

## A Winter's Dream

By Flora Vranikou

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> December. After a brief Christmas celebration at school, which included Christmas songs, the sharing out of sweets and exchanging of Christmas wishes, I return home. This year the “coincidence” of when days fall in the calendar gave an extra day of holiday to students and teachers.

I couldn't wait for these days off – a break from the stressful daily routine, a breath of freedom!

Strangely though, I do not feel joy, not even relief. Just tiredness, infinite fatigue. Twenty-eight plus years of work suddenly crushing me with their weight. Almost three decades worth...

The only thing I want to do is to finally reach home and sleep. To not think, to not feel, just to sleep...

I lie down on my right side. I love lying in this position. In this way I forget my internal metronome, I am transported free into a world without time. I hear the rhythmic falling of the rain and the whispers of the air outside. The warmth of my bed slowly seeps into my whole existence.

I feel my hand as a child enclosed in my father's strong and hot hand in the pocket of his camel coat. It is evening. Both of us are walking against the wind, wading through the rainwater. Where are we going? I don't know. I don't need to know. I only know that the cold doesn't affect me and the dampness doesn't penetrate me. This warm, soft dark pocket has grown and I am now totally inside it....

Afterwards, without understanding how, I find myself all alone in a long high-ceilinged room. One side of it is raised and up there I can see the judge's heavy carved oak Bench. On the wall behind it two pictures are hung. The higher of the two the icon of Christ with his crown of thorns and slightly further down the image of Justice with her eyes blindfolded and scales in her left hand. My left so she is holding them in her right hand I think to myself. So I must be in a courtroom, I realise that I am no longer a child.

I am sitting in the dock. Opposite me two rows of high-backed chairs are lined up. They must be the chairs of the jury. But why am I here?

In the gloom created by the heavy blue curtains I can discern a large audience at the back of the room.

When my eyes adjust better to the darkness, I can see myself, multiplied who knows how many times, on the benches of the courtroom and in all the seats of the jury.

I am sweating.

A voice from above, unknown and yet familiar, asks in a strict tone of voice - What did you do with the life that was given to you?

I know that voice from somewhere. It reminds me of something. I look towards the bench. I try to see the face of the person who is asking me. The bench is so high though that everything is blurry. As if I am looking at it through a funhouse mirror which distorts what you see.

Well? Asks the voice again authoritatively. What did you do with the life that was given to you?

That familiar tone, that unfamiliar face... Who is asking me? Who is my judge?

Haven't you got anything to say for yourself? The voice asks for a third time.

I want to speak, to apologise. I want to say: I studied, I had a family, I do my job, conscientiously I believe, I dreamt of a better world, I tried....

What exactly did I try to do? How much did I really try? What did I achieve in the end?

I don't say anything. I remain mute, feeling the doubt and the guilt flood my body.

So? How did you get on? I hear my father's voice as soon as I open the front door. I had a geometry exam today.

I didn't do so badly, I want to say. I don't, however, say anything. I look at hem of my blue school uniform and the ankle socks on my feet. For three days now he had been teaching me in the afternoons.

You should get an A he had said that morning before I left for school.

I didn't get an A. I also feel guilty for not living up to his expectations. I feel shame and doubts about my abilities.

Guilt, shame, doubt. Everything is so confusing. However, the voice, the voice which keeps asking, the voice which is so familiar and yet so unfamiliar is his voice, is it really the voice of my long dead father?

A prolonged rumble of thunder wakes me. I am soaked in sweat. So it was a dream. The question however still sounding in my ears: What did you do with the life that was given to you?