

ALEXANDRA IN WAR-LAND

by

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Preface

“Pinocchia”

Once upon a time, there lived a little girl called Pinocchia. Pinocchia lived with her mother Geppetta in a remote village in the mountains. Some people said that Geppetta had created Pinocchia with her own hands, and that Pinocchia was made of porcelain, because of the whiteness of her skin. For the same reason, Seven Dwarfs who lived in a home close to Pinocchia’s home called her “Snow White”.

Pinocchia was very fragile, and sometimes she was so fragile, that she would break to pieces. When she was sad, she was sadder than the usual level of sadness, and that would cause her problems in overcoming difficult situations. But her mother Geppetta always helped her. She was always by her side and advised her. Geppetta was a very sincere person and she passed this sincerity to her daughter Pinocchia. But that happened subconsciously and not because she wanted it to happen. On the contrary, she always advised Pinocchia: “Don’t be so sincere! And don’t be so conscientious!”

That was a problem. Pinocchia was a girl who always told the truth, always helped people when they needed her help and always wanted to make other people happy. She never asked for a reward for that. And every time she did something good, and especially when she told the truth, her eyes became biiigggeerrr and they spaaarked, so she couldn’t hide her truths...Her worst day was April the 1st, for on that day there was the custom in her country that everybody should tell at least one lie. She tried to tell lies, but she was very unsuccessful as a liar, so she gave up and never tried to tell lies again, even on April the 1st.

Being always sincere is a problem. Because when you are sincere, some people may be displeased by your words, and they may take vengeance on you. For example, one day, Pinocchia spoke her mind to a Queen. She told her that she was an unfair Queen and that she exploited the just people. The Queen didn’t accept Pinocchia’s words, and out of revenge, she sent Pinocchia a poisoned apple as a gift. When Pinocchia ate the apple, she immediately fell asleep and she slept for seven whole years. Her mother Geppetta cried and asked Pinocchia to wake up in vain. Pinocchia couldn’t listen to her mother. She lived in her own world; a world full of dreams and nightmares.

Someday, the Seven Dwarfs ran to Pinocchia’s home to inform Geppetta that they had met a stranger who wanted to talk to her. Geppetta said: “Who is that stranger who wants to talk to me? Tell him to come here and to talk to me”. The Seven Dwarfs led the stranger to Geppetta. The stranger seemed very calm and he smelled like a rose while his skin was covered by a slight light all over the surface of his body and face. “Hello Geppetta” he said. “I’m God’s angel. God knows the unjust way that brought your daughter into this condition. So many years of sadness are enough. From this day on, your daughter will wake up again.” After saying that, the angel disappeared. Geppetta ran into her daughter’s bedroom and she saw that her daughter had woken up and was smiling at her. The two women hugged each other and tears streamed

down their cheeks. "I missed your smile," the mother said. "I missed your smile too," the daughter replied.

From then on, Pinocchia was very careful when she wanted to tell the truth. She started to filter what she wanted to say and to observe people's dispositions. And she understood that the best thing is to know the truth, but not to speak the truth. The best way to tell the truth now, was to tell the truth only to herself. To all the others from now on she would be, sh sh sh sh sh! SILENT! Pinocchia was not made of porcelain anymore. The angel had transformed her and she had become a usual, normal girl. Now she knew the truth. But, because she couldn't tell the truth so easily anymore, she decided to write the truth in fairy tales. Her fairy tales are didactic too. She believes that fairy tales tell more truths than real life does. In a life full of lies, Pinocchia's fairy tales provide all the truth one would look for. But, please, don't tell this truth to anybody. Just be, sh sh sh sh sh! SILENT!!!!!!!

Introduction

Pinocchia's most successful work is *ALEXANDRA IN WARLAND*. It is a work which talks about Alexandra and her journey in life and how this relates to war. It is a kind of an epic. Alexandra is a real character. She exists. She is not fictional. Pinocchia can't write about fictional characters. Alexandra is a character who passes through many different and difficult circumstances, through an Odyssey, through an Alexandriad and in the end..... In the end.....??????????

In the end....she stands right here in front of you and talks to you about her life up until now and the effect the war had on her...

Chapter 1–Act 1.
Alexandra’s Childhood.

Alexandra enters the stage wearing a short blue floral dress. She holds a small teddy-bear. She sings a children’s song.

Alexandra: Si Mario Mario si doremi macaro macaro, leo leo tip tip tip, leo leo tip tip tip, one- two- three!!!

She looks around. She is searching for the other children. Nobody is there now.

Kids! Where are you? Hey! Kids! Let’s play again! I remember those days, especially in the summer when we played together in the neighbourhood ... We used to play all kinds of games... Hide and seek, tag, skipping rope, tennis, hopscotch and above all, FOOTBALL! *(She kicks in the air).*

We lived on the edge of Xanthi. We used to take endless strolls in nature, observed the birds and butterflies, smelled the various wild flowers, gathered oregano, mint, and fennel, climbed trees, ate hazelnuts and figs from the trees and blackberries from the bushes. We passed through brooks with ice-cold water; we found caves and small canyons. Sometimes we played WAR. We would play ‘Cowboys and Indians,’ or generally a game between two teams which we called WAR. We would use many weapons, such as fake guns, squirt-guns, swords, and mainly pea-shooters. PHH! *(She uses a pink pen as if it was a pea-shooter and she blows loudly).*

We used to make small paper-darts and we blew through the pea-shooters and threw the paper-darts to the opponents. That was the first time I felt I liked being close to a boy, and playing with him, even war. I liked his company. And when he won I didn’t care. Sometimes I let him win, to make him happy. I could beat him of course! But I just let him win!!! *(She sings)...*

I was five and he was six
We rode on horses made of sticks
He wore black and I wore white
He would always win the fight
Bang bang
He shot me down, bang bang
I hit the ground , bang bang
That awful sound, bang bang
My baby shot me down (Nancy Sinatra, Bang Bang).

Chapter 2-Act 2.
Alexandra's Teens.

Alexandra leaves the teddy-bear aside. She speaks:

When I entered high-school, my life became much different than it used to be when I was in primary school. I studied hard till late at night. I studied for school, and for the tuition centre, I also studied for my English lessons doing my best. I liked learning, reading and searching. I had many interests.

In the first years of High School we studied Homer's *Odyssey* and Homer's *Iliad*. For a reason I will never understand, we did the *Odyssey* in the first year and the *Iliad* in the second, although *Iliad* preceded *Odyssey* chronologically. So we learned first about the consequences of war on a man's life -that is, Ulysses- and then about the Trojan War... It was the schizophrenia of the School Curriculum!

During the period that I studied Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* a war broke out very near my own country. It was the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This war lasted more than three years. People who previously lived like brothers decided that they had nothing in common. Then the small Yugoslavia was divided into even smaller countries after bloodshed. During that war many children were orphaned of one or both parents. Some families in my town hosted such children mainly during the Christmas holidays. That was how I met some of those children. I remember their eyes...always thoughtful, always traveling somewhere else... With fear on their faces, they rarely smiled, rarely spoke. They would just look at you with their melancholic eyes and in those eyes you could read what they wanted to tell you. They wanted to tell you about the atrocities they saw in the war, the destructions that occurred in their home-place, how much they miss their parents, how lonely they feel, how strange they feel being in a foreign country and spending the holidays with strangers, they wanted to tell you about

(she sings)

That awful sound...Bang Bang,

That awful sound...Bang Bang...

(She speaks)

But they wouldn't speak. They were silent; only silent...

Alexandra takes the pink pen and a notebook and writes.

Alexandra: Simple past... Past Continuous...Present Perfect...Past Perfect.....
Perfect! I wanted to be perfect! In everything! Nonetheless, sometimes I got tired and said: I can't bear this anymore...How many years will I study? That's enough! Then my father always said:

She holds a tie on her throat and speaks like a father.

Father: Don't give up, Alexandra...Try! Life is a battle! We must be fighters! If you try now, and if you are patient, in the end you will receive the fruit of your efforts... So don't worry. Just keep up the good work; and everything will be done as it should be.

She puts the tie aside. She speaks again.

Sometimes I took a break from my studying and conversed with my mother. My mother was always there, by me. She advised me and encouraged me. Sometimes she talked to me about her life in the village when she was young. She remembered stories, poems, songs, or real events. Some of the events she narrated to me were related to war. This is one of those stories:

Alexandra wears a crimson cardigan. (It represents her mother). Now she impersonates her mother.

Mother: When we were little children, in the village, when the women talked with each other we drew close and listened to them. I remember them stitching tobacco leaves and talking. Sometimes my grandmother talked to us about the lost land of their forefathers. In 1922 after the destruction in Asia Minor, and even before the signing of the Lausanne convention a big part of the Greek population from Eastern Thrace left their villages and their fortunes and came to Greece. My grandmother came from a village of Eastern Thrace. She talked to us about her homeland. She talked and cried:

Alexandra puts on a black shawl. Now she is her great-grand- mother:

Great grand mother: Oh children! The wealth we had in our land! Houses with two and three floors! Fertile land! Apples! Figs! Pears! Vineyards! Tasty grapes! Oh children! Someday we will go back to our homeland again!

Alexandra takes off the black shawl.

Mother: And our grandmother cried, and the women cried, and we, the little children cried too. My grandma spoke full of nostalgia about her homeland. And her big complaint was that she never went back there again, not even as a visitor.

Alexandra takes off the crimson cardigan.

Alexandra: Some other time my mother told me what happened and how she felt the day conscription was ordered in Greece in 1974, after the Turkish invasion in Cyprus.

Alexandra puts on the crimson cardigan.

Mother: It was summer; July; Saturday. Your sister Despina was only 4 months old. She was sleeping. I had just washed her baby clothes. I was hanging the wash on the line, when I heard the church bells ringing without stopping. People started running like crazy. I took the baby in my arms, and followed the crowd. We gathered at the square of the village. Everybody was crying their eyes out. Your father was in Thessaloniki helping his nephew prepare for some exams. He had a hunch that something was going wrong because he used to listen to foreign radio stations, so he had his discharge papers with him. So, he reported himself in Thessaloniki, and from there he was sent to Evros. But we didn't know where he was. Next evening, we heard a knock on the door. Somebody shouted! "Grandma!!!" It was your father's nephew. He brought us your father's suitcase and told us that he had reported himself.

I started trembling. Then I went to the kitchen, took a knife (*She holds the pink pen as if it was a knife*) and kept it next to me day and night. Then, after two days your father called and told me where he was. Your Grandma cried: “I have three sons and they are all sent to the fire! My child had a fresh wound from the operation on his appendicitis. And he holds a gun! How many wars will my eyes see yet? I’ve seen the war of ’12, I’ve seen the ’22, I’ve seen the ’40! God forbid!”

Then, your father came to the village, on a leave, and we had your sister baptized. Meanwhile, because of my great worry and stress, I didn’t have milk anymore, and I stopped breastfeeding your sister. And I said: “I, who had so much milk that was more than enough, now I don’t even have a drop.” Then, because schools were about to start and your father was a teacher, he came back. It was a relief after those months of sadness.

Alexandra takes off the crimson cardigan.

It was like this that I passed my teens in Xanthi. Studying continuously, and sometimes conversing with my mother about old stories. That’s how I saw it then. I thought that these stories belonged to the past, and had nothing to do with me. They were over. In fact, I sympathized with my mother, but couldn’t understand exactly the pain she described to me...But someday, I would understand...

Chapter 3- No Act (Just for reading).
The War inside me.

And my dreams are now in ruins
And my whole world has broken into pieces

I still breathe the air of the country I love;
The cradle of Democracy.

So much injustice...

Oregano, mint and fennel are still in my hands;
But now blood is flowing from the wounds of my palms onto the dry soil.
The taste of blackberries, figs and hazelnuts is still in my mouth;
But now a thick crust of bitterness is covering all the pleasant flavors of the past.

So much injustice...

How can I hate the endless light, the affectionate warmth of Mother Sea?
How can I hate the playful dolphin which follows the ship all the way to the island
that celebrates and welcomes me?
How can I hate the scent of the jasmine, the lily, the wild rose and the pine-tree?

I can't.
I don't.

But now it's night in my soul.
Colors don't exist anymore.
I'm locked in a cage of thoughts.
And the only thing I can do
Is run
Like a small tiger
On the internal surface of a transparent cylinder;
Run as much as I can
To return to the same point;
A pointless point;
Sometimes I hang from it.
Sometimes I do acrobatics.
And people look at me.
And they gloat over my grief.
Or they are just indifferent.
But my heart is trembling.

Who am I now?
I'm still a fighter, aren't I?
Whom do I fight?

The war inside me doesn't end.
And the only thing I can do
Is act

Silently,
Unceasingly
To find the pieces of my old self
And stick them together again
With clay which contains my own tears.

Yet,
The Sun of Justice knows the truth
And at last
He saves you when you are in great need.
He embraces you with the vast light
Since only He is the ally of the just people.
He holds you in His hands.
And He raises you high
At the right point of the landscape.
He raises you where you belong
To complete the Divine puzzle.

A happy image
For,
After so much pain
What you really deserve
Is your smile.

Chapter 4-Act 3.

The War in Lebanon in the summer of 2006.

Alexandra: It was summer; July. July the 12th, 2006. That day has been engraved in my memory forever. Because then the war in Lebanon broke out. And how is this connected with me? My sister and her husband were there. To be exact, my sister's husband had a position there for two years due to an officials exchange program and my sister was there with him. Their being there caused us the most intense and the most excruciating pain we have ever felt in our lives.

That summer turned out to be for us A NIGHTMARE. WAR IS AN EXTENDED NIGHTMARE. Because when you go to sleep, you can't sleep and when you are awake you are not completely awake. You think and think and think continuously. We wanted to contact my sister and her husband but we couldn't. The telecommunications in Lebanon were down! We didn't know what to do! We called my brother-in-law's mother and she said that she couldn't contact them either. My father then called the Foreign Office of Greece and from there we were assured that there wasn't any danger for the Greek population in Beirut. After two days of agony, eventually my sister called us from an unknown cell-phone number and she said that they were safe, they were in the Greek Embassy which is a safe place, and she hoped that the war would end very soon. My sister has a very strong character, and she never shows her sorrow or fear. But this time I sensed her fear. It was there, between the vowels, between the few words she managed to tell us, it was in her frozen, trembling voice, below her deliberate attempt to hide it.

I remember my self and my parents that summer. We didn't want to eat, we were pale, we had dark circles around our eyes; our heart was beating faster, our blood pressure was at its highest, and I remember that sometimes, I felt that due to my faster breathing, my lungs were getting tired and I had a kind of burden on my chest. It was as if somebody heavy was stepping on my chest all the time.

We were counting the seconds. Each second could be equivalent to a bomb, a stray bomb, on my sister's head, my sister, who was young, newly married, and lived in a foreign country miles away from Greece. And it was the first time I realized how much a day lasts; because when you count every second, you realize that a day is not just A DAY. It is 86400 seconds; 86400 potential bombs on our people's heads. Not only bombs, but also shots, suicide attacks, whatever unexpected, whatever horrible one could imagine.

We spent all those 34 days the war lasted in front of the TV screen watching the bombings on the News and listening to the threatening wailing of the war siren. That was the music of that summer for us: The sounds from the bombs and the sirens. And that was the film of that summer for us: The images of the bombarded regions, the images of the bombs the moment they were cast, the images of the flames and the images of the people who were killed or injured, the crying children, and the crying mothers. It was the image of the Prime Minister of Lebanon who cried in front of millions of people for his devastated country.

We lived in Greece where there was no war, but our home, was in the war of Lebanon; not only our home, but also the homes of all the people who had relatives in

Lebanon. It is no more a foreign country when your relatives are there. It is also your country. That's why you feel that excruciating pain in your heart. And your heart is like a leaf, an autumn leaf, yellow, dry, which is stitched by one thousand awls a moment before it crumbles, a moment before it becomes dust.

At last, my sister and her husband returned safe about a month after the war ended. They stayed for about a week in Xanthi. After a long wait they were with us! I tried to ask my sister some questions about the war, but she didn't speak a lot. Then I remembered the Yugoslavian children I had met some years ago...They wouldn't speak either...We tried to discuss pleasant events, as far as we could... Then they left again. Two weeks after their departure from Greece to Lebanon my father had a stroke being only 59 years old! All that pain had this consequence. A new struggle began then for my father and my family.

A war doesn't end when it ends officially. It continues to have consequences on people's lives. And what Homer called Cyclops and Laestrygonians exist. They are not monsters created by a poet's imagination. They come to you with and after war.

I hope that nobody, ever, will feel what we felt in our family in the summer of 2006. And I IMAGINE, like John Lennon, A WORLD WITHOUT WARS.

(She says without singing):

**You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us,
and the world will live as one.**

(John Lennon, Imagine).