was out of danger, but Penny was still expected to die any moment: "Penny's left only six minutes of life!" cried the girls around me. I tried hard to shed a tear, but I just couldn't.

"How many minutes?" I only wondered.

"Six! In six minutes Penny will die!" answered Angie, the girl sitting behind me, while a storm of tears and sobs was raging all around.

As about me, still nothing. The imminent death of a schoolmate caused me no emotion at all. I had to really force myself into shedding one or two tears, just for the sake of appearances.

Finally, Penny was saved "at the last moment". It was a great relief for everybody to see her returning from the hospital in a taxi. Most probably, she had never been in danger at all; my classmates were just being hysterical.

Sunday, 27th December 1970

I have recently discovered the reading-book my father had when he was in the sixth class of elementary school. I enjoy reading its stories but I like especially the poems, which I usually learn by heart. What has impressed me most is a poem about the Labours of Heracles: it has big verses written in puristic Greek, and it takes two and a half pages. I've read it only twice and memorized it already. I take great pleasure in reciting it wherever I go. Some people look at me in wonder. Others, mostly neighbours, get

annoyed and make a wry face. For example, aunt Pauline was not at all happy to hear me reciting the poem this afternoon. "Why don't you wash the dishes instead?" she scolded me.

Tuesday, 9th February 1971

Back to school, after having my tonsils removed. Early in the morning, as I was walking unwarily across the yard, I heard fat-Yanni shouting to his skinny friend: "Let's go and beat Yvonne, who is always sick!" They both approached in skipping steps and started hitting me, just like that, without any reason. I put up a sturdy resistance, I even managed to overpower the skinny boy, but I wasn't strong enough to beat the fat one too. So, I had to retreat crying in pain, feeling defeated and humiliated.

Monday, 15th February 1971

Away from school, things are a little better for me: Almost every day, I meet my friend Gregory and other children of the neighbourhood and we play lots of games like hopscotch, hide-and-seek, tag, the statues, the apples. We have a nice time, although Gregory is always playing tricks on me and then he tells the others that I am a fool.

As about aunt Pauline, his mother, she always trumpets forth that "Yvonne is silly. When she sees me on the road, she doesn't say "hello" or "how do you do". She is too foolish for that!". By the way, is there a seven-year-old child, who cares about greeting the adults while playing in the street?

This afternoon, I had a really bad fight with Gregory, because he insisted that one of my toy cars was his. Our mothers soon got wind of the fuss and they both came out to see what was wrong. The two women had a sparring match and in the end my mum cried: "Everybody tells me that Yvonne is stupid! If only all children were as good pupils as Yvonne is!" These words will be echoing in my ears for decades...

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