

# **MEMOIRS OF A NANNY**

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CULTURAL ILLUSTRATIONS  
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Maria is my name  
a simple woman, uneducated of my own choice.

Values have always been of utmost importance to me  
since I first started to understand that I' m alive.  
People's actions and behaviour matter more to me.  
They beautify life, broaden our souls and our perceptions  
as a whole..,

A strange impulse has taken hold of my feelings this morning.  
Memories. The past. A persistent feeling to share them with  
you rules my thoughts this day.

Life on earth is so precious, a heavenly gift to us all, similar to  
a book that is gradually accomplished. Time flies and the  
epilogue comes with our demise. The curtains on the stage are  
drawn for the last time

Yet before I go ahead with my tale I feel the need to ask  
for your forgiveness My incompetence in expression is due  
indeed to this lack of education . . . You may therefore find  
my words and thoughts simplistic, valueless.

No matter, the need in me to share those longed for days of  
old is stronger than my vanity.

This tale is about loving.  
We all gain by sharing in loving.



I was born on an island in Greece.  
In the shadows of memory rest the first few years of my  
existence on the island.

They christened me Maria Angelika.

My parents were poor farmers who propagated a large number  
of children. Alas, one child accompanied the next to the  
grave. I alone, survived.

My poor exhausted mother was forced to help till the land  
with father. Difficult years those were to stay alive, to earn  
the basic needs.

I distinctly remember however nature on the island, its beauty.  
The aroma the pines spread in the summertime, the corn fields  
swinging their elegant tops in the gentle winds, the  
magnificent olive trees whose trunks fascinated me with their  
strange shapes. More often than not they brought to mind fairy  
tales.

One of my grandmothers managed to live long enough to tell  
me some of these tales.

In those days human beings did not live long Hardships cut  
short their existence.

Doctors were scarce on the island unwilling maybe to practice  
there.

Along with so many other commodities lacking in our lives clothes were of course scarce. Two sets of clothes if a person possessed or three, one set had to be saved in the chest for national and religious festivities.



As for shoes we children ran barefoot mostly, not to ruin the only pair we possessed.

My cousin who had to attend school in the next village had to walk miles every day. He removed his shoes on the way not to wear them out.

So many hardships indeed. Everything was difficult.



We children received a present of a new pair of shoes from our God - parents usually at Easter time. Imagine our joy. We spent the night in bed with our shoes on.

Father died first. They carried him from the fields, placed him in a coffin and the villagers crowded into our tiny house filling the place with lamentations all night long. Their voices still linger in my dreams on occasion. I jump up with fright and thank the Almighty that it was only a dream.

Mother followed my father soon to the grave. They also filled her with lamentations one whole night whilst I sat doubled up in a corner totally lost in despair. What was to happen to me now? I was still a small child. Nobody gave me a thought as those bleak, endless hours went by.

Luckily there was an uncle, my father's brother. He collected me and brought me to his home to live with them.

My aunt now had eight mouths to feed, including myself. Naturally she resented my presence. She would vent her frustrations and annoyance by spanking me as often as possible

Those first ten years of my life were indeed far from pleasant as you might imagine.

A piece of land owned by my uncle bordered with that of Mr. Kanellos, a wealthy landowner. Many discussions and fights were in order often regarding my uncle's small plot. His wife was always nagging him that he should sell his plot to repay debts and other expenses.

Uncle disagreed. Land is important to farmers. Disgruntled my aunt would beat me really hard after every row.

One day immediately after their quarrel Mr.Kanellos appeared on the door- step accompanied by another gentleman apparently his younger brother who resided in Egypt

Praxiteles Kanellos was a wealthy entrepreneur. His intentions and proposals were good. He had a plan that would benefit uncle too if their transaction was agreed upon.

Whilst Mr. Kanellos tried to explain all the details. Unaware of their discussions my aunt for no special reason started to beat me up unusually hard cursing me out for eating their bread.

The two strangers stopped talking and stared dumb-founded highly embarrassed. Uncle tried to excuse this unpleasant scene explaining that I was his orphaned niece who now lived with them.

- Life was very hard for the whole family - he said

The two gentlemen however hastily departed looking very sad indeed.

Next day Perikles Kanellos, the younger brother came to visit us alone. He spoke at length with my uncle and....guess what.

They agreed that I, Maria.... would escort Perikles Kanellos and his family ....



To Egypt...to become a companion and playmate to his young daughter. Imagine that...

To this day it seems unfathomable to my mind how easily it all transpired.

Moving to Egypt with the Kanellos family was amazingly exciting an almost unreal experience My life took such a different turn from one day to the next.

Dire poverty was left behind. We lived in comfort now.

The only joys missed from the past were the freshness of the open fields, the aroma of the trees and my closeness to the natural beauty of the island.

It did not take long for me to adapt to my new family as well as to their daughter Penelope.

We spent our time together very agreeably talking, playing different games suitable to our age when of course she was free from her lessons and school.

Her mother, my good mistress, taught me many things in my spare time, embroidery, house work but most particularly manners. She was kind to us all and civil.

There was a Greek cook who also lived with us Mrs. Sophia whose fortunes ran out after her husband's demise. Mrs. Sophia kept company to my mistress when her chores in the kitchen were over. As a result I never perfected my abilities in cooking.

My specific role was to keep company to Penelope who really tried hard to please me

One failing however in my new friend was difficult to get used to. If an idea entered Penelope's head she would not give in to anybody. Nothing and nobody would make her change her mind.

Despite such minor problems, pleasantly as careless youngsters the years went by.



Pericles Kanellos did not wait for his daughter to come of age, to get her engaged to be married. An acquaintance who happened to be visiting Cairo talked to him about a relative of his who had recently returned from Athens, a worthy young man just graduated as a doctor.

As well as two boys Kanellos had a girl called Penelope whom he adored. It seemed natural that he might not have been too keen to part with her before she had matured.

The master was a self-made very successful business-man, highly respected in society for his integrity but most particularly for his heart of gold. He grew up in Greece, on the same island as myself and emigrated to Egypt when he was young. Though his family was not devoid of ease, some especial psychological need of his had made him abandon his homeland as soon as he had graduated from school.

The good man fought hard to make his fortune abroad and to gain the esteem of his fellow men in society. His business transactions flourished along with his fame for honesty.

When he turned forty a wealthy good looking Greek lady – plump, genteel, -born in Egypt herself- who is now my mistress- won him. Together they bore their three children, the two boys and our beloved Penelope.

Pericles Kanellos had a good reason to wish to see his daughter established in holy wedlock sooner than he ever anticipated all those years.



His heart of gold ticked faster than usual for the last few months. He was worried for Penelope who was still a youngster, only sixteen years old then. Women from “good families” at the time, were not meant to go to work for their living and his daughter had not shown any eagerness to further her education. Women perfected themselves in keeping house.

They spent the rest of their spare time embroidering or socializing.

Marriage was therefore the ideal solution for them, a husband to look after them, to protect them and to bear children.

Pericles Kanellos decided to meet with the young man, his friend’s relative without mentioning any of his thoughts to his wife and the rest of his family

Alone, he travelled to Alexandria.

He met with “the intended groom” They spoke at length. He appeared indeed to be a very serious young person, sound and correct. He was pleased. As a father he was satisfied too...with one reservation. Penelope had of course to approve of him herself

He desired that his children would not be faced with the difficulties he himself had experienced. The boys would become professionals one would be a lawyer the other an economist and his Penelope would also marry a learned man.



His return to Cairo somewhat scared him  
Contrary to his expectations his wife had developed into a totally different person since their marriage. A doting mother and a most capable lady, she kept her household under her control to perfection.

As a wife Kanellos might have preferred her to have developed a less dynamic character, a slightly sweeter disposition maybe with regard to his personal relationship with her. The successful businessman was a fearless man, No one could scare him but in his heart of hearts he was afraid of Polixeni. His nature was mild in temperament, ineffable in words and feelings.

Whenever Polixeni scolded him if they happened to disagree, he never let it develop into an argument. He would listen patiently to her rattling, bending his head without replying, but he always followed his feelings in his decisions, not allowing himself to be influenced by his wife.

There was a very good reason for tolerating his wife's weaknesses. When they were first married, Polixeni was eighteen a beautiful speechless youngster.



His eyes would often rest upon her with admiration, pride and respect as he watched her mature into a real woman, the mother of his children. And if on occasion she became unreasonable because she was jealous of him, Perikles would smile with satisfaction. Whenever she saw him greeting the next door neighbor, a young Armenian widow, Polixeni went up in flames, jealousy winning the day in her heart. On his return home scenes would follow.

Perikles enjoyed watching his wife lay claim on him fighting like a lioness.

This time however he was not prepared to relent and to lose the fight. He had very serious reasons and was not ready to give in. He wished with all his heart for his daughter to marry while there was still time maybe for him to see a grandchild born.

As soon as he announced his decision dark clouds gathered in the dining room. They had barely finished their midday meal and were all still sitting around the dining table.

Polixeni reacted immediately. She put her head down on the table and started sobbing loudly. When her tears stopped, a flow of words followed suit...

-Pericles, what are you trying to tell us? You have found a groom for our daughter to marry? What in heaven's name is the rush about.

Penelope is still under age. We do not wish to send her away from home. She is too young. I cannot give my consent and do not wish to discuss the matter any further.

She pressed her lips together and tried to stand up hoping to put an end to the conversation.

- I'm afraid my dear, I have to insist this time. – her husband answered in a firm voice.

-please sit down. I have not finished expressing my thoughts

-but it is illogical to ask us to meet a young man whom you have barely met yesterday, to marry off our daughter. After all with the income from her dowry which you will be providing she can get married whenever she wishes and can select any suitable young man she desires.

Penelope sat speechless staring into the distance, her beautiful eyes bigger than ever. She had her father's disposition. It was not easy for her to openly express her feelings

The two boys were also speechless. They had nothing to add. Father had spoken. Best not to interfere. Besides they had no opinion on the matter under discussion.

Another epoch, other ways of life, the young had to behave with respect towards their elders. Discipline was required by parents.

The impact this marriage would have on their sister's development and life was beyond their understanding anyway.

Father must have a good reason to firmly insist.

Perikles listened to his wife's arguments, unbending in his decision, his heart wrung with anguish. He definitely desired nothing less than to see his daughter depart. He knew very well that he was the one who would miss her most. They were so alike in their natures. He was greatly comforted in her. But the young man had impressed him. He was different, progressive. He was determined to marry her off. It was imperative now that was his belief.

He was also under the impression that his daughter would experience another way of life, more interesting, wider, in an environment and social circle different to their own as a doctor's wife.

Until that time, those bachelors of their "milieu" had not won his esteem.

-Penelope, my child, do you have any misgivings or objections to meet this young man? -

Her lovely eyes almost popping out of her head in astonishment, Penelope did not answer at first, Fresh, young she was more beautiful than her mother when Perikles had met and married Polixeni.

She liked the idea well enough to meet the "intended groom" but felt scared too. She could manipulate her father to give in to her every wish and fancy. Not her mother. There were frequent disagreements between mother and daughter.

If she were to marry she would become a matron, a lady.  
She would do as she pleased.  
The very thought filled her with enthusiasm.  
Her young mind restricted to its world, did not engage itself  
in more earnest thoughts.  
She smiled.....and consented to meet with the groom.

My personal reaction ... was depressing. It plunged me into  
despair. Penelope about to get married....Wow. .It was  
difficult for me to accept this idea. I too believed she was too  
young. I was only a few years older than her. We still played  
together. She was definitely not mature enough.

Now what would happen to me, if Penelope got married?

Master Perikles did not procrastinate in reassuring me about  
my future. He had observed me maundering around the house  
a sad and thoughtful look on my face.

-You are at home Maria.  
Only if you settle your life in wedlock will you leave us.  
Do not worry about anything.

He certainly helped relieve me of my fears as always  
with his kind heart and good intentions .

Penelope's engagement was celebrated within the close family  
circle. She looked really beautiful though somewhat scared  
but said not a word to any of us regarding her feelings. Up to  
then she had not experienced love. One of the young men in  
her social circle had caught her fancy in the past. That was all.  
Her parents' marital life had encouraged her to evaluate  
marriage as a step forward to her development

She had a positive attitude in her feelings. The prospect of marriage was therefore acceptable.

When the groom was expected to arrive in Cairo for their first meeting intensive preparations had kept Penelope busy. She went out of her way to appear beautiful and elegant. Proud of her fine taste, she shopped with her mother and my good self sometimes, choosing the most expensive materials on the market.

What could Polixeni say? Tears would often fill her eyes, as she watched her take charge with such initiative. Only a short while ago she had been her little girl. Now they were making plans for her wedding and departure from the family hearth.

It was not easy for her heart to accept this event.

Sometimes she would moan to Pericles.

-Do not indulge in negative thoughts wife, they do not generate good luck. If our child approves of this young man, I believe she will find happiness- her husband would reply. Nobody was on Polixeni's side anymore.

She was forced to stop voicing her deep resentment.

Eugene Eftichides the illustrious groom to be, arrived at their house in Cairo with his relative and a bouquet of flowers. He was favourably received by the whole family excluding Polixeni of course. The young people seemed not to have any objections to be united.

Polixeni the mother, deep down in her heart took an immediate dislike to Eugene but she was compelled to hide her feelings.

Penelope was thunderstruck by Eugene. She had not expected him so handsome, dynamic or clever.





Her impression regarding herself was that she lacked her mother's sharp mind and judgment.

Older than her by twelve years though Eugene was it did not seem to put her off. On the contrary it flattered her. She thought she would manage to get him to follow her every wish and fancy as she did with her father. Even Polixeni could not dissuade her. No matter how many disagreements they had together she always succeeded in having her way.

Pericles Kanellos was satisfied that all was well and proceeded with arrangements and plans for their wedding. Eugene suggested that they should not rush. They would have to get to know each other better. A few months would have to pass before they could get married since he resided in Alexandria and already had plenty of patients who respected him.

The idea that their daughter would live far away, in another town, now disturbed both parents. Eugene would have to travel to Cairo, back and forth in his free time. It made the parents feel unwell.

They questioned the very idea of marriage with this young man.

Influenced by their doubts, their plans rested. Several other unforeseeable problems cropped up too.



Penelope however had made her mind up.  
She wanted Eugene as a husband.  
Her stubborn insistence finally convinced them...as always.

Not a word did I utter, just in case, I, Maria, may have been misunderstood. I would miss Penelope sorely but her happiness weighed more for me than my feelings of loss. Besides life had taught me to accept the turn of events uncomplaining.

As for Eugene it seemed that his feelings were genuine. He admired his bride to be. His whole demeanour and expressions showed what he felt.

Penelope was for him a beautiful girl born with a silver spoon in her mouth, her background and surroundings totally different to his.

Eugene's mother was of aristocratic stock, - of the finest stock as we simple folk say- yet she adjusted admirably to wedded life with forbearance and humility as her husband was always poor. Particularly practical with many children, both parents managed to bring up their brood as well as they could despite their meager finances.

Eugene had to put up a fight to see his life progress.



Even his studies only took place because of a scholarship and some loans. He was determined to better himself in life, just as his father-in-law-to-be had done before him. The same values in their natures, perseverance in their goals characterized both men.

As for Penelope being much younger, Eugene did not find this a big problem. He trusted that she would adjust to his ways. Her character was still malleable he convinced himself. It would develop as she matured.

Whenever they were together, he would watch her with admiration sitting quietly by his side without prattling as so many young ladies of her age did.

Romantic thoughts filled his heart and in his loving eyes one could actually witness his genuine feelings shine through.

Preparations were now under way slowly.

A dowry, besides money necessary stuff like furniture, clothes, sheets all embroidered of the finest Irish linen and so forth and so on. Penelope's developed sensitivity helped select the very best. She supervised everything in detail...Eugene would have to be really proud of her.

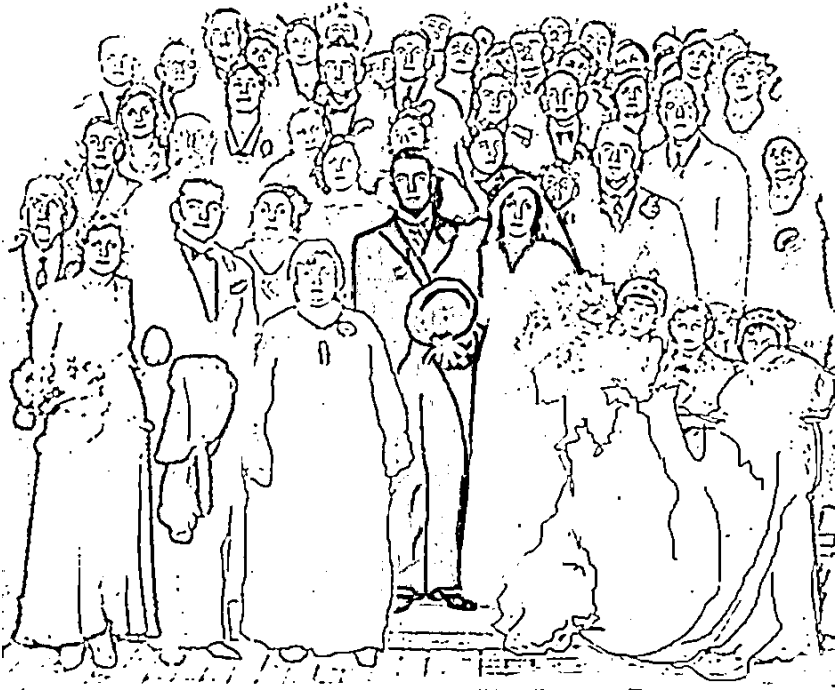
What a splendid wedding it was. We were all there to join in prayers for their happiness.

Penelope in her bridal gown prettier than ever before though somewhat scared stunned us with her beauty. Eugene was equally handsome. They looked like...a royal pair straight out of a fairy tale.

A large crowd witnessed the ceremony relatives, friends, important guests as well as simple folk.

A regal reception followed.

The newly weds were to spend their honeymoon in Greece. Then they were to proceed on their journey....to Austria where they would reside for a certain period as Eugene wished to further specialize in his profession.



Long after their departure when they had settled down in their home without Penelope's presence whenever she saw her husband fret Polixeni would scold.

-We can do nothing now Pericles-  
-you are the one who insisted on marrying her off so young.  
-May they find happiness that counts most- her father would add, though he actually missed her more than he could express. It was very difficult for him to bear not to have her around the house.

As for my person, there was sorrow in my heart for our separation. I had lost my companion. The misses found a variety of chores to occupy me with but they were not fun without Penelope.

Peace reigns in my soul to-day  
Old photographs, trinkets, letters,  
Memories more precious than jewels the trunk holds.  
My thoughts travel rapidly back in time

Happy memories of days gone by.  
Sad too.

Forgotten ...a child's essay:

*Irene is my name'*

*I am child more or less like all the children of the world. My mother is sweet natured and my father wise. I love them both.*

*My parents, since the time I was born on earth, wanted to bring me up correctly, as most parents do. Not to follow in their foot-steps.*

*Whatever reasons they had to wish for me to be different to them I am not aware of.*

*Possibly deep down in their hearts, all good parents wish to see their children grow up different to themselves, better than themselves in every way,*

*I was born in Egypt, in Alexandria, in a Greek family .and was told that my birth raised high hopes for my parents and relatives.*

*I was expected as babies usually do, to bring joy, to broaden the family's horizons.....*

*There is nothing I can add to that*

*I am searching for Irene within me,  
For the real me like a bird flying freely into the bright, open  
skies.*

I Maria was blessed  
to look after Eirene when she was born.

Many years ago, long before Penelope was married  
when her father By Divine Grace inspired,  
pitied me and brought me to Egypt,





I had lived since then with the Kanellos family  
and continued to do so after their daughter's marriage.  
Good years  
Quiet ones  
They sped by

We missed Penelope sorely  
Waited and waited most anxiously for an addition  
A change in our lives.....  
A baby, to lighten our hearts .

It took three YEARS for our hopes and prayers to take effect  
Our impatience grew with us as one year followed the other.

We are now moving to Alexandria. -the whole household-  
just imagine- to be present at the child's birth

It is difficult to describe old Kanellos' excitement and the  
misses too.  
They smile incessantly.

During the summer months the heat is intense in Egypt.  
Old Kanellos had rented a house for us by the sea.  
His greatest wish was about to come true  
He was going to become a grandfather

We all came to be present to share in the joy and  
to welcome the arrival of the tiny being, the Beneficent  
Creator was about to deliver into our lives.

Two whole days she kept us waiting.  
As for Pericles Kanellos, he paced up and down the pavements outside the clinic not to disturb anyone, his heart of gold ticking faster than ever before-as we found out later

Those first summer months were spent in the beautiful, large, airy, house by the sea after Eirene's birth took place.



The baby was entrusted  
to me..... Maria, to look after though I have remained  
stubbornly uneducated throughout my life despite grandpa  
Kanellos' insistence on helping me get some education. My  
mind has always been quick  
-Sharp-witted-they say-

What use would I have had to further my education.  
That was my motto all along  
Unshakeable is my faith in God Who Guides and Protects us.

All the members in the family trust me.  
I look after their little angel

Rest assured ... nobody is likely to give her < the evil eye>  
As for care, Eirinoula and I are inseparable.  
Almost the whole day we spend out of doors.  
We traipse around the sea-side "corniche" they call this long  
walk and some parks.  
The pram is always covered by a mosquito net, just in case  
someone's glance falls on my darling with admiration in their  
eyes and renders her unwell.  
You may have guessed .....

I am afraid of "the evil eye" and the harm it can cause to our  
well-being.  
Might you be thinking now that my belief stems from a lack  
of education....

Did not Jesus turn his eyes on a fig tree admiringly and it  
dried up  
- or something like it –



When Eirinoula was born she was somewhat darkish  
Covered in hair too.  
Her appearance did not influence our feelings,  
We adored her

As she began to grow however she turned into a most  
beautiful baby. Her darkish hair became light.  
She transformed into a beauty, a most intelligent child,  
alert and sensitive

Grandpa Kanellos and the missus were indeed compelled to leave us after a long while, to return to Cairo, their house, family and obligations but their thoughts and love stayed with us - one could almost sense their loving care in our every day life..

As for myself.... a new mission  
Looking after Eirene is ahead of me now.

They left me behind... to reside in Alexandria with the good doctor and Penelope, who panics when her husband is with her.



Penelope is really afraid of her husband  
It is not..at all easy. Thank God, I am around.  
Every so often she expresses her fears and worries to me.

-Have patience my Penelope- I keep telling her

-You will become of one spirit in time.  
Your husband is a clever and good man. You will get used to  
his temperament and your married life.

Absent-mindedly she listens to whatever I say, but does not  
heed my advice.

Our baby grows prettier by the day She is now two years old.

Eirinoula is ready to face the world  
A first fancy dress gathering.-Penelope so wants to show her  
off.-

Old Kanellos' golden heart was bequeathed by Almighty God  
to his daughter, along with golden hands. Whatever Penelope  
undertook she would complete to perfection, sewing, cooking,  
embroidery. All were works of art.

That particular time she busied herself with a fancy dress  
costume. Her knowledge in dress-making was minimal but  
she worked wonders.

At the gathering a parade was held for the best costume and the most good looking child.

Our child...naturally! won the first prize, she was prettier by far than the rest including her costume.

A lovely doll like herself was awarded to her covered in frills and lace



The show over, we headed for home at last.  
Eirene delighted, got into the car hugging the doll lovingly  
in her arms



Just before we reached home the car jolted.  
The doll slipped and fell...her delicate face smashed to pieces.

Big tears of distress streamed down the child's cheeks as she  
clutched her back into her arms blubbering in between her  
sobs.

-why did the doll break?  
-had she been a bad little girl?

Her mother much like a child herself, speechless, almost in  
tears, was devoid of words of consolation.

As for me, I repeated what I firmly believe – 'the evil eye' was  
to blame. All those people glaring, admiring our little one.



They were responsible for the damage

-Don't say such things in front of the child Maria, her father really objects- Penelope warned.

Her father had other words of consolation when we reached home.

-Lucky for you Eirini you have so many more dolls to play with when millions of children have none, not even enough to eat. Remember to be grateful to God for whatever comes your way.  
Find blessedness within your sorrow always no matter what comes your way.

Such a small child

Nevertheless

She was soon smiling as usual as though she had understood deep down the meaning of these words of wisdom.

Indeed it is a boon to be loved and cared for.

Whatever life lay in store for Eirini, this early experience would serve her well. I was certain.

The long promenades turned out to be auspicious for me personally Maria.

Our house happened to be located in the centre of town. One fine day we stopped with little Eirinoula at a coffee shop to rest and refresh ourselves.

Unforeseeble the games luck plays. My darling child had a soft drink and I Maria, a delicious cup of Greek coffee.

All the while we were resting, the owner of the coffee shop would not stop looking at me intently until I went red in the face as though I was feverish.



- Silly man- I kept mumbling to myself, you will give me the evil eye.

How ironic. He was short and thin, barely reaching my shoulders, if we had stood next to each other.

I was tall and plump- delicious food is a special weakness of mine-

–How ridiculous that this shorty was making my cheeks burn with heat as though I was suffering from an illness. We definitely would have made the funniest of couples if I were at all interested in him and believe it or not, he never stopped gaping .

We left as soon as possible after that first encounter.

Luck was on his side however.

Our paths crossed unavoidably as his café happened to be located not far from our home. Every time we went for a walk we were forced to pass by his coffee shop.

It is difficult to describe his enthusiasm whenever his eyes caught sight of us from afar. He would beam with delight smiling broadly.

His admiration for my person eventually touched me. The years had gone by. I was far from old of course but.... male attention no matter how many times we profess indifference is flattering to a female.

Every so often I would remind myself what a ridiculous couple we would make, he half a foot...  
I, tall, hefty, strong much like those comics Penelope read picturing a similar grotesque couple

Our relationship went no further.  
Not one word was exchanged between us but his intense look always brought fire to my cheeks.  
Months went by.

One fine day he, -Soter is his name,- appeared at our doorstep and asked to speak to the master,  
He even knew my name.

And...he proposed to marry me.  
His earnings would allow us, he explained, to live comfortably though he was not rich.

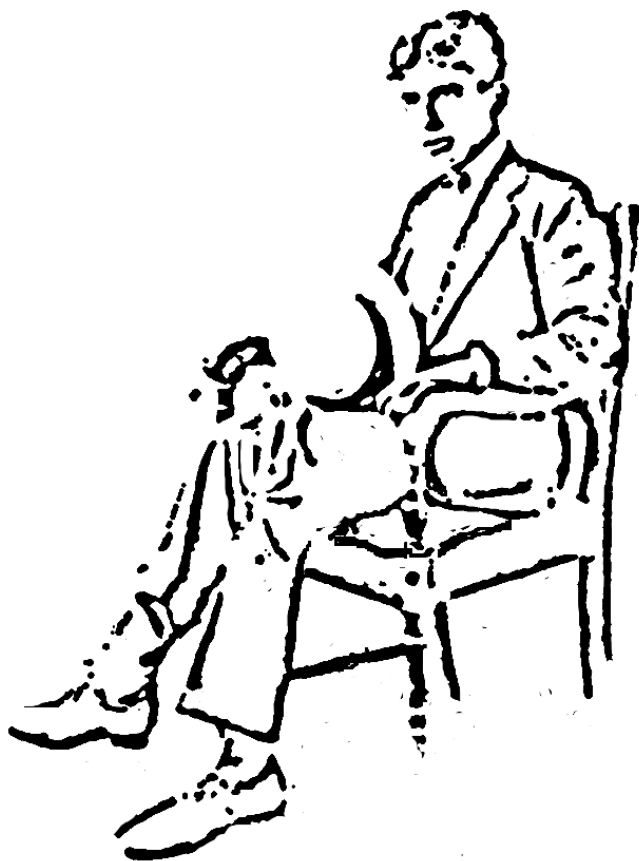
I too had my savings but this he did not know.

Master Eugene insisted that I give the matter serious consideration not “kick at luck in the face”.

I decided to contemplate on the matter.

We were officially engaged with one condition.  
I would remain with my little Eirine for as long as she was still small.

When I felt the time propitious, in other words when the child would go to a junior school or later, depending on my feelings we might get married.



Poor Soter was really keen and so patient, I must admit .... but I did not mind. I was not ready to depart from the family no matter how kind and ardent his wishes were.

Besides I needed to be reassured that I had not taken the wrong decision.

Some time after the engagement before sundown, as Penelope and I were getting the child ready for bed, the phone rang.

Penelope rushes to answer the phone. The child follows her like a puppy.

-Oh, my goodness .....War has been declared- says Penelope  
-Greece has joined World War Two-

-Mummy what is wrong. What is war?

-Be quiet please.

-Will they draft you too-asked her mother

Her husband gave an explanation inaudible to us

-What about my brothers-

-Oh my God, but they are so young only 18 and 19.  
How awful...

-Mummy what is war? Mummy please don't cry-

Penelope is inconsolable. She cannot stop crying and we do the same .

She was barely three when she first started to go to a French nursery school

The nuns taught songs and many other things all in French. She started prattling at home in no time at all to the astonishment of the whole family particularly myself.

They called her “Irene”- (that; is very French)

Amazing really such a small child to learn three or four languages at the same time.

Imagine if she were living in the village in Greece She would have hardly mastered her mother tongue well enough.

For us who lived in Egypt at the beginning, the significance of this war eluded us.

We covered the shutters with dark paper almost at once as advised, uncertain as to what would follow or how our daily lives would be affected.

Later we began to assimilate into our beings the tragedies wars spread, men and women dying by the hundreds of thousands the unbelievable catastrophe taking place on earth.

We were indeed fortunate to be living in this blessed land when people were being bombarded constantly elsewhere and those who survived lived in daily misery and hunger.

Food too we did not lack nor were we to face great dangers.

When the bombardments started we had to move sometimes to spend the night at master Eugene's sister/s house which was considered safer as it was more modern, built with cement.

By nature I am cool in spirit, and do not scare easily. One night Eirene could not go to sleep. I had forgotten to bring her favourite doll with which she slept huddled in her arms and a freshly washed towel that she placed on her head. Without these two items it was impossible for her to fall asleep.

I walked back home fearlessly though a bombardment was going on at the time. We had still not heard of the tragedies taking place in the rest of the world yet it was hazardous to take a chance even if we were not targeted in Alexandria.

You could drop dead if a shell hit your head.



Despite the advice that death would befriend me whilst I walked the streets I was soon back safe and sound.

Unshakeable is my faith in God's Will, His Grace and Protection.

The nights we had to move, Eirinoula and I slept in the study, where two narrow divan beds were placed temporarily for our use.

Above our beds facing each other hung huge paintings of ancestors looking very grim. They filled a lot of space on each wall.

The study was rather small in size, never intended for use as a bed-room.

It was difficult to avoid looking at the portraits.

They commanded attention

-Poor ancestors- the child would invariably say.

-They must be scared and unhappy with so much noise going on, on earth. Not easy for us all to sleep together. They haven't a single smile left for us-.

That particular night just as soon as we had lain on our beds my mind went blank. Moved by instinct only, I jumped suddenly on my feet and fell right on top of the child's bed like a huge mountain -consider my size please-

Only seconds before the ancestors descended to join us , all of us together in the tiny bed, portraits, frames and pieces of glass.

The building shook to its foundation when the shell had exploded.

They extricated me away from the rubble still under shock crying whilst thanking also the Almighty for his Protection.

The child safe and unharmed did not even have a scratch on her from the fall of the ancestors I still held clutched into my arms.

Despite the war that had aroused and enraged people everywhere.

Alexandria continued at that time to be a cosmopolitan city, the most important city after Cairo, the capital of Egypt.

All the forces we represented living mostly in the major cities nationalities. I believe we gained from this but learnt also to share.

The inhabitants who lived all over Egypt came to Alexandria during the summer months to avoid excessive heat and to spend their holidays by the sea.

In ancient times Alexandria had greater importance world wide.

It was closely connected to the rest of Europe, second in importance to Rome with its famous ancient port so elegantly constructed.

Word has it that Alexander the Great had constructed (ot maybe had given instructions for the city to be built according to his own plan.

There is even a rumour that he is buried somewhere around the centre of the town.

There was also a famous lighthouse in days of old, the height of which reached 400 metres-one of the seven wonders of the world. Only some rocks remain from the famous lighthouse.

It was totally destroyed. On these very few rocks the gulf of Kuwait was constructed

Alexandria was better known for its cultural endeavors throughout the world for its schools and libraries, its philosophers, astronomers and mathematicians. In ancient times its citizens had dealings with all the prominent intelligentsia of the world -even Homer.

In our time Alexandria had still more intellectuals and artists than those living in Cairo the capital, where commerce and trade was predominant.

I often felt amused that Almighty God had helped me settle in such a cultural city, though I could not even read the alphabet.

Grandmother Kanellos was an active boisterous lady. She was very fair with us but demanded discipline. I do not remember anyone in their employment complaining or having to resign.

The missus was funny as well. She insisted that we should not be deprived of good food. We were all pretty chubby.

With her children however the mistress was soft. She indulged in her love for them without measure. Such love does not help children they become demanding.

Egypt provided many goods thanks be to God, The missus was financially independent of her own accord, not only because of her husband's successful endeavors.

The result was that two of her three children expected their mother to grant them their every wish and fancy. In other words, she spoiled her children, as we simple folk say.

Penelope was no exception She was especially pampered by her parents and it turned out that her nature did not facilitate her married life as her father had imagined or expected..

Her husband was a respectable and wise human-being but he did not tolerate any nonsense. He was composed, disciplined often stern.

After she had settled down into her married life, Penelope anxious to be accepted in their social entourage made special efforts to win their favour as all the women were older than her, well acquainted with the tricks and games of life.

Beautiful, young, inexperienced as she was, advice poured into her ears by those friends frequently. In her innocence she trusted them. So, trouble infiltrated into her family life.

Negative reactions in her relationship with her husband now were common.

No good comes from these situations.

Frequent disagreements ending in tears made Eugene more stern than ever. He did not know how to cope with his wife's immaturity and character. He was baffled and concerned about her

Yet Penelope would not pay any attention to his words of wisdom.

My own advice was also ignored inclined as she was to trust and follow those outsiders' opinions how to handle her marital problems.

Those "good" friends, took advantage of her. She spent generously on them regaling them with presents and invitations. Whenever she ran out of money she would ask for more from her mother in secret even without her father's knowledge.

Education is not imperative for one to understand plain truths. I Maria, was personally very perturbed by these "ladies"  
Indeed more so because Eirinoula was always in my thoughts whenever the couple got into arguments.

The child lost her cheer.

Lack of harmony at home influenced Eirinoula deeply, no matter how hard I tried to appease the situation.

A very disturbing incident occurred at Eirini's christening as well.

After the christening ceremony a large reception was held at home.

The whole floor was used to host the guests.

The baby safely deposited in her bed-room slept soundly -a lovely room it was too-a gift from her doting grandfather Kanellos, for whom the best was not good enough for his granddaughter.

Fearful of the evil eye –as I explained earlier, I remained in her room, to be close to the child and did not allow anybody to come in to disturb her rest. Too much excitement had tired her out. It had been a long day for my sweet puppet.

After about an hour I left the room to offer my services with the guests.

I fastened on her pillow an expensive gold brooch with turquoise stones and diamonds before leaving, a present from some relative.

You can imagine my agitation when I returned to check how the baby was faring in her sleep.

The brooch..... had vanished into thin air

We searched all over the place.  
Everybody was very upset particularly the staff.  
No-one would have stolen the brooch from our home  
Obviously some outsider had dared to remove it  
while I was absent from the child's side.

Two years elapsed.

We go to pay a visit to one of these "ladies" with Eirini  
and her mother. More "ladies" were also gathered there.

The owner asks me to hang Penelope's coat in the wardrobe.  
I open it and my eyes encounter.....  
Guess what...our baby's brooch pinned on the owner's  
jacket.

My immediate reaction was to call Penelope and to whisper  
in her ear- we had some intimacy of course after all those  
years together. My age was not certified since registrations  
of births at that time were not strictly adhered to.  
Nevertheless it was presumed that I was a few years older.

-I have found our brooch here in this very cupboard.

-You...must say something-.

Penelope went pale in the face poor dear.

-Please Maria, its very embarrassing.

We are guests in this house. What can I say to her?

A scene would be improper.

So what do you think I, Maria did ?



Before we left the house, I unfastened the brooch from the jacket and took it home with us. After all, it belonged to Eirini.

No pangs of conscience bother me to this day, for my action.

This 'lady' had to be ashamed, not me.

:Friends' with these habits have to be watched.

They are useless to our well-being and peace of mind.

Eirini's godmother was Penelope's great aunt, an amazing lady. Right after her marriage with Pericles Kanellos the mistress' mother passed away.

Her sister Constantina who survived her, was therefore very attached to her niece's family and served as a mother figure to my mistress.

Great aunt Constantina was a perfectionist by nature. Penelope learnt a great deal from her and was always paying her visits or staying the night over at her house when she was young.

Exceptionally well-off she could have resided in the smartest and richest side of town. Yet she insisted on living in an area where few Europeans inhabited.

Everybody loved and respected this woman wherever she went... and just imagine, she lacked proper education like myself.

As I have stubbornly maintained when one's mind is sharp and one's soul clean, education is not that essential...

Despite her lack of education aunt Constantina handled all of her affairs on her own and they were numerous.

As for her house-hold, it was much like a museum. Beautiful antique pieces of furniture, very precious ornaments, Persian rugs, Chinese vases, valuable paintings. One's breath was caught by the over-all effect.

Slim, agile, smartly dressed like a picture of a model in a magazine, aunt Constantina was.



If she happened to go to the bank, the manager himself would rush to welcome her to discuss finances as well as investments for he valued her opinion greatly -that shows how clever she was even though uneducated..  
does it not?

When her husband was still alive, some of these responsibilities were handed over to him.  
Recently he had unfortunately departed... for heaven.  
She was greatly enamoured of him and grieved sorely though they had not been blessed with children of their own.

Master Eugene highly respected aunt Constantina and chose her as god-mother to his daughter.

The war was never ending.  
At the beginning everybody expected it would NOT drag on for years

They were wrong.

Sotiris continued to serve his customers at the coffee shop.  
He was not enlisted for some reason. Maybe his age group was not called..

His presence did not improve my situation even from afar  
I was not in a hurry to get married. No doubt he had to develop more and more patience but he never gave up wishing to be married to my person.

In the meantime our home was not harmonious.  
The couple continued to have trouble with each other.  
They argued frequently.

A terrible shame indeed. They were both such good people.

The child was growing fast.  
Soon she was to be educated in an English school.  
but would continue to have intensive lessons in French  
and Greek ...the year round.

I really worried about her. Over burdened with lessons  
my sweet puppet was. She had not much spare time to play.

Every afternoon when she returned home from her  
kindergarten a French teacher took over.

“Mamsel” Rose was her name-. a beautiful name.

The poor lady, a spinster was very thin and had a dried up  
look which did not in any way remind one of a rose.

She wore long pleated skirts, white stockings, smelt of powder  
and cologne scented with roses.

Here ended any similarity with a rose.

Mlle Rose, spoke not a word of Greek and when she did speak  
in her own mother tongue her mouth rounded like a  
buttonhole. It was funny to watch the difference. We Greeks  
rarely speak rounding our lips. The sounds are flatter in our  
language.

Eirinoula became “Irene’ again ...with her .

I would peep once in a while to see how they spent their hours together. More often than not Eirinoula was in the clouds, day dreaming, not paying much attention to her teacher.

“S’ il vous plait mademoiselle Irene” Mlle Rose would say (imagine that.. calling a child a lady)

The child would hold her hand in front of her mouth to ... hide a smile.

Naughty. Not very mindful of her teacher she would proceed with her day- dreaming, until she was reprimanded again.

Truth be told either Mlle Rose did not believe in discipline - her lack of concentration was of little importance to her - or else she had a very kind heart.

Never once did she complain to her father.

The following two hours were spent in a totally different way. Miss Protopsaltou took over.

“Despinis” Protopsaltou was not in the prime of her years either.

In fact she had taught Irini’s father when he first arrived in Egypt, to live with his sister as a teen-ager.

She was meticulously groomed, not too tall and had her hair pulled in a bun. Her whole attire commanded discipline and concentration.

Despinis Protopsaltou, was an excellent teacher

“Eirini” had to pay attention.

She insisted on teaching her the Greek alphabet as early as possible, shaping those lovely letters painstakingly.

She talked about Greece too.

Whenever she talked about Greece, “I r i n I”

-clearly and pointedly pronounced –

was allowed to slip into a reverie and into another side of her person.

a Hellene, sensitive to beauty but also practical.

Eirini was made to smell even the absent flowers, feel the dry hot summer winds, the special aroma the Greek pine trees exude in the forests, the clear blue seas and skies.

Other lessons involved “mythology” about the ancients and their incredible imaginary worlds .

At the beginning it was not important to catch up with the school curriculum, the child was still too small. It just meant that Despina Protosaltou was going to be teaching GREEK for several years to come.

Eirini’s father had decided that she should have a British education from the start but follow the Greek school lessons simultaneously at home, plus French, plus Arabic!!

Despite the war, our daily life in Egypt was relatively normal. Hardly anything to complain about. Blessed were we and sheltered in His Land of Plenty

Yet in His Created Kingdom pests abide too.

A very active lot. Battles with large flying cockroaches were frequent in the summer. Mice found their way in the house sometimes scaring one with their sudden appearance.

Bats attracted by the evening light paid an occasional visit.

Penelope was faint hearted.

It was normal for the child to fret

No matter how hard her father tried to instill into her his Spartan ways to make her heart firm it was of no avail.

There was a beautiful cat in the household to aid and abate fears of pests - an enormous Persian Tom with large greenish blue eyes and a soft white coat.

Tom was out of bounds in the living areas.

Penelope refused to have his smell linger behind him, -she tended to be allergic-.

The cat was a source of joy to the child.

One afternoon when both parents were away and I, Maria, had my day off, the child remained at home with the new nanny Eleni, who was going to replace me after my wedding.

Busy with her chores it did not cross Eleni's mind that Irini had made plans of her own how to spend an agreeable afternoon.

An extremely well fed animal Tom was brought into the house and placed in a smallish basket. Eirene always admired his agility climbing up and down trees conquering heights. An elevator might have been more fun for him, less exhausting too, she decided.

At the bottom on the ground floor lay in wait, in a corner an unsightly black kitten to keep Tom company...at least that is what it looked like to Eirene from the top floor.

When the basket started to descend, tied by a flimsy rope the child almost followed.



Hardly able to move in his narrow basket portly Tom surrendered to his fate, but as he was nearing the first floor hanging in mid air by a thin rope in his constricted basket his feline nature reacted.

He became thoroughly agitated.  
There was no space for him to move let alone attempt to jump out.

He shook with excitement unsteady both the basket and the child's hands holding on to the flimsy rope

Tom had very good reason to become so agitated, his feline nature sensed this with certainty. For what lay at the bottom, on the ground floor was

ugh ooh...ghastly ...not of the feline species.

When the realization hit the top floor panting with terror and the shivers....trying all the time to calm poor Tom to behave and sit still, Eirini had one thought only left.

How was Tom to come up? Her hands were shaking.

Luckily she managed to hold on to the flimsy rope despite her terror.  
Slowly, very slowly indeed the cat was pulled all the way up to the second floor.

An amazing feat considering his weight and size

The angels had to work very hard.

The escapade over, nobody but my good self was told  
Nobody else found out. The impact on Tom was not too  
severe. As soon as he felt firm ground he moved with  
exceptional rapidity and zeal to tackle the enemy on his own  
four feet.

As for Eirini, she felt faint for several hours.  
And for the next few days she was a model child,  
A little angel.

Magical moments were experienced during the summer  
months at week-ends by the sea. The family had a wooden  
chalet of their own big enough to accomodate us all  
comfortably.

As soon as Eirini became a toddler, the sea became an integral  
part of our life. The whole household moved to Agami, a  
seaside resort not far from Alexandria,  
Everybody swam splashing in and out of the refreshing clear  
waters.

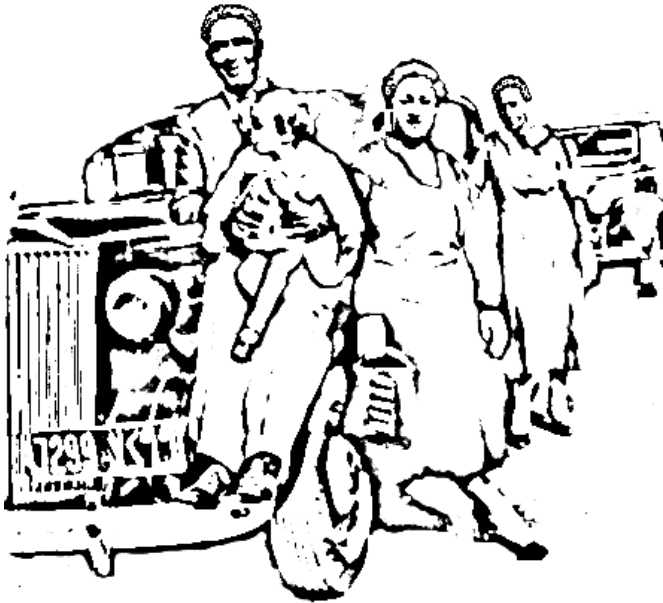


In Agami the exceptionally white sandy beaches are particularly inviting.

After our swim, followed sand-castles.  
The adults sometimes joined us, enjoying with us  
their magic  
their secret passages  
the beautiful princes and princesses  
living far from sight,  
in the dark passages of those castles.

The wooden chalet at Agami was a real treasure.

One week-end we drove to Agami as usual.



The war had spread to further corners of the earth.  
Egypt was literally swarming with soldiers  
either going to battle  
or coming back.

Soldiers everywhere tried to release their tensions  
by drinking, living it up.

That depressing summer week-end  
in place of the wooden chalet lay  
..... burnt logs!!

The chalet was never replaced though it was sorely missed.  
Sotiris was the only one without regrets.

Since then Master Eugene took his family out  
for lunch and the staff had the day off.

Clothes washing in Egypt in those days was a spectacular  
sight, time-consuming too.

A washer-woman would regularly appear on certain days  
of the week and promptly disappear into her busy world,  
to launder piles of clothes. A special room isolated her  
from the rest of the household .

Enormous pots were constantly boiling steaming the place up.  
In other pots, cold water stood ready for rinsing.  
The room full of steam felt as though one had walked into  
a cloud.

With her feet tucked under her and her working clothes lifted  
up to her thighs she would sit on the floor separate the white

from the coloured ones and then she proceeded to wash whilst the water was boiling.

She worked as efficiently as a doctor handling her patients totally engrossed in her work paying no attention to visitors.

If there were no lessons you could not keep Eirini away.

First she soaked the clothes, then washed the white ones which were subsequently boiled and rinsed in indigo blue for extra whiteness.

The whole pile was washed by hand, with pure olive soap Finally when she had finished washing, she rinsed them in tubs containing different scents like lavender, rose and other flowery extracts

Their amazing brightness and lovely scent, once ironed is unforgettable. It still lingers in the nostrils

Strange indeed how they dared to bring him along to pay us a visit that unforgettable afternoon.

Epaminondas was four years or so older than our Irene. Our child must have been about four herself.

Penelope as was mentioned previously had some strange lady friends. She invited one or two of these “ladies” for tea. They sat in the lounge to partake of each other’s company whilst the children were to play together.

It did not take long for Epaminondas to get bored.  
-Show me your house and your father's quarters-  
The clinic was right next to our living quarters.

Filled with pride for the attention the older boy was paying her, they escaped unnoticed by their elders.

Wherever they passed around the house and in the clinic Epaminontas created havoc, pulling papers, overturning tables, chairs even heavy carpets, destroying all he could lay his hands upon.



The child lost her zest for life –  
Please stop, I will be punished.

Nothing and no-one could have prevailed on Epaminondas  
by then.

He dashed forward like a fuming horse, banging his legs on  
the floor  
to frighten her even further

-I need to go to the toilet- she begged, white as a sheet in the  
face.

- Pee here on the Persian carpet-  
-I'll beat you real hard if you cry out...or call them.-

Suddenly both mothers appeared while the child's pee was  
running out  
of control from her panties onto the rug

In a split second Epaminontas vanished out of sight.

He hid in the wardrobe behind some coats.  
His mother who knew his idiosyncrasies well enough and his  
incontrollable nature found him almost immediately ..... and  
started to chase him around the house shouting in a raucous  
voice.

<When I catch you, I will beat the life out of you, you terribly  
naughty creature. You will send me to my grave early you  
rascal –

(she nevertheless lived to a ripe old age as far as I know-)

Eirini stood staring, wet, unhappy, forgotten, whilst all this was going on

By the time she was finally picked up and taken to her quarters to have her clothes changed Epaminontas had taken refuge under a side table in the corridor.

Doubled over the table, her skinny legs dangling almost above her head, his mother was trying to grab him, both of them shouting simultaneously

-Now I mean to give you a good thrashing you incorrigible creature.

- No, mother, please don't. I promise to be good.  
Eirini put me up to it all.

-Epaminontas is not polite and noble like the princes and princesses in the fairy tales that you tell me-

-He is also a liar,- she whispered in my ear as we were entering the bedroom.

In the spring and autumn we went fishing with master Eugene, when Eirinoula was still small. Later the two of them went together.

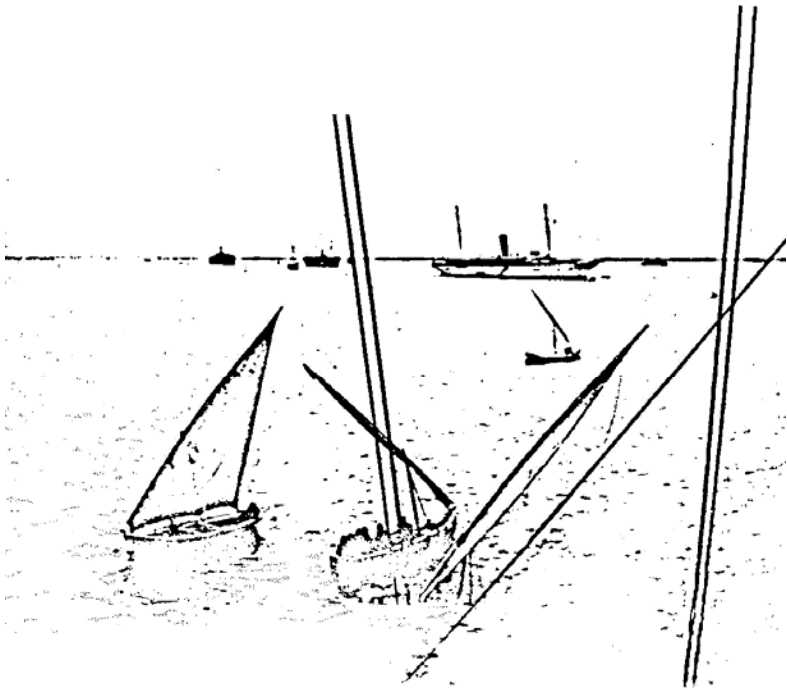
We would rise early and direct ourselves hastily towards the port of Alexandria. A few of the doctor's friends would join us on occasion.



As the horizon lit the sky with the early morning rays of the rising sun, we would row a few miles outside the port and throw anchor without conversing.

After preparing the bait we would wait in silence, patiently for the fish to react.

The port was never still. In the background small and big ships went back and forth. Tuggers, boats of various sizes. The whole atmosphere was magnetic. So much movement everywhere.



The child took it all in, totally engrossed her spirit always reposing in its own world.

She was absent, traveling to far distant lands, since due to the war voyages were out of the question.

Being an islander myself, I let the power of the sea grip me. Its enormity moved me deeply whereas the swishing sound of the waters rendered even imagination still.

As for life at the bottom of the seas what wonders indeed did it contain? A totally different hidden world moved around us out of our sight, barely letting us guess at its existence, -at least in those days, before television and other media widened our knowledge-

Penelope's food basket which always accompanied us on those occasions, with its delicious contents was greatly appreciated. The sea helped our appetites improve enormously..

We all enjoyed ourselves. Eirini would be delighted if fish were caught but when it came to putting them in the basket she would beg her father to throw them back into the sea.

No matter how hard master Eugene persevered in teaching her his Spartan ways, the child could not find it in her nature to go along with his ideas of life.

Our family life was unquiet getting worse as time went by.

Husband and wife did not get on. We were all disturbed and affected by this lack of harmony in particular Eirini. She lost her spontaneous smiles.



In her early years she would side with her mother and would scold her dad for not understanding her mom's nature.. Later she seemed to get along much better with her dad She did however develop a deeper sense in understanding people's feelings way beyond her childish years.

If truth be told, her father was particularly caring.

He took great pains to instill into her much valuable advice. She would often sit with him at his office, her legs dangling down the high chair. Her father opposite her, would bend forward over his mahogany desk to get closer to her, pouring his advice gently into her ears hoping that his words were being headed.

She would listen uncomplaining paying great attention to all he said. Sometimes master Eugene would lose his temper if she insisted on some stupid idea. After all, she was but a small child. It was normal for her to say silly things.

His intention was apparently to develop into her the right criteria.

He had a natural distaste for stupidity and did not wish his daughter to become a thoughtless, narrow minded pedantic woman when she grew up. He strove with all his might to teach her to discriminate right from wrong, not to follow anybody blindly and most particularly not to imitate the bad examples of other children.

He would explain his thoughts one by one, at great length and expected her to reply, for him to fathom to what extent his advice had taken root.



Being uneducated myself I did not always comprehend what the child told me. I am pretty sharp in my thinking but I function better instinctively.

Life is far simpler for us who are uneducated. The mind does not over work, it rests more and lets our instinct take over.

Samantha was a year or two younger than Eirini.

Her parents sometimes sent her to our house, for the children to play together and speak in French. She was also an only child. Her features were nondescript, brown hair, a very quiet child without undue imagination making their games and exchanges in communication rather difficult.

Eirini only accepted to play with her because she did not refuse to follow her every wish and whim.

Until some day Samantha revolted.  
She categorically refused to follow the leader.

Unused to this, Eirini was taken by surprise. She had until that time always managed to have her way.

That sudden change of attitude seemed unacceptable to her. They fought.....and the 'war' ended with both children bawling.

Ofcourse master Eugene did not miss out on the opportunity to scold his daughter, especially to give her a lesson in hospitality and good behaviour.

-but dad I'm not an angel, I'm a little girl-

-that thought might have been mine, instilled into her on occasion, when I felt she needed extra moral support-

Despite all the advice and guidance, in the holy books, in literary works of value, from prophets saints philosophers it is my belief that nobody has ever become a saint of his own accord without the Grace and Power of God nor has any small child been transformed into an angel without Almighty God's Will and Assistance. Simple really, is it not. ?

In the event of an impending bombardment whenever the sirens sounded, town dwellers were compelled to go to the nearest shelters in the early stages of the war. As soon as we heard the sirens we would pick ourselves up and rush even though we were not really faced with great dangers.

The nights we spent in those shelters, were mostly sleepless. We listened to extremely sad tales about the war narrated by our fellow human-beings, the terrible catastrophes people were undergoing.

We kept thanking God constantly particularly on those nights for His Care and Protection. The war was elsewhere, Alexandria was not a target but people's hearts and feelings both old and young are greatly influenced no matter how far away one is.

We all live on the same earth. To separate ourselves from the whole is sad. Our lives are affected one way or the other, interconnected too.

The child was equally disturbed and had many questions to ask regarding values, right and wrong. Her remarks were often wiser and more profound than the proclamations and ideologies of those in charge who fought to tear people asunder no matter what nationality they belonged to.

Hence the saying- you will hear the truth from deranged minds and innocent children-.

No truer saying indeed.

Master Eugene's values would not have the same effect on society at large, I kept thinking in my simple mind after so much suffering the earth had faced during the second world war.

People would change inevitably and so would their values.

Sotiris lost patience every so often.

We then would try to plan our wedding day, fixing the date. Every time we had made those plans in the past some unforeseeable difficulty would arise to put them off.



At home, the situation was becoming tenser. Master Eugene decided to send us all to Cairo for a while, just in case distance improved their communication.

Eirini was not enthusiastic with this idea, as if she knew the difficulties her parents were encountering in their relationship.

Our wedding plans had to be postponed once more.

I must admit with some guilt that I was not in the least disturbed.

I had missed them all in Cairo.

When would I get another chance to be together with them after my marriage, I reasoned with myself.

We travelled to Cairo in a train packed with soldiers, all in a state of complete excitement like drunkards. Where were the soldiers going? They would not tell.

We too were not in the best of spirits. The child was unusually silent, Penelope sad. Sotiris left behind in Alexandria was extremely tense as he was bidding us good-bye afraid I might change my mind whilst I was away.

As for myself, I am sorry to admit that my heart was filled with joy at the impending reunion ahead. I had grown up with the Kanellos family, they were very dear to me and had treated me really well. Unforgettable their kindnesses to me.

They taught me to Love.

Whilst my heart fluttered with joy, I could nevertheless not control my emotions. Feelings of sorrow superceded the joy throughout the whole of that journey.

So many youngsters going to war.

Which one of them would survive? Only God knew.

Their poor unfortunate mothers, how they might have wished to be on the train with us, their fiances, their wives.

Most of them were very young like our boys the Kanellos who had been enlisted too.

I kept wondering where they might be.

We had had no news of them for quite some time.

What a terrible shame all those young people killing each other for ideas, ambitions, madness.

How can anyone really fathom, or even totally grasp the craziness of those fanatics who had started the war. Passions easily overcome the hearts of nationalists, firing them into patriotic enthusiasm.

The result stared me in the face.

I kept my eyes firmly fixed staring at the scenery outside the window of the fast moving train so as not to upset the young soldier sitting opposite me or the child.

Tears filled my eyes constantly.

Unusual for cool..... Maria

At Grandpa Kanellos'house the daily pace was different, more relaxed compared to the full programs that had to be adhered to in Alexandria.

You may have guessed how great their joy and warm welcome was to have us in their home. .

They tried their hardest to satisfy all our needs, particularly their little grandchild 's.

They shone with happiness every time their look rested on the child. Their very soul seemed refreshed in her presence.

Those dear people were certainly not devoid of worries.  
Their daughter's marriage.  
Both their sons away fighting,  
The terrible war  
I really felt pity in my heart for them.

At her grandparents' home, Eirini became a really pampered little girl.  
She played constantly without disturbances, teachers or lessons.

Granma Polixeni was not fond of house pets, but for her grandchild .....everything was possible, even a dog was acquired, a female puppy as warm and affectionate as Eirinoula.



One fine morning as Granpa Kanellos was ready to go to work his granddaughter asked him to buy her a porcelain tea set for her dolls when he came back home in the evening. She had seen such a tea set in one of the large department stores. The tiny dainty porcelain cups and saucers decorated with multi-coloured flowers, a milk jug and a beautiful tea pot had charmed her.

All day long she kept mumbling to her dolls how they would enjoy their meal and increase their appetite. They would eat plenty of sweet-meats too when grandpa came -who of course had no idea what sort of a tea- set Eirinoula had in mind. Nobody had informed him on the subject.

A busy man, he concentrated on his affairs and serious transactions. When he had finished the day's work before returning home he visited his church as was usual with him to thank the Almighty for His Bounty –he was very devout- and was ready now to go home,...when Eirinoula's request came to his mind.

He stopped at the first small store, no tea set. The next shop had none too. All of a sudden his eyes rested on a deep bowl. He had really no idea what Eirini had been expecting that whole day..

He bought the large ceramic bowl—which looked more like a bird's bath, thinking happily to himself

-surely the dolls will be satiated with this large bowl-.

Upon his arrival he found Eirini sitting on the floor surrounded by her whole house-hold, dolls, beds, all sorts of equipment to pamper her family of dolls. Everbody was anxiously expecting grandpa to come with the porcelain tea set.

Grandpa stooped and happily deposited the large bowl on the floor.

-what is that grandpa- said the child turning her head upwards to look at him .

-Oh! It seems I did not understand too well, my little one-

The poor man was shaken. The child's sad expression struck him to the heart.

.  
-but grandpa, you promised a tea-set - the child's eyes were perplexed.

-yes, but I found none at the stores. Your dolls might eat a lot from this large bowl.

By now the old granpa was filled with unhappiness and had lost his colour- the poor dear man was not that old either-

The child did not answer at first. She hid her disappointment deep inside of herself. Despite her age she often reasoned like an adult. Her father's advice had taken root. Grandpa was really upset it was evident from the expression on his face.

Eirini was sure that her granpa loved her. She had become particularly sensitive to the grown ups feelings.

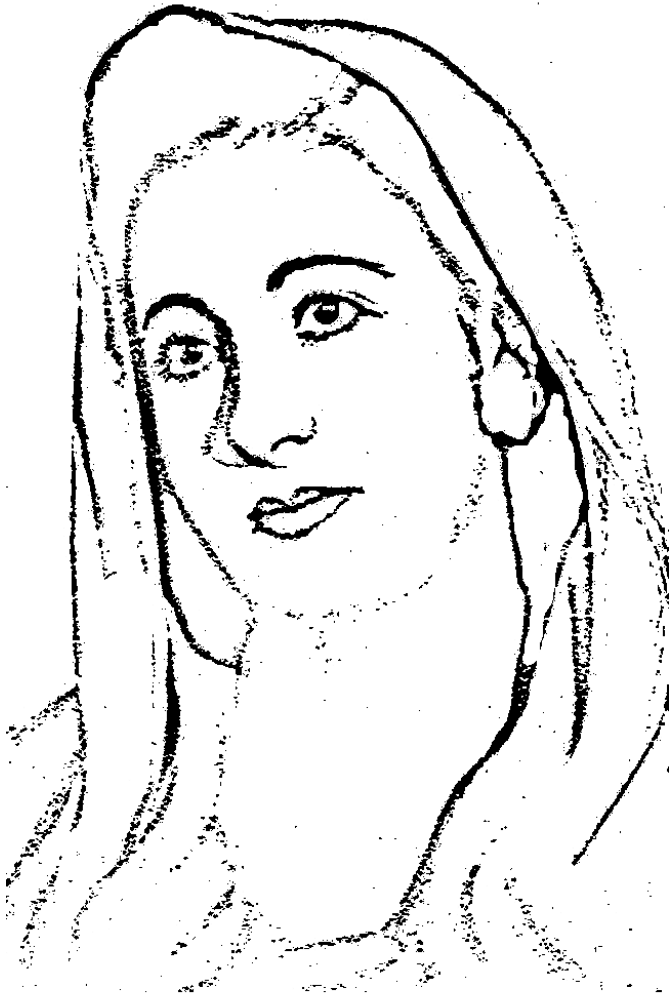
-never mind grandpa, thank you-

After a while she started muttering to herself aloud.-

- I will use the bowl, even though it is not made of fine porcelain. Maybe my dolls will not be disappointed too much. But then, I must rock them to sleep to- night, just in case they are not showing\ how upset they are- .

It did not take too long for us to return to Alexandria.

After about a month we went home  
Despite Sotiris' fears my decision to get married to him  
had not changed  
His calm and patient nature had won me over.





Our hopes were now raised that our stay in Cairo would bear fruit and improve the couple's relationship.

Advice was constantly given to Penelope whilst we lived at the Kanellos' household.

You may recall that both parents were particularly indulgent with their offspring, -at least so it seemed to me, a simple islander's understanding.

Granpa Kanellos' soft nature was inclined anyway to tolerate human failings and weaknesses. On the contrary, his wife mistress Polixeni, added stress to her daughter's tension and misery by upholding her views. She had taken a dislike to her son in law right from the start. He was to blame for everything, lack of harmony included. Inevitably Penelope felt even more victimized and sorry for herself. Luckily her father though thoroughly upset by the latest development in his daughter's family life, never gave up trying to reason with her, to soothe and pacify her. Actually Penelope loved her husband, but her love for him was much like a child's and her stubbornness equally immature.

Divorce was out of the question ... Yet Penelope did not want to adjust... nor change her ways. Divorce was not in fashion anyway at the time. People managed to cope with their marital existence in a more subtle and submissive way. They might have had less expectations from each other than youngsters have nowadays.

Besides, divorcees were unacceptable mostly in society

The Greek communities were large in Egypt and had settled not just in the capital Cairo or the second largest city Alexandria, with its busy port. In other smaller towns too even some villages all over Egypt, the Hellenes had settled and had made their homes. They built schools, hospitals, orphanages and churches of their own, the majority being Greek Orthodox Christians and lived contentedly in this blessed land.

Many successful businesses were set up all over Egypt and philanthropy was abundant. The rapport between those who had succeeded with the rest of their compatriots was very satisfactory, for not all the Hellenes who lived in Egypt were well off. Quite a lot of them who had abided there for generations greatly appreciated living there, even though they had not acquired wealth. There was also reciprocity, collaboration and order among the Greek communities and the multi-lingual, multi-national ones residing in this country. They co-existed peacefully and in harmony with the rest of their compatriots.

Hence the Hellenes of Egypt became more knowledgeable, wider and more international in their spirit. They also learnt to speak several languages. With the local population the Greeks blended particularly well.

Egypt was home.

After we had settled back in Alexandria we decided with Sotiris that we should procrastinate no longer, on fixing our wedding date.

Man plans, God ordains.  
Our plans had to be changed once again.

A very serious scary event took place.

We almost lost our little Eirini. The Almighty almost Lifted her up to Him, to her world of origin.

One afternoon, -it was probably during some holiday - I remember vaguely - as there were no teachers around, Penelope took us both for a drive. She had a friend, a pleasant lady this one was- who lived on the outskirts of town and whose house was surrounded by a beautiful large garden.

The child enjoyed herself running freely in the open air among the lovely flowers. We town dwellers certainly missed the open air, parks and trees. Our arboreal friends pacify the spirit and Eirini's full program had resumed upon our return to Alexandria. She rarely was free to enjoy herself .

She was growing fast naturally but did not always appear content. Her physical condition was somewhat ailing often weakened by pains in the stomach. Doctors had diagnosed an early appendicitis not yet necessary to be operated upon.

On our way back home after the visit, she kept complaining that she was in pain though she did not seem to be particularly uncomfortable. Something was bothering her, my instinct told me.

What it was, I could not fathom.

By the time she was ready for bed, she continued to insist that her pains were stronger.

Penelope panicked. Master Eugene's phlegmatic nature reacted sensibly.

The pediatrician, a family friend was called immediately. Was Eirini trying to attract our attention or else what?

Uncertain the doctor asked for tests. The pains in her stomach had by now receded slightly. Could the child be lying?

Late at night the results came. A surgeon was instantly called.

Eirini had to undergo an immediate operation

Penelope and I moved to the hospital with the child  
As soon as it dawned the operation was carried out  
successfully Just in time.

The peritone was ready to burst. Apparently just before it bursts the pains somewhat subside.

After the operation, when she had recovered from the anaesthetic, whilst her mother was out of the room for a few minutes she confided in me.

She felt troubled, confused.

She kept wondering what had made her lie so even though on occasion she had suffered greater stomach pains in the past. Her father was adamant with regard to lying.

What sort of an explanation could I give?

-my one, your instinct moved you to keep lying, so that you may be saved,

-I can't think of any other reason ...Why this, why that?

You are truly a funny child--

This child was determined to find whatever truths were needed from within herself, to help her understand many things.

Other people's ideas and thoughts did not suffice.

We were subsequently moved to a tiny room the only available one as the hospital was overcrowded with soldiers. Though it was still spring the heat was intense. Our presence in such a tiny room disturbed the nurses. They opened the windows wide to let fresh air in.

The following morning found Eirini burning with a high fever.

- galloping, double pneumonia - was diagnosed.

She was traveling full speed towards her Creator.

We were forbidden entrance to her room.

An unforgettable experience those endless hours sitting outside her room, in the corridor

waiting

waiting... for a miracle

The doctors were very concerned.

The child was in a coma, she had lost consciousness.

Penelope could not stop crying.

Master Eugene kept trying his best to elevate our hopes.  
For he too was extremely grieved..

As for myself it was not easy to believe that we were losing her.

Every so often I would jump up whenever master Eugene's voice reached my ears but all he had to tell us was not to lose hope.

-God is Great, everything is in his Power-.  
We tried hard to find solace in his very words.

The endless hours waiting felt as though a few years had passed.

The child's condition was not improving.  
We were losing our little darling.

The good Lord finally answered our prayers.

Penicilin, a new drug (an antibiotic) was now in use, to help the sick and injured soldiers recover. We were not familiar with this medicine then.

An old man had a supply of penicillin injections but would not spare a single one for anybody else but himself, even for a child about to die.

The doctor made it his business to “borrow” the injections, as a last resort. (and did actually return them as soon as he laid his hands on a new stock).

We remained in the hospital for fifty five days.

Eirinoula was saved

When she eventually started to regain her strength she shared her near death experience with me

Awe inspiring

Amazing

Mind boggling that account sounded in my ears.

Here's what she said to me-

At first she thought she was asleep.

Tired out, weakened she could not even keep her eyes open.

All of a sudden

though she was still lying on her bed, she got up

-she did not remember how she found herself up.

Then she started to float in the air like a cloud

Of course she marveled at this feat, for as she glanced downwards

there she was still lying in her hospital bed fast asleep ....or

Unable to think or figure out what exactly was happening she proceeded speedily onwards... through the wall and found herself in the corridor.



She saw all three of us pouring our hearts out with sorrow sitting there as miserable as could be.

She tried to alert us of her presence....  
sent us kisses, kept repeating how wonderful all of what was happening to her was,.....she even described exactly what we were saying  
what clothes we wore and many more details regarding those awful moments we were experiencing at the time..

In vain.  
We never felt or sensed her presence.

Deeply affected she decided to stop trying.

How could we not feel her ?  
What sort of love did we have for her?  
She felt unloved.....

At that stage she realized she was being escorted.

A H U G E Loving cuddle embraced her whole being  
She Was Held in the Arms of an Invisible Entity  
She was simply too Happy and sad too, surprised indeed that we felt nothing of what she felt.

(We simple uneducated folk are told that children passing into the next life, have really gentle experiences quite different to the ones adults experience).

She had up till then never felt such Loving Bliss feelings overflowing with LOVE.

**SHE WANTED TO SHARE THEM WITH US**

Very disappointed indeed that we did not communicate difficult though it was to give us up she now did not want to return to Life.

Then she received .....a command from somewhere maybe from inside of her being.

-you must go back to your parents and those who love you!-

At that very moment she opened her eyes  
for the first time,..... and returned to us.

Eirene's recuperation was long both in the hospital and at home

As for us we were so happy, we went around the house smiling idiotically, grateful to God that she had been spared and returned to her loving family.

The child looked almost the same after her illness, no different to the way she was before, but especially quiet now.

Only later did this near death experience show its mark.

She was from then onwards different to other kids of her age. Her thoughts (along with her father's extensive explanations) had helped in developing her feelings. She was years ahead for her age in mind and spirit.

Unavoidably other children's naughty pranks and childish thoughts often puzzled her.

Before Eirini had totally recuperated another calamity came upon us.

Grandpa Kanellos passed away suddenly.

Penelope shattered, departed for Cairo accompanied by her husband Master Eugene. The child was still frail so I remained behind. His presence on earth would be sorely missed. My thoughts were constantly with them. Grandpa Kanellos was as dear to me as a father, so kind and generous with me all those years. His physical self had passed away, I kept consoling myself.

His kind soul would travel to far better worlds, I was sure. His memory would go on living in our hearts for as long as we were on earth.

Master Eugene joined us almost immediately in Alexandria after the funeral not to leave us too long by ourselves. He respected and admired his father in law and was obviously grieved by his sudden death, but besides us two, he also had his work to attend to.

Upon Penelope's return we got a complete account of her father's last hours.

Apparently grandpa had been suffering from a weak heart for quite a while, hence his insistence on Penelope's early marriage. Nobody knew about his sickness except for their family physician.

In a few days time Pericles Kanellos was to celebrate his wedding anniversary with his missus Polixeni.

He died quietly sitting on his chair, just as they were about to have dinner. Poor dear mistress Polixeni, all alone without any members of her family around to offer her sympathy and consolation. How difficult it must have been for her.

In Granpa's pocket when they had washed and dressed him to receive his last rights, a huge diamond brooch was found, a surprise for their wedding anniversary, immensely moving his wife's feelings, poor dear lady.

Pericles Kanellos' social activities were also conducted in secrecy. His very nature was opposed to loud exhibitionism. Once in a while when the mistress instinctively felt that he was tired out, as many people turned to him for help, she would advise gently-

-Pericles, charity begins at home. Do not exhaust yourself my dear-

People did not forget his kind heart. Hundreds turned up at his funeral from all walks of life. Many were total strangers to the family and relatives.

Penelope remained in Cairo to assist her mother as long as she could.

When the forty days were over and the heart-ache for the departed had somewhat subsided mistress Polixeni had to make up her mind what she should do next. She did not have the luxury to procrastinate. She had to decide quickly how to handle "grandpa's" business ventures.

Her boys were away fighting, her daughter had to return to her own family in Alexandria. She was alone now.

All those years maintaining grandpa's successful business ventures would go to waste otherwise.

So, mistress Polixeni put on her black dress and hat and despite her lack of knowledge and inexperience went to work.

She managed to keep the business going for as many years as it took for the war to end and her children to take charge of the enterprises.

Penelope's household was now busier than ever. There were many soldiers to look after, far away from home uncertain of their fate. Both husband and wife felt it their duty to make them feel at home though they were careful not to make life too difficult for their little girl.

The whole family enjoyed those comings and goings.

It was a pleasure to see how the unfortunate soldiers expressions were transformed. Moments of peace and care gave them a real break. But it sometimes meant that twenty people or so would turn up for lunch or dinner. We had to be prepared to serve at all times. Luckily it did not include my good self, since cooking was not my speciality, thank God.

On some days of the week master Eugene invited his friends too. They were all very learned and conversations over lunch were animated. The delicious meals served also helped elevate their spirits. If the meal dragged on master Eugene who could not do without his siesta, would depart asking them not be disturbed by his absence.

They obviously took him at his word .and continued conversing until late in the afternoon.

Eirine was allowed to sit with the grown-ups at the lunch table on these occasions. It was customary then, for children to "be seen but not heard". . . .

Oh...how proud she felt and lunch was consumed as quietly as a "mouse"

She did however have her preferences among her father's friends.

Two were particularly made welcome whenever they paid us a visit.

The first was especially gifted with an extraordinary sense of humour.

He amused the whole household, playing pranks, telling jokes, teasing Eirini and us all. He lightened our hearts with laughter.

The second favourite friend was exceptionally well educated, a linguist particularly fluent in the English language. He could recite off pat whole poems and scenes from a famous English playwright...  
oh!! his name escapes my memory.....  
yes, I think he was called "sekespir".

Eirini would listen to his recitations spell-bound, her eyes shining with admiration, her mouth gaping .

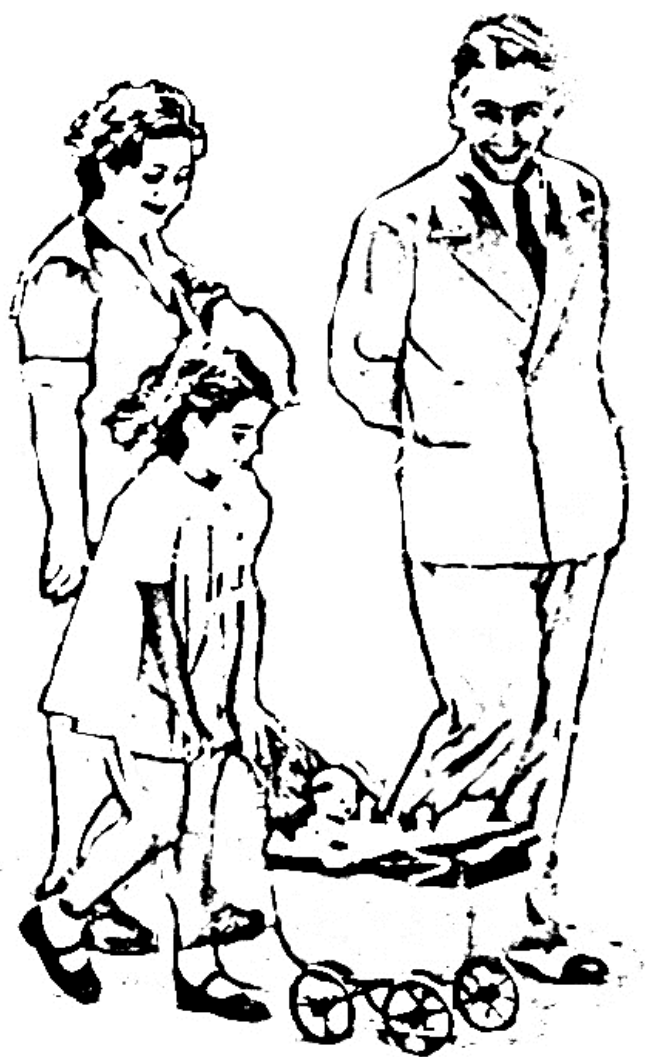
One other very important reason made this man so well-loved. An enormous Alsatian, a huge beast unfailingly accompanied him that chased Irinoula all over the house dragging the carpets under his paws with his weight. You couldn't get her away from this gentle but loving dog

Naturally Penelope was not too pleased, believe you me...

After her father's demise Penelope had changed. She had matured maybe.

Master Eugene was now more relaxed. The rows diminished. Eirene's smiles returned on her sweet face.

Their harmonious family life filled all our hearts with joy.





Easter -The most important and holiest ecclesiastical event of the Greek Orthodox Christians.

Wherever they may be living, either abroad or in their homeland, the Hellenes prepare themselves for 40 days to sense in their hearts and spirit the enormity of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection

We had a Patriarchate of our own (of the Greek Orthodox church) based in Alexandria too and as I pointed out earlier, we were treated well in our adopted homeland. A parade in the streets on holy Friday and the Resurrection service at midnight on Holy Saturday were allowed. The Egyptians were tolerant of our beliefs, since in the Koran, their Holy book of revelation, all of the Prophets are included. Some even paid tribute to the Virgin Mary which was surprising to me.

Preparations for the coming feast enthuse most children. Penelope's gifted hands and great mastery in cooking produced wonders. Delicacies such as sweet breads, biscuits of all sorts both salty and sweet, pertaining to the Easter tradition, filled the household with their aroma. A trial indeed for Eirini and myself as it was absolutely forbidden to us to taste anything at all before the ceremony of the resurrection.

Last but not least we painted dozens of eggs. Once dyed they were polished with olive oil and decorated all over the house in baskets.

Our anticipation grew as the days passed.

When Holy Saturday finally dawned Eirini had to go to bed early that evening. We would then wake her up and dress her warmly before our departure for the midnight mass.

Temperatures drop dramatically at night in Egypt, particularly in the desert where it can be very cold, in contrast to day-time.

We would worship devotedly and return enthusiastically home to taste Penelope's marvelous creations at last.

The fast was over.

Irene's father assisted voluntarily at the orphanage. What exactly his function was I do not recall. Maybe he was on the board of directors.

Before our Easter Sunday festive meal, whilst Penelope and I made the necessary preparations, master Eugene and his daughter went off to the orphanage.

Eirini did not look forward to these visits. It was difficult for her to face all those orphans dressed in their depressing uniforms, with their heads shaved and their gloomy expressions. She would fret for them but she knew very well in her heart that she should not exhibit her feelings by crying.

After the liturgy the guests celebrated in the traditional Easter custom, mingling, cracking painted Easter eggs with the orphans, who remained speechless most of the time despite the festive season unaccustomed as they were to the numerous guests who were intruders in their premises despite their good intentions and good will.

She always returned home in poor spirits. She admitted to me however that the sight of the orphans- for these visits were not restricted only to the Easter celebrations, other festive days always included a visit to the orphanage. They helped her to appreciate her good fortune and to thank the Almighty for his many Blessings.

## The English Girls College

The child was now to go to an English school, following simultaneously the whole curriculum of the Greek school at home, including French lessons.

Altogether too many lessons those were, at least so it seemed to my poor mind.

Before the Second World War German education was preferred for its high standards in learning and discipline, both for schooling and University .

Master Eugene had himself obtained his doctorate at a German speaking University in Austria after graduating in Athens. Careful as he was in all his decisions he never hesitated to give his child the best possible chance to educate herself no matter what expenses were incurred .

He certainly did not manage to convince me, however, to change my mind regarding education.

The soul is important to me. Education naturally may be beneficial to train the mind to work in a more organized way, according to the intelligence that the Almighty may have bestowed upon each .individual.

We hear or meet in life very learned people whose actions often shame them and us too.

Their learned heads do not inhibit their disgruntling and unethical behaviour.

Nor does the mind's knowledge make them better people.

We have five fingers on each hand. Every one of these fingers differs in size to its neighbouring one. They will never be similar in size, no matter how many theories and beliefs exist.

The peasant and the millionaire are born with the self same soul that their mothers first conceived in their wombs. Nothing and no-one can elaborate or raise the quality of their souls but the Power of God Almighty.

The English Girls' College was first established whilst Egypt was still a British Protectorate.

Most children who were admitted and followed this school came from the finest families with parents belonging to the highest social order. Princes, prime-ministers, pashas, and so forth even from as far as the Far East.

Understandably, it was difficult to be admitted to such a school. The year master Eugene wanted to enroll Eirini there was no vacancy. She attended temporarily another English school.

In the winter of the following year when she became a student, I would watch her with pride and admiration leave in a grey uniform and tie. -that may have been later though when she started to attend the primary school.-.



In the summer the girls wore multi-coloured pastel dresses and hats, so pleasing to the eyes and senses; they looked like a bunch of spring flowers!

Master Eugene's plans were for Eirini to graduate from that school.

Man plans. God ordains.

When she was first admitted into the second kindergarden class Eirini's impressions were favourable.

A few weeks later, back home, she told her father.

-Dad guess who is in the same class as myself.-  
Father mentioned two or three names unsuccessfully  
-I give up, my child, tell us-  
-We have a real Greek prince in the kindergarden. He goes to a class lower than my own, but we play in the same garden during break. His sister is in the same kindergarden too but she is younger still.

Father smiled with understanding, not believing a word she said. The school was exclusively a Girls College....

- Children often make stories up - he whispered to me.  
- She must be trying to adjust to her new environment.-

Eirini had not imagined this particular tale. During that period Prince Paul was living in Egypt with his wife and his three children, exiled from Greece. They remained for a certain time in Alexandria. Prince Paul's two older children (that is ex- King Constantine of Greece and his sister the present queen Sophia of Spain) attended for a spell the same kindergarten as Eirini.

They were recalled to Greece when King George I died suddenly and Prince Paul, his brother was crowned King. Eirini was particularly impressed by their presence at school. They were Greek like herself but real princes. She identified herself somehow with them and fairy tales full of stories of princes and princesses certainly help build more exotic worlds in our minds.

The school she was attending was packed with children of very important parents from Egypt and abroad, but this is mainly insignificant to children.

The grown ups pay more attention to rank and class influencing their kids to have similar points of view.

When the months of mourning were over, Sotiris and I decided that we should not prolong our wedding any longer. We fixed yet another date. If all went according to plan we would be married in one month's time.

I had made up my mind and was finally ready to get married.

Poor Sotiris had waited long enough .I felt ashamed for having delayed my decision.

The dear man was enthusiastic. He developed wings in order to please me to find us a pleasant home. Grandpa's demise had obviously influenced us all. We had become wiser to the fact that the years fly faster than we anticipate. And one day it is over, we age and die.

Penelope now found a new project to attend to. She undertook to arrange the wedding preparations. You can imagine how much care and attention was lavished on our persons .

The change of life ahead of me was slightly disturbing to my quiet nature I would miss them, all of them, particularly the Child. Anyway I wasn't going too far. It would have been impossible for me to give them up.

Sotiris is delirious with joy.

The wedding at last.

Despite our difference in the physical sense, Sotiris and I suited each other and were compatible companions. There is a saying that true love comes after one's marriage. How true!

I never expected to find such sensitivity in our relationship. My husband was the tenderest of companions. Those many years of waiting helped tie us closer to each other.

We managed to communicate from the soul.

Sometimes I would be ashamed to stand next to him, hefty and buxom as I am, he slim and short Whenever he saw me embarrassed he immediately understood and reacted hastily pulling me towards him.

-heart of my hearts you are my queen- he would say giving me a hug Love is indeed blind—that's another true saying.

Our wedding ceremony was conducted simply. A few friends joined us at the church. Penelope was matron of honour and master Eugene best man. They even held a fine wedding dinner for us inviting all our friends. It was perfectly touching and moving to us both.

Unfortunately mistress Polixeni was unable to attend, to bless us with her presence and good wishes. Her children were still fighting in the war and she had to go to work.





Romance and love flourished during the war. Unaware of their fate and if the following day would find them alive, the soldiers followed their heart and wishes. Away from their fatherland, they fell head over heels in love within hours sometimes and married in haste more often than not without a second thought.

This romantic tendency was in the air. Catching like influenza. Even the citizens not fighting in the war tended to follow suit.

Eirinoula attended numerous weddings as a bridesmaid along with her parents who never missed a chance to be open and kind to all. She even was a bridesmaid to a Jewish wedding.

Penelope made sure that she was dressed beautifully. Every year a new dress was sewn.

The child's instinct however was stronger than we imagined. She was not always pleased at every wedding she attended. Sometimes she would return home sulking, unaware of what had made her grumpy. It occurred to me much later on, that the child was reacting instinctively to the grown ups feelings.

Some marriages flourished, grew in their togetherness and lived contentedly...Others gained nothing from their marital ties..

People live their lives according to their natures. Some are pragmatic, others float in the clouds.

She was naturally going to be my bridesmaid.... at my own wedding And what a little lady, 'a real mamsel" she had become.

Our parting and goodbyes before we departed from the house with me wearing my lovely bridal gown was very moving.

-My beloved Maria, I will miss you terribly. You won't forget us now that you are getting married, will you? Please come and visit as often as possible.-  
and a few tears rolled down her cheeks.

Pretty as a picture she was, dressed in her bridesmaids dress. I placed her on my knees, hugged her tenderly and said.

-My angel, how can I forget you. Life was rich and rewarding all the while that I looked after you, when you were still a small child and now that you are growing fast why would I stay away. I am the one who will lose if I do so.

Tears were hard to restrain but..... they were kept back.

I felt sure the child would not upset me any further.

She kissed me warmly and ran out of the room to play before we left for the church.





## PART TWO

The second world war finally ended All the predictions that it would last a very short while had been wrong.

Having spread almost throughout the whole world, it divided the earth's inhabitants into two political and ideological camps.

Millions were killed

Millions were exterminated in gas chambers - their blame and fault was.... that they believed in another God !!

The ones whose bellicose and grandiose ideas of superiority had declared the wars spreading destruction and death throughout to prove their superiority

.....were finally beaten into surrender by the allied countries- that is us .

THANKS BE TO GOD

Now those very allies who had won the wars had to re-build the devastating destruction incurred in the various countries

Unbelievable is it not?

Man's passions are not easily grasped by the mind or logic. Troubles for as long as we are alive on earth are never ending

In the Middle East and in some other African countries plump women are preferred by men to this day. When the Egyptians wanted to admire a lady they would say.

-“how pretty she is, she walks like a duck”-.

Pretty indeed...her weight made her legs move wide apart. in her stride. Poverty and well-being are in conflict here.

Taste as with everything else is relative, greatly influenced by the life-styles people lead.

Later many years after the war, it became most fashionable for a woman to look like a scare-crow or a broom –stick.

During the war fashion changed radically. Skirts and dresses became more practical and short. Economy in the use of material was essential. There was a shortage of food too in very many countries. Slim women were consequently preferred.

In Egypt, I Maria, had no problem regarding my size and weight. I was admired and considered a beauty....always continuing to relish the delectable Middle eastern and Greek cuisine

The only snag now was that I had to prepare the meals for the two of us... myself. Luckily my cooking obligations in my marital life did not weigh too heavily on my person.



At the beginning of our marital life, I avoided paying frequent visits to Eirinoula in the hope that she would get accustomed quickly to her life without me. It was more difficult for me to stay away of course.

Sotiris was all day at work. I had never been alone before. In the past the house was always full of people. Gradually I became acquainted with my neighbours, even though I unfortunately never mastered Arabic. Our exchanges rested on a few words and quite a lot of laughter.

Eiini was now changing at an incredibly fast rate.

Between the ages of eight and twelve children grow incessantly. At that stage they are always hungry and consume enormous quantities of food .as their body prepares for puberty. As soon as they are fed they are hungry again. Our child was nevertheless not overweight despite this.

They do object strongly however to comments on their looks.

Some of Penelope's friends were admired by the child. Calm, smiling, well groomed, she looked up to them for their femininity. They seemed to her like mythical beings in fairy tales. Exceptions are always present.



Returning from school one afternoon, Eirinoula got into the elevator with one of her mother's friends who was visiting. As the elevator went up the woman, besides pinching her cheeks never stopped remarking on her physique.

-oh how you have grown...your hair is now curly  
and yes you are fatter, but really my dear don't worry about  
that it is only puppy fat, it will soon go.-

That particular lady was skinny, quite unattractive I would say.

She gave the child <the evil eye>

Embarrassed beyond belief, Eirini tried to retreat in the elevator.

As soon as the elevator touched the second floor  
she excused herself politely .....she had forgotten something  
extricated herself from the elevator  
and dashed down the stairs.

wide apart  
the marble steps were not easy to step on  
step on.

Her foot slipped  
she tumbled downwards  
like a puppet sitting on her backside .  
bumping heavily on and on from one step to the next.

The pain left her breathless

The impact of the fall came at the end of the second landing. She had been unable to stop tumbling down. On and on she fell for one more landing.

When she reached the ground floor on her behind at that very moment I entered the front door.

Luckily she had suffered no severe damage. The tail end of her spine had been bruised from the fall.

-that woman gave you the evil eye my poppet- I complained -no Maria, I lost my nerve, I am to blame-.

Most of the foreigners inhabiting Egypt spoke at least two or three foreign languages besides their mother tongue.

Master Eugene also spoke two or three foreign languages but he was self taught. His pronunciation lacked polish and it must have sounded funny to his child. She would hide her smiles every time she heard him speak in a foreign tongue for Master Eugene had not had the same facilities that he provided for his child. No financial provision was available to him for extra curricular lessons. He had to make do with his own efforts to improve his education

We Greeks living in Egypt were made particularly welcome by the Egyptians for we integrated easily, not only with the local population but with the international communities as well.

We loved and respected them and vice-versa. We did not create many problems abiding in their land. For us, too, it was a challenge. to learn to adapt ourselves to different ways, cultures and life-styles. beyond our own.

As for my good self, the experience of living in Egypt with the Kanellos and Eftichides families helped me unimaginably. But Eirine's presence in my life made the greatest difference of all. It enhanced enormously my development.

From her I learnt to search for the deeper meaning in life. Her special nature as well as her pre-death experiences made her unlike others, incessantly searching to understand the deeper side in ourselves. On rare occasions after the first few months of our wedded life had elapsed, Eirini would ask permission to pay me a visit at my home.

Proud of my tiny household I would share with her how the days were spent and what chores had to be done whilst Sotiris was at work. I had the best training of course So my house was spotlessly clean.

What a good little girl she was. She enjoyed every little detail of my new life. I had missed her so much but ...did not have the slightest intention to take advantage of her sincere sentiments and weakness for my person.

We enjoyed ourselves immensely, whenever she had the time to pay me a visit. From the open window the sound of petty salesmen would reach us, selling their goods, Egyptian sweets, sherbets, nuts and many other goodies. Eirini's favourite was a cake named "arisa" which means bride in Arabic. She relished eating this cake every time she came to visit.

Sometimes she would watch the passers by from the window-sill, the children playing in the streets.

-Your neighbourhood feels like living in another town. How simple and carefree their life seems.-she told Maria.

After her visit, I ended up seeing my neighbours and their environment in a different light too, even though I was already familiar with them.

Several weeks after Irini's fall on the stair-case. Penelope was to celebrate her birthday. Numerous guests had been invited to wish her well on the following day.

Preparations were in full swing. Everybody was busy and the house in an upheaval .

Mamsel Rose- who was still there- decided not to teach 'Irene.'

It seemed to her that the child was not too well healthwise  
So they spent their time conversing.  
The child by the by started to shiver.  
By night-fall she was very seriously ill again.

Another double-pneumonia.

The angel of death paid Irini a second visit.

Fortunately she came to within two days-absolutely horrifying for us all who loved her.

Her complete recovery took over a month.  
This time, however, whatever experience she may have gone through she kept to herself and did not share even with my good self.



Poor Mamoiselle Rose –we found out much later-died suddenly in her bath-tub of old age always a spinster

One of the many queries Eirini had regarding human nature and its failings is the fact that we are unable and unwilling to find our own true selves.

Influenced easily by lower forces and other negative situations man had managed, she thought, to create chaos around him and in society at large. The dire effects of the war on the earth created even more questions. It seemed to her that man's cognizance, his nobler nature, aim and direction was generally forgotten.

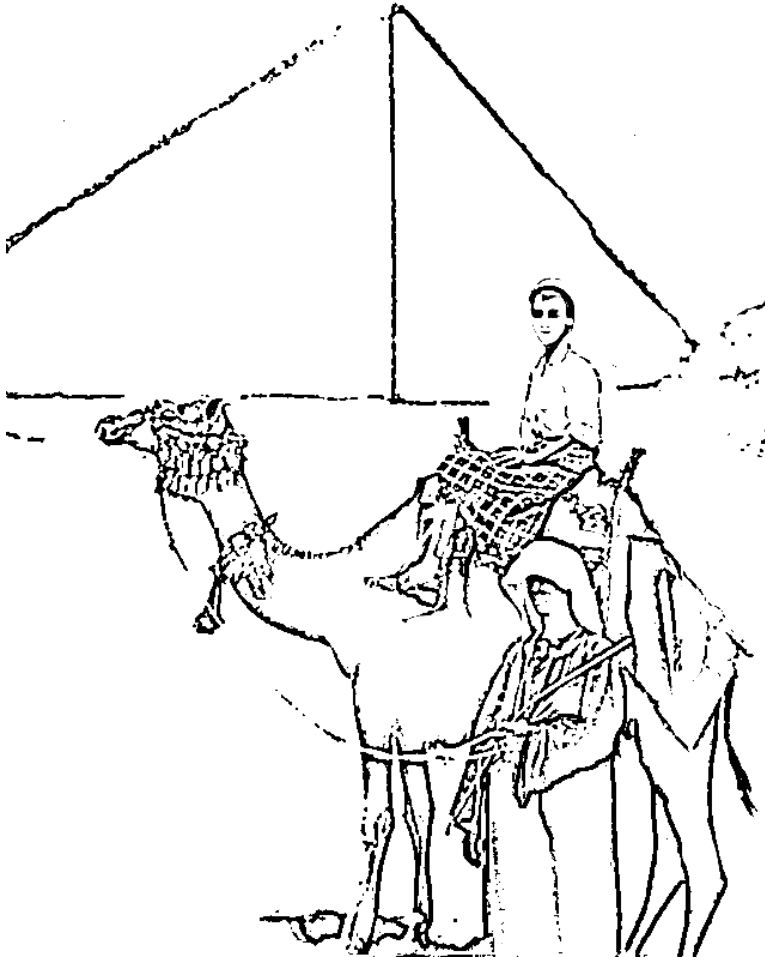
She also sensed the difference between herself and other children of her age who did not concern themselves as intensely with those problems.

Often saddened she was forced by circumstances to keep her opinions and deeper thoughts to herself.

Compromise was imperative otherwise she would have been isolated from them. Teenagers enjoy socializing in groups. It is characteristic of their age. She was aware that she still had a lot of ground to cover inwardly.

For the time-being however it was important for her to live life according to her age





Are there coincidences.?

Is coincidence a simultaneous occurrence, luck, fate, happenstance or a lack of something else in us... she was not sure. During the summer months, when the heat is intense in Egypt, Eirini would rest quietly in her room to refrain from disturbing her parents who were having their afternoon siesta. On several occasions it had happened that a song would occupy her mind intensely and a passer-by would hum it simultaneously. Was it coincidental or do we lack deeper awareness and need to keep searching to understand?

Lying quietly on her bed she compiled impression upon impression paying special attention to sounds and shapes, creating ever newer ideas, traveling somehow towards the Light, away from the daily grip of the routine.

Frankly speaking, it was too difficult for me, Maria to fathom all these thoughts and queries of Eirini's.

Imagination is also limited in my person. Life for me is painted in black and white with a few greys in between. Life has its ups and downs as it develops ofcourse, its happy and sad moments. They help us mature and gain knowledge.

All the experiences are necessary for our growth, those hard to bear as well as the lighter ones. Our beings widen and on our way forward people destined to help will join us and enrich us with their giving. I am convinced that once our spirit remains open whatever we need comes our way.

These boggling and impossible questions to grasp that Eirini busied herself with, did nevertheless awaken in my person another aspect of life. Though beyond me, it nevertheless awakened an interest in not just accepting things on their face value.

A few hours away from Alexandria there was a weaving factory owned by an Egyptian Pacha which bordered his extensive cotton plantations .

World famous for its superb quality the Egyptian cotton produced on his plantations was subsequently woven in the bordering factory.

The pacha's daughter happened to be in the same class as Irini. A field trip was organized by the school. Upon arrival the pupils were shown around the factory and the plantations by the pacha himself, who appeared somewhat sad while he was showing them around.

This pacha was a humanitarian and progressive man very concerned with the workers' standard of living. People whose lives were very poor indeed, living in hardship for thousands of years with no desire whatsoever to improve their fate.

He spent large sums of money building for them a whole modern village, small white-washed houses perfectly clean with their own gardens, entertainment spaces, canteens. All were designed and constructed with care. He also organized competitions for the best kept house and garden and had teachers to teach them and their children to read and write.

The post-war situation in the world was depressingly dark still.

Few countries had facilities like the ones he was offering to his workers at that time.

Most workers stayed only for a while at his model village.

The various tribes lived from hand to mouth, sometimes in mud huts when they were out of work. Those who did not own some land moved on from place to place along with their families and worked sporadically, long enough to feed themselves and their families.

They stayed at the pacha's model village only until they had saved a little money. Then they disappeared.

The same workers rarely re-appeared to work for him, having neither desire nor willingness to improve their lot.

Inherited mistakes and failings are not overcome easily. They are deeply rooted into ourselves influencing our very souls and all our outer activities. Man resigns himself to lethargic living.

These and many other problems puzzled Eirini daily .

Mistress Polixeni's two boys luckily returned to her alive from the war.

The dear lady could now rest and take care of her house-hold at last.

A strange incident saved the younger son from being killed. When the war was declared the young soldiers went to fight for a better freer world, at least that is what they were promised. Their zeal and enthusiasm was indescribable.

One son was enlisted in the air-force, the other in the army.

He had to fight in the front line which tired him out and very soon disheartened him regarding the optimistic view of a better world.



After a night of entertainment, as he was walking out of the hall, he expressed his disappointment and doubts to another soldier, for he now believed that their promises were empty words, to fire their zeal.

By chance someone overheard his comments.  
(whichever are they called-I think M.P. or secret police).

He was accused

-You are a communist-they said.  
They incarcerated him along with many real communists for a long while. By the end of the war he had almost become a communist himself.

That however was also God's Will. It saved his life.

Eirini persevered with her wish to get to try to find the real being in herself.

Other children of her age did not have the same urge. Her other strong wish was to go to University which was somewhat unusual at that time for a girl growing up in the Middle East.

I still remember her father's older brother advising him not to spend unnecessary money on her education.

-Women need a dowry- don't forget-he would say.

Being progressive in his nature master Eugene never followed anyone's advice blindly. His daughter did the same.

I never had any doubts since the moment that I held her first in my arms that she would succeed.

God Almighty showered me with Love.

The island was my birthplace where cognizance of life was first felt by my good self.

Here we are again living on the island, on Greek soil.

Praise Be to God. Life in our land is now very pleasant. At least we do not have to face any problems with the language. We are at home, our own homeland.

A variety of changes took place in Egypt after the end of the war. These changes were not restricted to Egypt only. Rapid reforms transformed all the countries in the world. They did not occur simultaneously of course. It took some time for every reform to be established.

Independence was slowly gained by the Commonwealth countries. We in Egypt were a British Protectorate. Self-rule was primarily handed to the Egyptians or something like that. Independence came next. One fine day the army after long preparations, created a coup and started to run the country.

King Farouk and his entourage fled in his royal yacht secretly.

The monarchy was abolished. Titles were done with-in other words no pachas, beys. Princes and so forth were no more honoured. Their properties were confiscated..

As one day followed the next, news of great reforms and changes reached our ears.

Master Eugene was a far-sighted man. Long before these happenings he kept proclaiming to his friends and patients, the risks of change, particularly to those who had large fortunes and interests in Egypt.

But at the time there was no evidence of major changes ahead.

If my memory does not fail me, for time does not improve it, the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt were asked to leave possibly because of the creation of a new state, Israel in Palestine

-a situation that found the whole of the Arab world opposed.

New frustrations were starting.

Unfortunately for as long as men live on earth they will manage to create problems, differences and wars to tear them asunder

The British departed from Egypt as did many other foreigners who had settled there. Some properties were confiscated.

The Greeks began to consider leaving the country too.

After the war ended, master Eugene traveled with his family to Greece. It was Eirene's first trip abroad. She returned filled with enthusiasm.

All of nature, the aroma of the trees, the gentle winds, the blue seas had impressed her immensely. She reacted to natural beauty, much like myself. The truth is that Madam Protopsaltou was an excellent teacher.



All the while that traveling was impossible because of the war, she had helped build up in the child, imagination, a sense of observation and appreciation of the Hellenic beauty in Greece both scenic and cultural.

The rest Eirene found within her own self.

Water was scarce for the town-dwellers needs then. At certain times when it flowed freely they collected it in reservoirs, even in bath tubs, but for children such a situation was not important enough to disturb their sense of well-being.

They arrived at Piraeus, the port of Athens, by boat. Ships were not allowed to enter the port. They anchored outside and small boats going back and forth carried and helped the passengers to land.

It amused her greatly.

Master Eugene's plans, besides a visit to their homeland and a change of scenery, was to establish and put into effect some of his predictions.

Their life and future in Egypt now seemed to him hazardous. He hoped to find solutions, buy property, a house too and to settle his finances before the changes overtook his life and found him unprepared.

As a result, when after several years they had to leave Egypt and settle in Greece, he was well prepared.

The Kanellos family were also compelled to move to Greece. though Eugene Eftichides was better off than the Kanellos'.

Throughout the years that they lived in Greece they never stopped reminiscing about Egypt. Except for Eirini.

Wherever she happened to live, she felt at home.

Mistress Polixeni's fortune dwindled. She sold her large estates for next to no money, as money post war had seriously devalued, changing everything.

She was now dependent on her children.

Her husband's enterprise, standing there for years and years, was sequestered by the state and turned into a road. Whatever they managed to salvage, including their furniture and family heirlooms they brought along with them.

The mistress' children had to start all over to survive as refugees in a new country which in fact was... their own homeland.

Slowly, they managed to build up their new endeavors. Life's ups and downs help us to grow wiser, hopefully.

The Kanellos family did not suffer unduly. They lived in relative ease, though not as well off as they were in Egypt..



With my sweet puppet Irini we never lost touch, nor with any other members of the Kanellos and Efthichides FAMILIES

Sotiris cared for and loved them all.

Irini went on to study abroad at an English school and then her longed for wish, the University came true.

She returned home to her parents only during the summer holidays. Strangely enough, as she developed she differed from her parents, just as she had written in her essays when still a child. I believe they actually wanted her to break away from their background and to develop into a different person.

We caught up with each other's news whenever we met.

My marital existence with Sotiris continues to be perfectly harmonious.

As the years go by, we become more attached to each other. As dissimilar as we are in our physique, nevertheless our binding as a couple is real.

It involves body and soul-  
-so wisely said in the Bible during our wedding ceremony-

The most important factor in our harmonious marital co-existence is that we respect each other. Compromise is essential and a perpetual effort to find ourselves in our partners to become more united is of utmost importance.

Blessedness enters the household and our lives.

Almighty God did not bless us with children of our own  
But it does not matter to either of us .

Eirini will always be a part of me, for as long as I live.  
Sotiris is also very deeply touched in his feelings with her  
as though she belongs to us both.

Thanks be to God.