

**♠ DIARY OF A  
HUMAN TARGET**

**Book One:  
Tainted Youth**

**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 or 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 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 school-yard; 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.

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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, 12<sup>th</sup> 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, of course.

### **Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> 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, 14<sup>th</sup> 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, 27<sup>th</sup> 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, 9<sup>th</sup> 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, 15<sup>th</sup> 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...

### **Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1971**

This morning we went on a school trip to Porto Rafti: After I had spent a lot of time vainly trying to join any party of children, I finally ended up alone on a pebbly beach. I stood there and watched the frothy waves for a while, experiencing a rare tranquility. Suddenly, all the others seemed to be far away; there was only me, the dark blue sea and an empty packet of cigarettes pitching on the foamy waves. I was blissfully immersed in the natural environment, when some children approached and giggled obtrusively. One of them pushed me hard and I stumbled clumsily; they all mocked at me and walked away quickly.

Later in the afternoon, when it was time to leave, all the children lined up in threes near the coaches. All at once, I had a strong premonition that the girl standing next to me would fall in the narrow ditch which yawned a few metres ahead. We started walking towards our vehicle, and when we reached the ditch, the girl did fall into it up to her thighs! She burst into crying, and I wondered how she had actually managed to fall into a hole which was not wider than the length of her feet.

### **Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1971**

Unfortunately, I am growing into a very sickly child: Either I cough, or I have the flu, or I have childhood diseases (measles, mumps, chicken pox etc), but I always have a cold. However, for some strange reason, my mother never gives me paper tissues when I go to school; she only gives me a small fabric handkerchief. After the second hour, I start wiping my nose with the sleeves of my blue pinafore.

The nasty colds (nose and eyes running non-stop) first appeared when I was four years old and they last from October to April every year. Strangely enough, no medicine can relieve me. Moreover, I have also come out in pimples. My whole face is covered with them and my classmates wonder:

“What on earth are these?”

“Maybe an infection!” some of them suppose.

“Or mosquito bites!” some others say.

### **Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1971**

This afternoon my parents took me to a dermatologist to see my pimples. After a short examination, he diagnosed acne and prescribed an ointment, which will soon prove to do little good. This means that at the age of seven I have a symptom that normally appears during adolescence.

I really don't know what's happening to me. Sometimes I think I am under a black magic spell: I am obliged to go around always with a red runny nose and lots of greasy pimples all over my face. No wonder that my classmates dislike and avoid me...

### **Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1971**

Hoping to reduce the frequency of my colds, my parents decided that I should undergo another operation, the third one in eight months: First I had my tonsils removed, then my appendicitis, today my nasal adenoids.

As soon as we arrived at the hospital this morning, I was surprised to see that it was just a cheap clinic. A little later I found out that the operation would be performed without any anesthesia, which scared me out of my wits! I tried to fall asleep, so as not to be awake during the operation, but I was too stressed to have a wink.

When the time came, I had to wait outside the operating-theater together with twenty other children. They all entered one by one, stayed there for some minutes and then came out quietly. I didn't hear any of them cry or even complain, in or out of the operating-theater. Obviously, I was the only one who was frightened, but I didn't dare show anything.

When my turn came (I was the last one), the doctors made me sit on a white metal chair, where they tied my arms and legs with leather straps. I wanted to show courage, but I just couldn't. Almost immediately, I burst into crying and fought so hard that I eventually managed to free myself. They tied me to the chair again and started picking my nostrils with some kind of lancets. It didn't last more than five minutes, it didn't hurt much, but I kept on screaming and crying until I saw my blood streaming down the white cloth I was wearing. I was shocked, yet I felt relieved because it was over at last.

... At the end of the school year, despite my being an excellent student in all subjects, I didn't manage to be upgraded with full marks because I had been absent for too many days (more than 60), as the teacher explained.

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### **Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1971**

Returning from her village in Mani a few days ago, Mrs Lemony, our new neighbour, brought us a bottle filled with handmade liquid butter. This morning the bottle was half-empty and we found a small knitting needle inside! My mother mentioned that to Mrs Lemony, who apologized and excused herself by saying that it was done by mistake. Strange mistake, though...

### **Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1971**

Mrs Lemony has become a very good friend of ours. Almost every day she comes and keeps us company. Even when mum is not at home, she comes and talks with my father for hours. Ten days ago she brought us a strange, ugly flower. She told us that it is sacred and considered to be “the flower of Virgin Mary”. It must be kept in a

basin of water, where it grows continually. "But don't you ever throw it away, or Virgin Mary will be angry," said Mrs Lemony.

However, this morning my mother decided to get rid of the so-called "flower of Virgin Mary", because it is very ugly and gets bigger and bigger every day. The water basin is already too small for it. Moreover, as we have recently learned, it is not at all sacred; it is just a fungus of dubious origin.

### **Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1971**

Just like last year, I am spending the summer in Lixouri, on the island of Cefallonia, where my father's kin live. Surprisingly, all my problems disappear miraculously when I am here. Nobody makes fun of me or calls me "stupid" here. Every day we go for a swim at nearby beaches with aunt Domna and her two daughters, Jenny and Niki. We spend the rest of the day playing in the earthen streets. I get along very well with Jenny, who is two years older than me. I wouldn't say the same about Niki, who is a year younger: Sometimes she gets angry about the merest trifle and she is in the sulks for the whole day.

This afternoon we were hunting butterflies. While playing, I accidentally ruined the wings of one by mistake. "That was a queen butterfly, and God will send you to hell for that! You hear? You will go to hell for that!" exclaimed Niki grimly.

I don't know why, but that sentence struck me really bad...

## ● *Class C Junior*

### **Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1971**

I am in the third class now. My only friend at school is Tonia, a quiet, obese girl, who is repeating the same class for the third time. During the breaks we usually play jacks.

Unfortunately, this year I happen to be sitting at the same desk with Lisa: she is a stocky, cunning girl, who does nothing but make fun of me all the time. "If you don't give me your pen, I will tell the teacher that you talk smut!" she threatened me this morning. I didn't respond immediately, so she put on an air of anger and raised her hand ostentatiously. I had no choice but do her the favour immediately before she told the teacher, who usually believes Lisa's lies and whacks me with the ruler.

### **Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1971**

This morning we went on a school treat to the nearby mountain. I was playing quietly by myself, since Tonia was absent today, when I was suddenly surrounded by a gang of children. Shouting and giggling mockingly, they destroyed the little house I had just built with stones, and then they went away laughing. A little later, as I was wandering aimlessly among the pine trees, I found a small wallet on the ground. I was naive enough to show it to a boy. He took it from me by deceit, telling me that it was he who had lost it. And I believed him.

A little later I saw Anastasia, a corpulent girl from my class, coming towards me weeping. She was accompanied by a rabble of vociferating children. Full of wrath and threats, they accused me of having stolen that wallet from her! Then they grabbed me all together and dragged me to the teachers, as if I were a criminal. I was crying all the way, telling them that I had found the wallet and given it to a boy, because he had said it was his. Nobody listened. Before even realizing it, I was standing before the teachers, who immediately scolded me "Where did you soil your your hands like that?", while the bawls of the rabble were ringing unintelligible in my ears. Anyway, due to lack of evidence, I was finally acquitted by the "court", although Anastasia and her friends still insisted that I was a thief.

### **Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1971**

As soon as we entered the classroom and sat at our desks, Anastasia came to me and apologized because, as she had discovered in retrospect, she had forgotten her wallet in her schoolbag. "Well, never mind" I told her. Anyway, I don't think that Anastasia herself had thought of blaming me. In all probability, it was somebody else's idea to accuse me of stealing, because they wanted to cause me a problem.

When I returned home, my mother informed me that she had had a bad quarrel with Mrs Lemony this morning. In fact, mum accused our neighbour that she has been flirting my father for months now and this was confirmed by an anonymous phone call last night. "If only it were true!" said Mrs Lemony to defend herself. In any case, I believe that this woman is jealous of us because my father is a captain while her husband is only a fisherman.

Starting from tomorrow, and for many years to go, we will often find broken eggshells dyed dark purple, right outside our front door...

### **Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1971**

This morning the teacher announced something peculiar: "A number of cholera cases have recently been identified in northern Greece; therefore, all Greek children must be vaccinated against this disease! And the vaccination will take place here, at school, tomorrow morning!". Once I heard it, I spontaneously had some queries: Why, indeed, is it necessary for all Greek children to get into this trouble, just because of a few cholera

cases? Besides, as far as I know, cholera is curable nowadays, isn't it?

However, I have a bigger problem than that: Ever since I was a small girl, I have always been terrified of injections and needles. Whenever my mother takes me to the doctor for a blood test, I cry my eyes out, I make a din and it takes four nurses to hold me and get the job done. In this case, however, acting like that is out of the question.

### **Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1971**

When the time came, all pupils lined up in threes in the school yard, each one waiting for their name to be heard and go into the teachers' office. Normally I would have already started crying, but this time I had no other alternative but keep my temper at all costs. Woe is me if I dare scream or cry in front of everyone: Right from the next moment, I would become the laughing-stock of the whole school.

However, what impressed me most was the fact that none of the other children looked scared. As I was waiting for my turn, full of anxiety, I kept observing all faces again and again, expecting to detect a sign of fear in anybody's eyes. Nothing. All the pupils looked carefree, as if nothing was going on. Only when short Lucy entered the teachers' office and got injected, I heard a classmate shouting: "Look! Lucy is trembling!". Many children laughed. The girl was obviously trembling of fear but she didn't dare make a sound.

When my turn came, I clenched my teeth and kept my temper perfectly. So, nobody got wind of my being afraid. Fortunately, the needle was very thin and didn't hurt at all. Moreover, I was surprised to see that there were hundreds of injections, one for each child -an unprecedented luxury in those years.

### **Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1971**

This afternoon I had a strange accident: I was studying in my room, when suddenly I heard a voice calling me from the yard. I thought it was Gregory, so I stood up and got out of the house at once, leaving the door of the kitchen open. The weather was cold and the wind was blowing hard. As I was passing by the shut window pane of my room, it suddenly broke into a thousand pieces and some of them were hurled against me. A sharp glass blade hurt the side of my right leg, opening a deep wound, while smaller pieces scratched my calf. It took us a long time to stop the bleeding. In all likelihood, it will leave a scar. Anyway, no serious damage was done; I suppose this could have gone a lot worse...

### **Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1971**

On the way to school this morning I met Martha, a blond girl who comes from Sweden. She is in the fourth class and happens to be a real ignoramus, since the highest of her marks is 6. We were talking calmly, when she suddenly spat out: "Yesterday I met Urania and she told me that she doesn't want to play again with you and your sister, because you are both stupid!".

I was taken aback because Urania had come to my house on Saturday afternoon, we had played for many hours and we had had a nice time. So, where was the problem?

Yet, that was not all: As we were walking past the church of St Tryfon, which is opposite our school, Martha glared at me and said:

"You are not a Christian!"

"Why do you say that?" I wondered.

"Because you don't make the sign of the cross!" she roared and crossed herself in an ostentatious manner, to show that she was a Christian. I felt obliged to do the same.

## **Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1972**

It's hard to say why but, for a few months now, whenever it rains I'm seized with fright! That's because I fear that the slightest rain might end up in a cataclysm! Perhaps I have been overly influenced by religion. If the rain lasts more than an hour, I start crying wherever I am.

It has been drizzling all day today. Yet, as I was returning from school early in the afternoon, the drizzle became a downpour. I really tried to contain myself but it proved to be impossible for me. Finally, I started weeping in the middle of the road. The other pupils wondered and I had to explain:

"I don't like the rain! What if it becomes a cataclysm?"

"You don't need to be afraid Yvonne, because the rainbow always comes out after the rain. This is God's promise that there will never be another cataclysm. Don't you know that?", Tonia reassured me and I felt better immediately. From that moment my phobia started to fade away, until it disappeared completely after two or three days.

## **Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1972**

I have another problem too, which first appeared about a month ago: I have a strange feeling that my parents don't love me and that they intend to kill me! "I was told to slaughter her in the backyard!" I heard my mother confess to a neighbour the other day, and I was scared stiff. A couple of days later, I was really relieved to learn that she meant one of our hens, which had cackled like a cock - a bad omen. "You will die!" dad told me this afternoon because I didn't want to eat my dinner. That spoiled my appetite completely. Fortunately, this obsession will not last longer than a few more days.

## **Saturday, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1972**

This evening aunt Wilma and her mother paid us an unexpected visit. The strange thing is that they came from Piraeus without uncle William, who is her husband and my mother's cousin. Then, something even more peculiar happened: While mum was in the kitchen making coffee, the two women grabbed a large decorative doll we had on the couch and pulled it apart! They took the head, the legs and the arms off and then they threw all the pieces out in the rubbish bin, on the grounds that the doll was too old! While this was happening, the two women were bantering and screaming like frenzied. I was just looking at them puzzled and did nothing to stop them.

## **Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1972**

It's been exactly one month since the day my youngest sister, Jasmine, was born. Everybody says she is a very beautiful baby - like all spastics are. Due to the indifference of the staff in the maternity hospital, my mother was left all alone in a room for several hours. In the meanwhile, the umbilical cord broke and hang out of my mother's body for more than an hour, but nobody got wind of it. As a result, the baby was left without oxygen and eventually she was born with quadriplegia: Her whole body is paralyzed and she suffers from mental retardation too. Since she was thought to die soon, she was hastily baptized in the maternity ward. Her godmother is a Mrs Melina, who will never put in an appearance again.

When my dad first went to the maternity hospital, he came back very angry and said that the baby had a strange sag on her head, which means that it had been bumped! He wanted to sue the doctors, but everybody dissuaded him from doing so because "there is no way you can get to the bottom of this, there is no proof; let alone that doctors always back up each other, no matter what!"

## **Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1972**

My cousin Annita has come from Cefallonia and she will stay with us for a couple of weeks. We usually get along well, but she keeps saying that I am in great danger of being killed by the police!

One day last summer, when I was in Lixouri, I dug a hole in her garden with my toy spade. According to her, lots of water came out of the hole and flooded the whole island, and ever since the local police have been looking for me, with the intention of killing me! "If they find you, they'll shoot you to death!" she says with a grim face. I am a little scared, because I can't rule out the possibility of her telling the truth..

## ● *Class D Junior*

### **Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1972**

This afternoon Alice quarreled with an older girl in the playground. "I will tell my big sister!", she moaned and pointed at me. I was on a swing, when I suddenly saw that girl standing beside me, waving her hand before me threateningly, as if she were about to hit me. "Who do you think your sister is? If I give her a slap, she will fall to pieces!" she yelled at Alice. My first reaction was to blink in surprise; then I decided to stand up for myself, so as not to be called "stupid" or "coward". There followed a battle royal, then the other girl ran to fetch her older brothers and I fetched my mother. I didn't really understand how, but we finally made it up.

### **Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1972**

Well, the above bully was meant to become my best friend during this school year. We happen to be classmates, her name is Barbara and she is already well known at school as a liar and a thief. Constantly trumpeting forth that her family is destitute, she has already fooled many children into giving her various things: stationery, clothes, shoes, toys, even jewellery. According to what they say, if she is not given anything, she steals it with dexterity. Everybody warns me about her but I don't pay much heed, maybe because I need her friendship; apart from boring Tonia, Barbara is the only child at school who is willing to keep me company. Besides, we do have fun together...

### **Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1972**

During the first months of her life, Jasmine didn't look any different from a normal baby, so I was not particularly concerned about her. Besides, I like to believe that when she grows up, she may overcome her problem. In fact, until recently Jasmine's health showed a steady improvement: She had already started to lift her head, she was also about to sit like a normal baby. The doctors who saw her were very pleased. However, about a month ago, she ran a temperature of 41.5° Celcius that wouldn't go down. The doctors diagnosed brain fever, which lasted for days and broke her once for all: She will never lift her head again, she will never sit; from now on, she will always be lying in bed.

As about my mother, she is not only devastated but she often receives malicious comments as well:

"It seems you have many sins, that's why God gave you this child; he wanted to punish you," aunt Domna told her the other day.

"Is this your daughter's baby?" she is often asked by other women, whenever we go to the playground.

"If I had such a child, I would kill it!" said aunt Penelope, my sister's godmother, when she visited us yesterday afternoon.

... As time passes, Jasmine's disability will become more and more obvious, while hope will be waning day by day. Soon we'll start taking her to a center for spastic children, where she will have kinesitherapy; in my opinion, this doesn't bring much result. But I always love my little sister, I take her in my lap, sing her songs and hope that some day she will get well, perhaps by a miracle.

### **Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1972**

Growing up, I feel it is not right to shun others and always retire into my shell. So, I often push myself into groups of children, even if their behaviour sometimes confuses me: When I avoid them, they call me silly; when I approach them, they make fun of me. I do my best to be friendly and pleasant, I often ignore teasings or I

respond with a smile of understanding. I even do them occasional favours so as to become more likeable. Yet, I can see that this strategy brings poor results. Furthermore, I must admit that I am still very timid and I don't dare oppose anyone -maybe because I'm always alone against gangs of bullies. "Yvonne is stupid, she doesn't understand what she is told!" says Nora, the star of the class, again and again.

Unfortunately, this year I happen to be sitting at the same desk with Anna Harrisis, a corpulent girl who takes pleasure in terrifying me, using her large size and the high number of her friends. She always tries to be clever, she steals my things and derides me all the time, just to show how smart she is.

Yesterday I agreed to exchange my rubber jumping rope for her fancy pen. Today, during the first break, Anna suddenly appeared before me together with the horde of her lumpish friends. In her hands she was holding the rubber rope, which had now been reduced to a dirty rag full of knots. I really wondered, how she had achieved that so quickly!

"I want my pen back, Yvonne! And here is your jumping rope!" she said and stretched it before me in an ostentatious manner. "This is your rope, Yvonne!" she repeated pompously.

I tried to protest but I shut up quickly when I faced the angry looks of the horde. So, I returned the pen and got back the useless rope.

"You see how dumb she is? She always does what she is told!" I heard Anna saying mockingly, as she and her underlings were moving off. I just stood behind alone, feeling sad and humiliated -as usual.

### **Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1973**

Since the beginning of the school year I have been collecting cards that depict various characters from animated cartoons. I find them in certain chocolates, I'm very fond of them and I have almost completed the entire collection.

However, there is a problem: Alice always wants half of whatever I have. She has often asked me to give her half of my cards too. This afternoon she groused and groused, so I decided to give her the cards I have in double. They are quite a few, but obviously not enough for her. She demanded to have exactly half of my basic collection and she wanted to choose which ones! I refused, we had a row, Alice turned on the waterworks (as usual) and mum came immediately to see what was wrong: "Give half of your cards to the infant, you big one!" she shouted angrily. I disagreed, Alice kept on wailing like a siren, and mum found it right to tear as many of my cards as possible, totally deaf to my entreaties and blind to my tears. Finally, something broke inside me and I tore myself all the remaining cards...

### **Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1973**

Early in the afternoon, at about 4:00 o'clock, I happened to meet Anna Harrisis on the road. She was going to the baker's to buy a loaf of bread. We walked there together, but we found the shop closed, since it was due to open at 5:30 again, like every day. "And this means that I must return home empty-handed? No way!" she growled.

Without hesitating at all, Anna made for the baker's house, which is right behind the shop, and rang the bell many times until the whole family got out of bed and answered the door. To my surprise, not only were they all smiles to her, but they also opened the shop before its time for the countess to buy half a kilo of bread.

### **Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1973**

As soon as I got into the classroom this morning, I noticed a big bunch of flowers lying on the first desk. Almost immediately I was informed that one of our classmates had been killed in a car accident two days before.

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