

When the Tree Sings

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WAR

The enemy soldiers loaded the good wheat into their trucks and took it away. And then they took the horses away. The horses, the goats, and the sheep. The chickens, the ducks, and the geese. The pigs! And when the farming season was over, they took the men away. The men and, selectively, the women.

“The enemy is not all that hungry,” said Grandmother. “The reason he eats a lot is to keep others from eating. “

Grandmother knew a lot about the enemy, and I liked the way she spoke. I offered her a partnership in my future shadow theater company, but she turned me down, saying, “I’d rather be in the audience. “

The enemy made records, destination charts, and sent the hostages away. Words that were always there, but almost never used, words that we didn’t even know existed, became more than familiar: *Forced Labor, Labor Camps, Concentration Camps, Death Camps, Torture Chambers, Gas Chambers, Extermination Chambers.* Camps and Chambers.

And when winter came, we watched the sparrows scratching the ice for food and not finding it. We too were hungry. We thought of setting traps to catch the sparrows and eat them, but somehow, we kept postponing it, kept forgetting about it, The language was catching up faster. *Hunger* became *Famine*. *Dying* was reduced to *Wiped Out Clean*, or just *Wiped*. The enemy *Enforced The Law*, and we *Sustained The Losses*. Our people began to meet in basements secretly. In many towns, men and women got together, saying, “Enough is enough, “and had long discussions about what was to be done. There were arguments.

“Informer, “said Grandmother. “In each group there was at least one enemy informer. But the idea of fighting took hold. “

Many of our people took to the mountains, then came down to attack remote garrisons, or to derails supply trains. There were quick reprisals: for each train destroyed, or enemy soldier killed, fifty of our own people were to be shot. Reprisals.

“The enemy thinks he’s superior, “said Grandmother, “but that doesn’t necessarily make us inferior.“

“What’s that supposed to mean, Grandmother? “

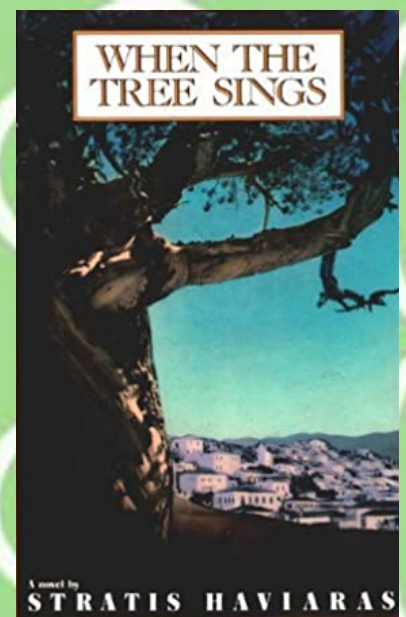
“We can be as brutal as the enemy, “said Grandmother, shaking her head.

“Then how come we don’t kill fifty enemy soldiers when they kill one of us? “

“Our kill has quality, “she said.

Grandmother was stranger than Phlox, but she too knew how to say out loud all sorts of things that i wanted to say but was unable to put into words. My collection of shadow theater puppets was increasing steadily. Besides the stock characters, I already owned Grandmother, Flisvos and Philippos, the Commandant, and Lekas the Informer. Then I began to carry a a little notebook and pencil in my pocket and to write down all kinds of thoughts and ideas that would enrich my shadow theater plays. Grandmother didn’t mind my performance. Since there was no longer

anything to cook in the kitchen, I stretched my screen across the opening of the pantry, and I didn’t have to take it down at the end of the show.



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