

find food for the jackals. He is good, and He will find food. Now go to sleep.’

It was very late when the voices of the jackals died out. Then there wasn’t a sound. We said our bedtime prayers and, as always, asked God to protect grandfather, grandmother, our father, our mother, the trees and all mankind. We lay down, but did not sleep. Sleep weighed on our eyelashes, but we used all our strength to keep it away until we could make sure that the jackals had gone. And then, when we were certain they were gone, we whispered our prayers again to ourselves, and along with mankind and with the trees, we also prayed for the hungry jackals of the world.

HOWEVER, THE SEASON WOULD COME when the fruit was ripening, and the half-ripe clusters of grapes hung from the vines. For the jackals to overrun us then was not without danger, as it had been in the spring. If such a big pack of hungry animals went through the property even one night, there would be no fruit left the next morning.

For this reason, people looked for a way to fight this evil and to withstand it. Everyone who worked on the estate, men and women, divided into three shifts. The first shift kept watch until ten o’clock, the next until the middle of the night, and the third until the morning hours. They would wait, and as soon as the jackals came near, they would all rush to the outer boundaries of the estate, shouting wildly and striking tin pans or drums. If the night was dark, many of them held flaming resin torches of split pine in their hands.

The frightened beasts would retreat, howling furiously, and run to other neighbouring estates. In a short while, shouts came from the people on the other properties as they, in turn, tried to defend themselves, turning the pack of hunger somewhere else. Some time would pass and again the cries were heard, now from deeper in the distance, from another estate. It was like a terrible wave, which rolled, possessed, striking here and there until it could find a place to break. It didn’t find one, and the circle began again. Again it hit us, and again our men drove it away. There were nights when the chase of fear and of hunger lasted until morning.

Our first encounter with this cruel game brought real distress to us children. One evening there was a curious commotion in the courtyard of the farmstead. The women, especially the young female labourers, and

the men were in small groups talking, laughing, and preparing resin torches, tin pans and drums. We had all gone to our room early, little Lena, Agapi and I, and were busy making toy boats out of pinewood. We didn't notice what was going on outside. Only Artemis was missing. She was probably looking around downstairs. No one thought anything of it.

Artemis was the most restless of us all. She had an extraordinary curiosity for her age, a curiosity that amounted to a mania. It was as though she sensed already that she was going to leave us early and was in a hurry to learn everything about this world before her time came and it was too late. While the most off-hand answers that the grown-ups gave to our questions sufficed the other children, Artemis, ever distrustful, always sensed another truth hidden behind the veils that enveloped the world. She would ask, she would probe, she would insist that they tell her and insist on learning. Because of this, the grown-ups found it difficult to answer when she asked them about things she wasn't supposed to know yet. They told her something off the top of their head, and the world's veils grew darker. Artemis sensed it and stamped her feet crossly.

'No! That's not it! That's not it!' she would shout, ready to cry.

But she didn't cry, very rarely did she cry. A premature sense of seriousness held her back, a dignity entirely unnatural for a child.

So while we were playing that evening with little pine boats, the door opened suddenly and Artemis rushed in. Her face was bright, and her pale cheeks were flushed. Sparks flew from her big dark eyes.

'Have you heard? Have you heard?'

We jumped up, abandoning our boats, and hung eagerly on her every word.

'What is it, Artemis? What is it?'

As though she wanted to torture us, she cast a contemptuous glance at our feet, at the toy lateens and caiques that lay abandoned.

'You are playing with boats, when tonight . . .'

'Oh, Artemis, tell us what it is! Tell us!' we begged her.

Suddenly she became serious. She looked at us once and then:

'Didn't you see the torches and drums they're getting ready?'

'They're getting torches and drums ready? What for? Why?'

'War!' says Artemis, looking us straight in the eyes.

War? What did that mean? None of us knew. We had never heard of such a creature: bird, beast or tree.

‘Tonight, war on the jackals begins,’ Artemis said. ‘Alexis told me.’

We jumped with joy at the thought that something new was going to enter our lives. Surely it would be some game, this ‘war’.

‘Really? It’s going to happen? What did you call it? There will be . . . war?’ We shouted and jumped up and down.

But Artemis didn’t jump or laugh with us. Her lips were tightly closed, and she shuffled her feet nervously. It was as though she guessed something, foresaw something.

Agapi, a girl of ten at the time, was the first to notice the serious expression on our younger sister’s face, so inconsistent with our delight.

‘What’s the matter, Artemis?’

And immediately connecting the doubt that suddenly rose up inside her with the expression on Artemis’ face, she asked fearfully:

‘And what is this game, Artemis? What is war?’

Yes, really. What is it?

Our jumping and shouting stopped at once, and our eyes fixed on Artemis again.

‘What is it, Artemis? What is war?’

But Artemis didn’t know; she had not been able to understand. Alexis, our best friend among the ploughmen, had reported the news to her. But he was in a hurry and short-tempered, and Artemis hadn’t asked anyone else, impatient as she was to be the first to bring us the news. But the mystery of the word, the fact that she couldn’t find out its meaning, together with her own forebodings, disturbed her deeply.

‘I don’t know!’ she said. ‘How should I know? Why are you asking me?’ She stood for a second wavering, and then said:

‘I have to find out! I have to find out! I am going to grandfather!’

She rushed to the door, and we ran behind her. Since we were all upset over the news, we expected to find our grandfather agitated too. Not in the least. He was sitting calmly, as he did on other evenings, as though nothing was happening and nothing was about to happen.

‘Grandfather, is there going to be war tonight?’ said Artemis, and fell at his feet out of breath.

He turned around and looked at her in surprise; he looked at all of us and our questioning eyes.

‘Is *what* going to happen?’ he asked.

‘War, Grandfather! Won’t there be war tonight?’