

Five men at our door

The parents, thinking that the girl was asleep whispered with shaky voices: “They are still there. We can’t go in”. The girl was wondering why the father hadn’t parked the car already and saw an opportunity to find the answer. She carefully opened one eye and saw five big men standing at the door of her apartment house. The father kept driving, it was the second time they were going around the block. Their car turned at a familiar corner, where their newspaper man was still selling newspapers. The girl briefly considered whether she could ask for something from the newspaper stand, the father usually felt very generous after going out to dinner. At the same moment she decided that it was not a good idea, two cars appeared from nowhere forcing the father hit the brake. A man walked out of one of the cars leaving the door open and knocked their window with a gun. It took the father a really long time to open the window. The plastic gadget kept sliding from his hand. The gun was very close to her father’s face. Finally, after a few dark seconds there was not glass between face and gun. “Why did you not enter your house?” asked the man with a slow, guttural voice. His words were barely understandable. The father tried with all his will to find an answer that would please the man. “With the things one hears these days... once can never be careful enough”. The man took the father answer with an accusatory rictus in his mouth. “Do we look like terrorists to you?” he asked. The father shook his head, it was clear that his only option was shaking his head but the rictus did not stop accusing. A new man, even bigger than the previous one, approached them. “You and you” he said pointing at the mother and the girl. “Go to that car. You” he said pointing at the father “park your car. We are going to check out everything, house and car. You have nothing to fear if you did nothing wrong”. His words were clear, calm and soft. The girl was barely eleven years old but she knew very well how much she had to fear, and was fearing with every organ, every function of her body.

The girl felt her legs moving like they belonged to somebody else. It was watching herself in a movie, the movie of the worst night of her life. While they got into the car the newspaper man exclaimed “Do not take them, they are good people”. His voice ended in a strange high pitch. While girl repeated those last words in her head “Good peeeep!” two guns pointed at the newspaper man. “Do you want us to take you?” the guttural voice asked. The newspaper man vigorously shook his head.

The girl and the mother were driven by three of the men. “The elevator can hold only four people” said the mother once they arrived to their house. The girl wondered whether she would see her father again. In the elevator the mother asked if they could check the girl’s room first, so she could go to sleep. It sounded so normal, like a favor one asks to a friend. The man with the guttural voice went into the girl’s room. He opened the closet door and the drawers. He picked up a pile of panties, looked inside the drawer with a flashlight. The girl sat silently on her bed. She had trouble breathing, the man was taking all the air. She hoped he could not hear her heart racing. The man went to her desk and grabbed her diary with a thousand Snoopies and the word “Diary” written in enormous golden letters in the cover. “He is not going to open my diary” she thought, “It is a girl’s diary”. The man opened her diary and read the last entry, looked at her, and read again. The girl knew that she had to let him do as he pleased but the pain was sharp. She heard the echoes of her father’s voice coming from the living room and felt some relief. The man opened the invitation letter and read it. “You went there tonight?” . The girl nodded and the man left the room. There was a great deal of movement in the house. Doors opening and closing, glasses bumping into each other, books falling. The books, the girl was aware that some of the books they had in the house were forbidden. She could talk about these books in the school only to say how bad, how wrong they were. Now the men were looking at the books. She remembered what happened to Mario and Ana. Her mother had tried to hide it but her grandma told her. “They took them, they left the baby with the nanny and they took them. Nobody knows where”. The girl had heard stories of torture and pain. The thought that Mario and Ana were being tortured was a heavy weight she carried since that conversation with her grandma. One has to go on, wake up, get dressed and continue with the little acts of life while the loved ones are being tortured. The possibility of torture was now in her living room. The girl went to the bathroom and

grabbed her toothbrush, just to keep the appearance of normality. All the lights of her house were on. She went back to her bedroom, closed the door and changed into her pajamas. Life without her mother was unthinkable. She could not, she would not face it. “If they take my mother” she told herself “I will jump through the window”. She felt better now that she had a plan.