

THE GOLD STAR* GIRL

CHAPTER I

GOLD STAR*

... One day, somewhere, there will be a unique and homogeneous civilization, where symmetry will be a rule, where similarity will be praised upon, where there will be no room for exception. In such a place, life will have discipline and rigor of military cadence to our eyes. Individuality and beauty, like all other aspects of life, will have legislation implied.

One day, a third child is born in a family, the youngest of three daughters. But, behold, to everybody's amazement, the child is flagrantly different from all others, and she has a marking (on the forehead). Her parents panicked, as they did not know what to think: is she ugly? Is she pretty? One thing is certain - she will draw everybody's attention. She will be adored or detested, but surely discriminated. What about their other daughters? So similar to one another and to everybody else... What is the meaning of this third daughter?

The case is brought to public board, and the couple is persuaded to make a decision: no one must know of the occurrence or even look at this girl. Neither should she ever see her own reflection, not to fully realize the extent of her difference.

So the child, then girl, then woman, grows in her enclosure, giving wings to imagination. She can go out in the garden, surrounded by its

high walls, but always alone. She communicates with the outside world using a tiny device, given by her parents, through which she can connect to the "global network". In this virtual universe she imagines herself free; in a context so different than the one where she feels that rules are imposed upon her like a punishment. In fact, no one ever explains them clearly to her, nevertheless expecting her to intuit them, to understand and to follow them without questioning.

When communicating with the outside world, she gives herself a name, "Aviator Bird". Yes, the concept may seem redundant, but it explains perfectly her will to fly away, to leave all those incomprehensible rules behind... and to be free to grow and prosper! ...

CHAPTER II

ANA'R'CHIC

... Day after day, Gold Star* becomes more curious.

For years her education was entrusted to a tutor who came to her parents' home, under a secrecy agreement. In his presence, she had to wear some fundamental accessories, another one of the many impositions or "laws" as her parents called it. She had to wear a helmet that hid her hair and covered her forehead, and a mask that covered her face.

" Ugly helmet Ana!" That's what her tutor called her when he wanted to tease her. Oh! Well yes! Gold Star *'s name is Ana; "Gold Star*" is an affectionate nickname that her parents gave her.

From year to year, Gold Star* feels a growing expectation of coming to understand through her family, her tutor or the "global network", how the society she was born in functions, its rules and laws, her rights and duties as a citizen, and the reasons for so many impositions.

But time goes by and nothing happens. Her parents and her sisters show an increase anxiety, apprehension and worry; the tutor teaches her the "system's program" - little more than knowing how to speak, write and do math, with a few pinches of History, Biology and Physics - and in the "global network" information proliferates in such a way that it distracts and makes it difficult to discern what is really valid.

"So what is going on? What is happening? What is my role here?" Gold Star* thought, increasingly confused and angry.

She then makes a risky decision: her "Aviator Bird" arranges a meeting with three people she met in the "global network", people that seemed "different". When? At night! After everybody went asleep. She asked one of the people to bring a mirror – she knew what it was as she had seen it in the "global network". She wanted to know more about her appearance. Better than the indistinct reflection on vaguely reflective surfaces at home. She would finally be able to look at herself clearly!

That night, Gold Star went to her room early. She waited until everyone fell asleep, and left. She had arranged the meeting behind her house. What a feeling of freedom! Leaving home! And no helmet or mask! She felt like a weight had been lifted of her shoulders.

"Aviator Bird?" she heard calling. She looked up and saw three silhouettes perched in a tree. "Yes" she replied. Her heart was beating so fast she felt dizzy. They came down one after another. There were two boys and a girl, one of the guys looked like her father, mother and sisters, the other boy and the girl were completely different! Never had she seen anyone dressed as any of the three! One of the boys handed her a mirror. Gold Star* smiled and looked at herself for the first time. She was stunned and thrilled. "You're very pretty!" Said the other boy, and the girl nodded her head. Gold Star* began to laugh and cry at the same time. Finally she understood her nickname when she saw the golden sign shaped as a star that she had on her forehead.

They stayed up all night talking and telling one another their life stories. Gold Star* learned about the Cause of her new friends, who shared her feeling of revolt against a system that discriminates, manipulates and represses, that imposes senseless rules and that degraded their families physical and psychological health.

They began meeting once a week. Gold Star* began to dress differently for these meetings. She would improvise garments made with materials found at home that she painted and draped on the body, combining them with other garments that her friends offered her. She felt alive, and with her friends she felt that she could change the world and be happy! ...

*Story inspired by the regional tale "The Girl with a golden star on the forehead" (which was told in Alentejo, "Serra do Caldeirão", in Portugal, a hundred years ago)