

They say that if you drown in the sea, before you sink for good, your whole life passes in front of you, like a movie. And now, as I sink on land, my whole life in Aachen passes in front of me.

Our house, on a big street with trees and flower beds in the middle.

We live on the third floor, and on the ground floor there is the shop that sells the bread rolls. My room is big, with a bed almost double, bronze, like old times, with a hoop * and a mosquito net to cover it all and get inside to dream awake. I had seen it in a window, when we went with mom and dad to choose furniture. "I want this one". They laughed. "Let's make her happy", dad said and they bought it for me. When they brought it to our house, I lay down for hours. One I slipped under the mosquito net, one I opened it and looked across, from the big window that covered the whole wall, the lights of Anna-strasse - a street not very big, decorated with old lanterns.

There we went with dad, as soon as I finished my lessons, to take a walk, even though it was getting dark. When it snowed, the snowflakes sparkled in the light of the lanterns. On Fridays, when we had no school the next day neither me nor dad, we went for a walk on the pedestrian streets that were around there, we gazed at the shops, that is, I gazed, and we ended up in a big cafe, King College, which had chairs made of thick straw and wooden tables. I took a hot chocolate and dad took a beer. If we were late, mom would say jokingly: "Did you throw it out again?".

There, on that street with the lanterns, I told dad all my secrets. "Konstantinio", that's how dad called me, "what's new today?". And I started and didn't finish; most of them about school, which I loved.

I loved it from the moment I saw it. Although, before we entered on the first day, my heart was beating like crazy, and my hands, which one was held by dad and the other by mom, had sweated.

We entered a large courtyard paved with green-gray slabs and a large roof around.

"The director, Mr. Heiner, is waiting for us in his office", mom says. We take a corridor with beige and burgundy tiles. The corridor endless, but all along, on one side, from end to end, windows and on their sills pots pots with different flowers and leaves each one. On the opposite wall, paintings. My heart no longer beat because I forgot and gazed.

We climbed a staircase that instead of railings had white metal mesh and its railing was dark burgundy. We arrived on the first floor and stopped in front of a door that dad said was the director's office. I don't know what other color I took besides my normal pale one. Surely I looked like a corpse *. Mom knocked on the door and dad turned and looked at me: "Konstantinio, courage, after we told you he's the best".

The door opened by itself, dad dragged me almost inside but before we got in well enough came and stood in front of us a gentleman not very tall with reddish hair and blue eyes who smiled and showed his white teeth.

Phew! My heart stopped playing tambourine. He bent down kissed me and said in Greek: "Welcome our child". Dad had told me that Mr Heiner loves Greece and learns Greek. He went to his office which was large loaded with many papers and among the piles protruded a blue vase with yellow roses.

He told us to sit down and I sat at the edge edge of a chair. So if I moved a little I would fall down.

Where are you Farmour * to hear what he told me? That he sees in my face that I will make it and he didn't say that I have an exam look but smart and willful. Then he got up and took me by the hand to take me to my class.

Mom and dad looked at me as if they were saying "courage" but I didn't need courage anymore. I walked down the hallways next to the director trying not to hunch over and looked around with my ... smart and willful look until we reached the class.

As Mr Heiner spoke with the teacher I looked at the room which had large windows with pots on their sills and paintings on their walls. The children sat each at their own desk.

They were almost all blond with blue eyes but I singled out one with slanted dark eyes and one black with curly hair. They all had their eyes fixed on me.

Mr Heiner stroked my head and left. The teacher a blonde girl with a face full of freckles showed me to sit in an empty desk in the first row. Next to it sat a little girl with hair red like flames who smiled at me.

The teacher went to write on a huge board that covered the whole wall. Fortunately in the summer before we left Greece I did German so I could at least distinguish the letters.

Then Frau Stefani -that's how I understood they called our teacher because she showed herself and said "Frau Stefani"- told us one by one the words she had written on the board and I looked at her mouth to try to pronounce them.

In the afternoon school in Greek I have no problem. Dad and mom taught me to read. First and second grade do class together -we are eleven children all together.

Fortunately I don't have mom as a teacher. I would feel strange. She teaches in the fifth and sixth and the children love her. As soon as they see her they run and hug her and shout all together "Mrs Stella Mrs Stella". I am very proud of my mom.

One day we met Mr Heiner in the hallway. At first he spoke to her in German and then his eyes smiled and he said to her in Greek: "Mrs Stella you are the diamond of our school".

Where to hear him Farmour who I know didn't love mom very much at least for the first few years she married dad. And if dad hadn't insisted so much maybe I wouldn't have her as my mom now!

The poor thing when she was little her parents took her from city to city and she changed five schools. In some small towns that didn't even have electricity. Her dad was an officer of the rural police and went wherever they sent him. In the civil war -when was it Farmour? Well I get confused with the dates with so many wars and battles that I hear you talk about all the time with your friends- they caught again my grandfather Constantine to send him into exile and on the ship they put him with others there was an officer of the rural police escorting them. He was my other grandfather!

Farmour says that to trust him to escort such great people like grandpa he must have been a big fascist. She of course even if she tells you the story of Little Red Riding Hood she will tell you that the wolf ate her because he was a fascist.

But then dad hadn't met mom yet and when he met her both my grandfathers had died.

When dad told her he would marry mom Farmour broke the world: "Your father's bones will creak".

She said this very often and I can't understand how the poor grandpa's bones would creak. But dad when something gets into his head same Farmour and ... same me I was going to say. And so he married mom who meanwhile was left alone in the world because her mother died.

I would be very sad if dad had listened to Farmour and now I had another mom and not my mom who is very important and is "the diamond of the school" as Mr Heiner says. Of course I'm not the ... diamond of the class but at the end of the year I managed to come third.

The German school is no joke. When in elementary school -which has four grades- you are not very good you don't go to high school which has another eight grades and from there you can go to university but you continue compulsory six more years and then you can attend vocational or technical schools. Mom says this is very unfair because a child from ten years old can't be judged for the rest of his life.

Besides Sigrid, the redhead who became my best friend, I hung out with many kids from class and from boys more with the black one Diagoras who seemed strange to me to have a Greek name. Dad though explained to me that in some parts of Africa there is a habit of giving ancient Greek names. Diagoras is first student in class and no matter how much David sweats who is second he can't catch him especially in arithmetic where Diagoras can subtract from forty nine thirteen like that out loud while we can barely say three minus one how much is it.

A. Zei, Konstantina and her spiders

hoop: metal ring; in the past it was used by children as a toy * corpse: from the word corpse which means dead body. Because Konstantina was very pale when she was little her grandmother said she looked like a corpse * Farmour: in Swedish grandmother from father's side. Konstantina learned the word from her friend Sigrid