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The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul

A Novel

&

Ottoman Crossroads: Coffeehouses, Politics, Theatres and Storytelling *Critical Essays*

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
PhD in English Literature (Creative Writing)

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Abstract

This Creative Writing PhD consists of a novel, *The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul*, and accompanying critical essays, *Ottoman Crossroads: Coffeehouses, Politics, Theatres and Storytelling*.

The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul is historical in nature, and magically real in temperament. It is an account of fin de siècle Constantinopolis, and contains forgotten fairy tales, remnants of an ancient manuscript culture, Armenian playwrights, Turkish feminists, Greek fortune-tellers and Sephardim cantors. It tells the tale of six intersecting lives in 1876, a time known as “the year of the three Sultans” in Ottoman history. This period was filled with tensions between traditionalism and Westernization, but also new political possibilities forwarded by the Young Ottomans. While the characters in this story are fictitious, they are inspired by historical events and figures.

The second element of my PhD, *Ottoman Crossroads*, is made up of four individual essays that focus on selected themes from the novel. They scrutinize, in order of presentation, the history of coffeehouse culture, the secretive society of the Young Ottomans and their political thought, the formation of Armenian-Turkish theatre, and the rediscovery of Ottoman fairy tales.

The reader can decide the sequence in which they want to read this PhD dissertation. *The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul* can be read before or after *Ottoman Crossroads*, and the articles in *Ottoman Crossroads* can be read consecutively, or individually in random succession. It is my hope that both the novel and the essays are coherent independently, whilst also linking to each other in ways that are sometimes direct, and at other times subtle.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

Printed Name



Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Author's Declaration	4
Acknowledgements	6
Introduction or a Recollection of the Writing Process	10
The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul.....	19
List of Characters in Order of Appearance	20
Titles.....	22
Foreign Words in Alphabetical Order.....	23
Timeline	26
A Note on Istanbul's Many Names.....	27
Adaptations	28
1. Alexandros	29
2. Perihan	70
3. Kehribar	160
4. Hagop.....	203
5. Kibar.....	276
6. Anna	312
Ottoman Crossroads: Coffeehouses, Politics, Theatres and Storytelling	319
1. Long Nights in Coffeehouses: Ottoman Storytelling in its Urban Locales	320
The History of Coffee and Coffeehouses.....	320
The Art of the Meddah.....	330
The Politics of Space.....	335
2. Remembering the Young Ottomans: A Case Study in Non-Western Modernism	339
19 th Century Islamic Modernism	340
Young Ottoman Thought	344
Political Activism and the Events of 1876.....	354
3. The Games We Play in Istanbul: Armenians and Turks on the Ottoman Stage	364
European Theatre in Istanbul and Amongst the Armenian Diaspora	364
Vatan Yahut Silistre	372
Vartovyan and Kemal's Cultural Reception	377
4. Deciphering an Ottoman Fairy Tale: <i>Tayyarzade</i> throughout the Centuries	381
The Difficulties in Searching for a New Ottoman Fairy Tale.....	382
The Missing Aspects of <i>Tayyarzade</i>	392
From the New Fairy Tale to the Inevitable Rewrites.....	395
Bibliography.....	402

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I am very lucky to have a partner who is as inspiring as he is sweet. *Te amo muito Peter Pan.*

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Many years ago, in our little kitchen in Bursa, she told me that it would mean a lot to her if I embarked on a doctoral degree. For that footnote of a wish, and so much more, I humbly dedicate this dissertation to her.

Voor mijn lieve Mama

Introduction or a Recollection of the Writing Process

“The urge to remember and the compulsion to forget are locked in complicity. They are all part of the same haunted clan: the detective, the analyst, the archivist, the academic, the assassin - all searching for clues, tampering with the evidence, hoping for a conclusion that does not come.”

Alev Adil

The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul started life as another novel. In the first year of my PhD, I was writing a book about the civil war in Turkey. The armed conflict between the Kurdistan Worker's Party [*Partiya Karkaren Kurdistanî*] and the Turkish State had cost 45.000 lives since its beginnings in 1978. The PKK campaigned for cultural and political rights, as well as independence from Turkey. They pursued their goals through political, and militant means. The Turkish state, along with many European ones, labelled them a terrorist organization and responded to their activism with force. As all children of my generation, I grew up with news of bombings, deaths and imprisonments. As an adult, I wanted to explore this tangled predicament through creative writing. How would a Turk and Kurd reconcile their political views if they were in love? *The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul* was born in the research process that accompanied this first, abandoned project.

I was 30.000 words and one year into my PhD, when I grew curious about the true beginnings of the Turkish-Kurdish discord. Going back 32 years to 1978, to the establishment of the PKK, did not satisfy me. Kurds and Turks had been divided along ethnic lines even then. I resolved to venture further back to 1923, to the inauguration of the Turkish Republic. This led me to several uprisings that were brutally curbed, and to an in depth study of the six core principles that formed the Turkish state, however I did not feel I

had hit upon an answer just yet.¹ To my initial frustration, the question at hand required going back to the Ottoman Empire. I had to explore the seeds of national unrest in the cosmopolitan past of the Turkish Republic.

My initial stop in Ottoman history was a political group called the Young Turks (1878-1908). They were the first proponents of Turkish nationalism in the Empire, and studied the latest intellectual discoveries of Europe closely. Young Turks, in line with 19th century positivism, wanted to erase religion from the Ottoman psyche, and initiated a progressive plan to this end. They would spread a materialist view of Islam, followed by the Bahai faith, and eventually lead the masses to atheism.² Young Turks also adhered to social Darwinism. Rumours as to their wish to form a higher species – by merging Turks with blonde Europeans – caused much uproar in the newspapers of the day.³ Young Turk ideology was based on theories of racial supremacy, and made me conclude I had arrived at the beginnings of the Turkish-Kurdish dissention. But the group also signalled towards a previous time in which such categories were not employed. Saddened and frustrated by the current political dilemma in Turkey, I quickly grew curious about a *lebenswelt* where ethnicity had not been the main denominator of society. A world in which the present civil war would have lacked all sense.

So I went further back in history. This is how I came upon the Young Ottomans (1865-1876). They were an eclectic union of Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Jewish and Kurdish intellectuals who desired to bring about the first constitution and parliament of the Ottoman Empire. I had finally found the breaking point, a stage prior to the nationalism of

¹ The six guiding principles of the Republican People's Party [*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*], which was founded in 1919 by Mustafa Kemal, are republicanism, populism, nationalism, secularism, etatism and reformism. For an in depth study of each please see: Suna Kili, *1960-1975 Döneminde Cumhuriyet Halk Partisinde Gelişmeler – Siyaset Bilimi Açısından Bir İnceleme* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1976), 50-77.

² Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 201-203.

³ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üç Dal Neşriyat, 1981), 387-389.

the Young Turks, a time in which Ottomanism had begun to morph into Turkish nationalism but had not triumphed yet.

I began my research with Şerif Mardin's seminal work on the society, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, and quickly expanded my reading list.⁴ As I researched the lives of Young Ottoman initiates, I came upon a charismatic and mysterious merchant by the name of Scalieri Cleanthi. He was a half Italian, half Greek enthusiast of theatre who had initiated Crown Prince Murat V and his brothers into a Freemason lodge in Istanbul. *I Proodos*, was the first Freemason lodge in the world to operate in local languages – Greek and Ottoman Turkish.⁵ It was a very hot August day in a park in Kuzguncuk, on the Asian side of Istanbul, when I came upon a strange set of words Cleanthi is said to have pronounced:

I will create a Byzantium with an Ottoman Sultan.⁶

I did not understand this sentence, but it excited me as only an impossible and beautiful idea can. I had been studying a conflict in which the smallest of differences had led to war and claimed lives, and here was a man that saw no difficulty in uniting the Byzantine and Ottoman civilizations. And so it was that I left my 30.000 words by the wayside, and began

⁴ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

⁵ Edhem Eldem, "Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Masonluk ve Siyaset Üzerine İzlenimler," *Toplumsal Tarih*, vol. 33, no. 6 (1996): 16-28.

⁶ I would later discover such sentiments were not unusual amongst the Phanariotes of Istanbul. The Phanariotes were Greek Orthodox Christians who resided in the Phanar quarter of the city and who functioned as intermediaries between the Ottoman ruling elite and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchy. Many Phanariotes aimed at conquering the Ottoman Empire from within through gaining control of important government posts. The end goal of this project was to resurrect the Byzantine Empire. With the establishment of Greece in 1821, the Phanariotes divided into three separate groups: those who stayed loyal to their original ideas, those who wanted to create a new Byzantine Empire under the auspices of a Russian King, and those who joined independent Greece. Scalieri Cleanthi belonged to the first group. For more information on the Phanariotes, their political activism and history see: Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Practicing Ottoman Governance in the Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) and Panayotis Alexandrou Papachristou, *The Three Faces of the Phanariotes: An inquiry into the Role and Motivations of the Greek Nobility Under Ottoman Rule, 1683-1821* (Masters thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1992).

writing a different novel in the second year of my PhD. My initial question regarding the Kurdish-Turkish conflict had lost importance, and a new one had arisen in its place: What would Istanbul have been like during the time of the Young Ottomans?

**

Many quarters of Istanbul contain buildings belonging to three different empires, the historical and cultural contexts of which remain largely forgotten by the city-dwellers.⁷ In Turkish-Italian director Ferzan Özpetek's *Il Bagno Turco* [The Turkish Bath], the heroine Marta sees a *hamam*, an old church, and an abandoned Art Nouveau apartment in quick succession and is impressed by the variety of the city-scape.⁸ In Argentinian-Armenian artist Silvana Der-Meguerditchian's audio-walk *Deep Sea Fish*, the participant is guided to seek traces of a lost Armenian past in the neighbourhood of Cihangir, and is led, time and again, to empty spaces and derelict houses through someone else's memories.⁹

I remember discovering Istanbul through a city guide instead. In *Istanbul Gezi Rehberi*, Murat Belge writes about an old kerevansarai in Karaköy – designed by architect Sinan in the 16th century – which has been turned into a two-story office building. He says in its garden, which now opens up to the busy main street, there is a Byzantine column.¹⁰ I went in search of that artefact. It took me hours to find it because it was broken and eroded, but also because the car washers who had occupied the garden did not realize the fountain they were using had a Byzantine column for a base.

⁷ The most famous of these neighbourhoods is Sultanahmet with its display of Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman architecture. The Roman hippodrome, the Byzantine Hagia Sophia, and the Ottoman Blue Mosque are all housed here, and are a mere five minute walk away from each other.

⁸ *Il Bagno Turco*, DVD, directed by Ferzan Özpetek (1997; Rome: Minerva Pictures, 2012).

⁹ Silvana der Meguerditchian, *Deep Sea Fish*, audio walk, accessed November 29, 2014. <http://www.deveron-arts.com/the-walking-institute/reference/silvana-der-meguerditchian/>

¹⁰ Murat Belge, *Istanbul Gezi Rehberi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 253.

What is most certain about Istanbul – both in its artistic depictions and in my personal experience – is that it used to be something else and something other; a shadow city that remains just out of reach. According to Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk this certainty creates *hüzün*, a Turkish term usually translated as melancholy, which Pamuk redefines as a communal sentiment.¹¹ I think this predicament creates an ubiquitous question in all Istanbulites. Sometimes the question is latent, and at other times it rises to the surface: just what was the city like a hundred, or two hundred years ago? My novel is a conscious investigation into that question.

In 19th century Istanbul, the Kurds were not the only minority who had their own language, music, dance and food. Istanbul used to have a rich social fabric made out of Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Romaniote, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, Arabs and Levantines, to name just a few. Edmondo de Amicis, in his 1877 *Constantinopolis*, describes Istanbul as follows:

The crowd goes by in great multicolored waves, and each new group represents a new populace. The most extravagant types, costumes and social classes that can be imagined may there be seen in the space of fifty yards and within ten minutes. Behind a crowd of Turkish porters who run past, bending under enormous burdens, a sedan chair comes along, inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, with an Armenian lady looking out; on either side of it a Bedouin wrapped in white mantle and a Turk in muslin turban and sky-blue kaftan, beside whom canters a young Greek gentleman followed by his dragoman in an embroidered jacket and a dervish with his tall conical hat and camel-hair tunic, who makes way for the carriage of a European ambassador, preceded by a footman in livery ... you find yourself in the middle of a crowd of Persians, in pyramid-shaped hats of astrakhan fur, who are followed by a Jew in a long yellow coat, open at the sides; a frowzy-headed gypsy woman carrying her child in a sling on her back; a Catholic priest with breviary and staff; while through a confused throng of Greek, Turks and Armenians a fat eunuch

¹¹ Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories of a City* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 90.

rides on horseback crying out “Make Way!” in front of a Turkish carriage, painted with flowers and birds, and filled with the ladies from a harem, dressed in green and purple, and wrapped in large veils; behind the carriage comes a Sister of Charity from one of the hospitals in Pera, an African slave carrying a monkey, and a professional storyteller wearing a necromancer’s robe. What is quite natural, but appears strange to the newcomer, is that all these different people pass each other without a second glance.¹²

The same easy co-habitation of differences existed in the Ottoman personality. My research led me to historical figures who participated in several identities at once, colourful characters hard to come by today. They were simultaneously freemasons, Phanariotes, and fervent supporters of a shy Ottoman prince. My Alexandros Cleanthi is a fictional rendering of the real life Scalieri Cleanthi. I discovered modernists who printed the Qur’an while in exile, who were also Bekhtashi poets creating vocabularies for a new nation, and whose fathers were Sufi court astrologers. The historical Namık Kemal inspired the Arif Kemal of *The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul*. I read about Armenians with mixed loyalties, men who had created Turkish theatre in the Armenian alphabet. It was Agop Vartovyan, and his Gedikpaşa theatre, that led me to create the imaginary Sakizlian and Hagop, and their red-doored establishment. These men who contained juxtapositions so elegantly, were

¹² Edmondo de Amicis, *Constantinople* (London: Alma Classics, 2013 [1877]), 17-18. It is interesting to note that Louis de Bernières, in his 2005 *Birds Without Wings*, describes early 20th century Istanbul in a very similiar manner: “A group of Mevlevi dervishes walked past together, clad in their great skirts and their hats that looked like tombstones ... A Jewess was borne past, her sedan chair inlaid with nacre and ivory... A mix party of Muslims and Christians took their first steps towards Ephesus, making pilgrimage together to the house of the Virgin Mary. Two gypsy women with babies at their backs walked hand in hand with two capuchin monkeys. A Portly Orthodox priest sweated behind a party of Bedouins draped in white cloaks, and after them a golden-vested Greek merchant rode side by side with a merchant from Italy, discussing prices in French ... Clutching a pink silk parasol, the dainty wife of one of the European ambassadors tripped along, flanked by four black servants and a grotesque eunuch from Ethiopia. A small group of Maltese nuns, whispering and giggling together, pattered along with parcels of medicines in their hands, whilst a group of Persians jostled with a band of Albanians, armed to the teeth and dressed entirely in white. Two young Greek women with scarlet skullcaps, their black hair flowing down over their shoulders, caught Rüstem Bey’s eye and nudged one another. A solemn Turk on a small ass led twelve ludicrously pompous camels, strung together, their halters hung with large azure prayer beads. Such was the normality of Istanbul, and none of these people found anything remarkable in such heterogeneity.” Louis de Bernières, *Birds Without Wings* (London: Vintage, 2005), 222-223.

in stark contrast with contemporary Turkey where one is either a Kemalist or a conservative, where one is either a leftist or a nationalist, a Kurd or a Turk.

There was, however, one problem with this colourful tableau; I did not come across many women I could write about. Women's testimonies of the Empire did not come into prominence until the 1890's.¹³ But I had no doubt there would have been significant females lurking inside Ottoman households, and so I created Perihan and Kalliopi. I imagined them as scholars, as free-thinking and courageous women who nevertheless reflected the values of their time. I then made up Kibar, a transgender singer, and Kehribar, a Muslim djinn, and the parameters of an Istanbul I could dream about were complete.

**

The break between the Empire and the nation state is an unsteady one, and not solely experienced by the Turks. The Republic of Turkey took 1923 as a zero hour and disregarded all continuities with its Ottoman past.¹⁴ We got rid of Sultans and Caliphs. Democracy ensued, secularism triumphed, women got the vote; we modernized. To quote Mustafa Kemal, the level of the highest contemporary civilization was reached. We Westernized. This at least, is a simplified outline of the early Turkish state doctrine.¹⁵ If there are traces of homogeneity in this view, it is intentional. The task is one of uprooting an older, habitual pattern, and hence the new ideology must be unequivocally good, while

¹³ Fatma Aliye's articles for the *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* [Ladies' Own Gazette] provide in depth information regarding the status of women in late 19th century Ottoman Empire. For further information on Aliye see: Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Fatma Aliye: Bir Osmanlı Kadın Yazarın Doğuşu* (Istanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2000).

¹⁴ Kader Konuk, "Istanbul On Fire: End of Empire Melancholy in Pamuk's Istanbul," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, vol 86, no 4 (2011): 260.

¹⁵ This summary is undoubtedly complicated by the current Justice and Development Party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*] which has been in power since 2002. The AK party is selectively re-appropriating the Ottoman heritage through an Islamic lens. The policies of the current administration, and political Islam in contemporary Turkey, fall outside the scope of this PhD thesis.

the old must be unequivocally bad. As we say in Turkish “*çivi çiviye söker,*” or in English, one must fight fire with fire.

The Turkish Republic created a *weltanschauung* that put the Ottoman on a shelf to gather dust. But this denial surfaced in the architecture of Istanbul. It also returned in a question Turks ask each other often, “*Aslen nerelisin?*” Translated literally the question means, where do you originally come from? But its true meaning is another, underlying query: “Yes, of course, you are from Istanbul, but before that, when we were an Empire, where did your people live?” In Turkey, where you were born is not as significant as where your ancestors were born. The different languages spoken inside Turkish homes and the variety of food cooked in its kitchens is a testimony to its colourful past. Even if Ottoman history is relegated to the background by the nation state, it returns through memories, heritage, architecture, food and vocabulary. Perhaps the act of forgetting, like the act of remembering, is never really complete.

The questions Turkish children ask each other, and the questions crumbling churches and synagogues raise, can be multiplied invariably within the humanities. What and who did we read, for instance, when we had another alphabet? How did a woman experience daily life when the dress code was different? How about the relationships between the various ethnic groups of the Empire, was there a hierarchy amongst them and what exactly did they think of each other? Each of these curiosities would require a full PhD in the social sciences, and yet, I felt a need to tackle them in my dissertation, even if partially. To this end, I focused on selected themes from my novel: coffeehouses, Young Ottomans, theatres, and fairy tales. They had all been important during the Empire, but were forgotten within the Republic, each of them creating an amnesia unique unto themselves. Fairy tales had been forgotten through the printing press and the change of alphabet, while theatres had been forgotten through a denial of Armenian contributions to

Ottoman culture. Coffeehouses had disappeared through modern architecture, and the Young Ottomans through nationalism.

Perhaps, I can humbly suggest my critical work be read as a bibliographical entry to the kinds of things the Turk forgot. I offer only four memory tokens. The articles in *Ottoman Crossroads* touch the surface that was elaborated further in *The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul* itself.

The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul

A Novel

List of Characters in Order of Appearance

1. ALEXANDROS

Alexandros Cleanthi: Phanariot, merchant, freemason, Young Ottoman.

Anna Davies, Annoula: Member of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, Rebecca's friend.

Rebecca Beale: Member of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, Alexandros' guest.

Perihan Hatun: Director of the Biggest Library of Istanbul.

Handan: Turkish student.

Kalliopi: Fortune teller, and friend of Perihan.

Sultan Abdülaziz: 32nd Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (February 18, 1830 - June 4, 1876).

Crown Prince Murat V, Sultan Murat V: Ottoman Crown Prince between 1840-1876, and the eventual 33rd Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (September 22, 1840-August 29, 1904).

Sultan Abdülhamid II: 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (September 22, 1842 - February 10, 1918).

Edmondo de Amicis: Italian painter and friend of Alexandros Cleanthi.

Sultan Orhan: Second ruler of the Ottoman Empire (1281-March 1362).

Katina: Alexandros Cleanthi's first love.

Sakizlian: Intellectual, and theatre owner.

Crown Prince Yusuf Izzettin: Sultan Abdülaziz's son.

Louis Souillier: French acrobat.

Sultan Mahmud II: 30th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (20 July 1789-1 July 1839).

Mutlu: Go-between.

Louis Amiable: Freemason and friend of Alexandros Cleanthi.

Sultan Abdülmecid I: 31st Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (25 April 1823-25 June 1861).

Crown Prince Nurettin: Brother of Crown Prince Murat V.

Arif Kemal: Poet, playwright, journalist and Young Ottoman.

Kibar Efendi: Singer.

Hagop: Porter, tea boy, rope walker and theatre director.

Dervish: Religious teacher, Young Ottoman.

Hüseyin Avni Paşa: Ottoman colonel.

Capolloene Dr: Palace physician.

2. PERIHAN

David and Samuel Nahmias: Publishers.

Father: Perihan's father.

Feride Nine: Housekeeper at the Biggest Library of Istanbul.

Marika: Perihan's neighbour.

Mütercim Halimi Efendi: The scribe of Sultan Abdülaziz.

Ruhi Efendi: Perihan's husband.

Ayşe Hatun: Guest at the Biggest Library of Istanbul.

Ali Bey: Husband of Ayşe Hatun.

Ali Paşa: Grand Vizier of Sultan Abdülaziz.

Fuad Paşa: Grand Vizier of Sultan Abdülaziz.

Ma'an: Lebanese Prince.

Kehribar: Djinn

3. KEHRIBAR

Zümrüt: Kehribar's father.

Elmas: Zümrüt's wife and Kehribar's mother.

Yuvarlak: Kehribar's older brother.

Ela: Sister of Kehribar.

Mafiş: Kehribar's younger brother.

Hayalci: Storyteller.

Haydar: Hunchback and gardener at the Biggest Library of Istanbul.

Şems and Hakem of Aleppo: Coffee merchants.

4. HAGOP

Ioannis Efendi: Coffeehouse owner.

Nora: Actress, Hagop's wife.

Aznavur: Theatre owner in Kasturya.

Cantor Moşe Cordova: Father of Nora.

Aram: The fool of Kasturya.

Müezzin Efendi: Friend of Hagop, and Nora's music teacher.

Yeraz: Nora.

Cuntalı Hasan: Head porter at the docks.

Eleni: Scribe's first love.

Yerganuş: Wife of Aznavur.

Osman: Coffee boy at the theatre.

Deli Ayten: Ayten the mad.

5. KIBAR

Little Father: Historian.

The Orphan: Little Father's friend.

Sultan Murād IV: 17th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (July 26, 1612 – February 9, 1640).

Granddaughter of Ma'an, the girl Ma'an, daughter of Ma'anoğlu: Alchemist.

Sheikh: The girl Ma'an's friend and teacher.

Titles

Ağabey: Older brother.

Canım efendim: My dear master.

Cim-cim: Syllable of endearment, added to the end of private names.

Efendi: Master, Sir.

Hatun: Lady, Mrs.

Hanım: Ms.

Hoca: Islamic religious teacher.

Mou: Greek term of endearment, my dear.

Nine: Granny.

Beyefendi: Gentleman.

Paşa: Ottoman officer of high rank.

Foreign Words in Alphabetical Order

Al kimya: Arabic and Turkish word for chemistry, also used for alchemy.

Al-Batin: The Hidden, one of Allah's ninety-nine names.

Al-Ghāfir: The Forgiver, one of Allah's ninety-nine names.

Al-Muntaqim: The Avenger, one of Allah's ninety-nine names.

Aşık: Minstrel

Ayran: A salty yoghurt drink.

Az-Zahir: The Manifest, one of Allah's ninety-nine names.

Bahşiş: Gratuity, tip.

Bismillah: Islamic term used when embarking on an activity, meaning in the name of God, the merciful and benevolent.

Börek: Flaky, savory pastry with thin layers of cheese, potatoes or minced meat.

Cacık: A yoghurt dip made with cucumbers, dried or fresh mint, basil, olive oil, garlic and lemon.

Çakır keyif: A term used for the initial, pleasant stages of drunkenness.

Cemaziyelahir: While the Islamic lunar calendar does not always correspond to the Christian calendar, Cemaziyelahir refers to the month of June in the year 1293 (1876).

Cicim: Term of endearment, meaning my sweet one, my beautiful one.

Çubuk: A long necked pipe used for smoking, especially in coffeehouses.

Darbuka: Middle Eastern percussion instrument.

Dengbej: Kurdish folk singer.

Eksili (sauce): A sour sauce made out of lemon, broth and melted butter.

Emanet: Person or thing entrusted to another's safekeeping.

Enderun: Palace school.

Estrağfurullah: Term used by a complimented person to indicate he is not worthy of praise.

Ey ahali: Term used for calling the people to attention before storytelling or important announcements.

Ezan: The Islamic call to prayer.

Garifalo: Greek word for cloves.

Gel: Turkish for enter, or come in.

Göbek taşı: A large marble stone placed in the middle of hamams where masseurs soap clients and give them massage.

Güllaç: A dessert made out of thin layers of filo pastry soaked in milk and rose water, topped with pomegranate seeds and pistachio shavings.

Hadith Qudsi: The hadith are a corpus of the words, deeds, and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, of which the Hadith Qudsi form a sub-category. The Hadith Qudsi are believed to be the direct words of Allah spoken through the Prophet's mouth.

Hagala: A belly-dancing move, also referred to as the ¾ hips walking shimmy.

Haremlik: The women's quarters of a house.

Haşa: Term indicating absolute refusal, or modesty and self-deprecation.

Hasret: A Turkish noun indicating the state of missing.

Hayde bre domuz: A belittling swearword starring a pig.

Helva: A dessert made out of semolina or flour, sweetened with milk and sugar, and decorated with pine nuts. It is made to mark special occasions such as a birth or death.

Hoca: Islamic teacher.

İç güveysi: A husband who depends on the financial support of his wife's family.

İftar: Evening meal during which the Ramadan fast is broken.

Karabasan: A nightmare caused by a djinn.

Kaymak: A very thick cream used for desserts, routinely eaten at breakfast with honey and bread.

Khabadayı: A desperado, a tough guy.

Kısır: Cracked wheat and fresh herb salad.

Kismet: A combination of luck and destiny.

Kuruş: Ottoman monetary unit.

Lodos: A warm wind that originates in Africa and blows over the Mediterranean.

Lodusçu: A person who collects objects discarded by the sea in order to sell them for profit.

Lokanta: Restaurant.

Lokum: Turkish delight.

Macun: Twirling, soft, brightly coloured candy made out of allspice, cinnamon, cumin, cardamom, orange blossom, cloves, black pepper, tumeric, mastic, nigella seeds, orange peel, vanilla, anise and myrrh.

Maftirim: Performance of sacred Hebrew poetry in accompaniment to Ottoman classical music.

Makam: Intervallic structures in Ottoman and Byzantine classical music.

Mangal: A brazier placed in the midst of rooms for warmth, and coffee making.

Maşallah: Term of praise, more specifically a query unto God that he protect the beautiful object under scrutiny. Typically used to ward off the evil eye.

Mazallah: A religious term meaning God forbid.

Medrese: Islamic center for learning, or university.

Meltem: A warm wind that blows from the sea.

Mercimek Köfte: Vegetarian red lentil and bulgur meatballs.

Mevlut: The reading and singing of the Qur'an on special occasions – such as birth, the 40th day of death – and holy nights.

Müezzin: The person who recites the call for prayer.

Musakka: A dish made by layering minced meat or lamb in tomato sauce, creamy béchamel, and sweet eggplants.

Muska: Amulet.

Nane limon: A concoction of lemons, mint and linden.

Nargile: Waterpipe.

Peri: Fairy.

Piznomim: Traditional Jewish melodies sung with the intention of praising God.

Poğaç: A type of bread filled with cheese or potatoes, and sprinkled with black sesame seeds or dried dill.

Poyraz: A northern wind.

Rakı: An alcoholic drink made out of aniseeds.

Ramazan: While the Islamic lunar calendar does not always correspond to the Christian calendar, Ramazan refers to the month of October in 1293 (1876).

Rebiyülevel: While the Islamic lunar calendar does not always correspond to the Christian calendar, Rebiyülevel refers to the month of June in the year 1286 (1867).

Sabahı şerifleriniz hayırlı olsun: Morning greeting for a sacred and blessed day.

Selam Aleykum: Customary Islamic greeting, peace be unto you.

Selamlık: Men's quarters in a house.

Şevval: While the Islamic lunar calendar does not always correspond to the Christian calendar, Şevval refers to the month of October in the year 1293 (1876).

Shakar lokum: Armenian butter cookies.

Shalvar: Baggy, Ottoman trousers tied around the waist with a drawstring.

Simit: A crisp, ring shaped, savory roll covered with sesame seeds.

Sucuk: A spicy sausage flavored with garlic.

Sumaki: Greek word for sumac.

Süphanallah: Term indicating Allah is devoid of flaws. Commonly used to express surprise at unlikely events.

Surah: A chapter from the Qur'an.

Sütlaç: Rice Pudding.

Tavşan kanı (tea): Ruby red tea.

Tourkiko kafé: Greek for Turkish coffee.

Vallah Billah: Term used to give one's word.

Vesvese: Ungrounded apprehensions that crowd the mind.

Vilayet: Province.

Yalı: Waterside mansion.

Yasakhdjis: A church official responsible for exposing and punishing Armenians who strayed from their religious obligations. The term is derived from the Turkish "yasak," meaning forbidden.

Yazma: Fabrics on which designs were printed or hand painted.

Zilhicce: While the Islamic lunar calendar does not always correspond to the Christian calendar, Zilhicce refers to the month of December in the year 1293 (1876).

Zilkade: While the Islamic lunar calendar does not always correspond to the Christian calendar, Zilkade refers to the month of November in 1293 (1876).

Timeline

April 1863 [Zilkade 1280]: Royal visit to Egypt.

Summer of 1865 [1282]: Young Ottomans formed during a picnic.

July-August 1867 [Rebiyülevvel-Rebiyülahir 1284]: Royal visit to Europe.

March 1868 [Zilhicce 1285]: *I Proodos* established.

1869 [1286]: Sakizlian's theatre gets monopoly on Turkish plays.

October 1872 [Şaban 1289]: Crown Prince Murat V joins *I Proodos*.

April 1873 [Rebiyülevvel 1290]: The Turkish play is staged.

30 May 1876 [Cemaziyelevvel 1293]: Sultan Abdülaziz, 32nd sovereign of the Ottoman Empire is dethroned. Sultan Murat V becomes 33rd Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

4 June 1876 [Cemaziyelahir 1293]: Sultan Abdülaziz dies.

31 August 1876 [Şaban 1293]: Sultan Murat V is dethroned, and imprisoned in the Çırağan Palace. Sultan Abdülhamid II becomes the 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

A Note on Istanbul's Many Names

The city that cradles East and West has been referred to by many different names throughout the centuries. I have tried to remain faithful to the 19th century usage of its titles in this novel. Consequently, the Greeks in *The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul* call the city Constantinopolis, Konstantinopolis, the polis, the city, or infrequently, Istanbul. Ladinos name it Konstantina. Turks refer to it as Istanbul, Dersaadet or Konstantiniye, while Armenians identify the city as Bolis.

Adaptations

p. 165-166: from Mohammad Ibn Ishaq al-Nadim [adapted from Bayard Dodge ed., *The Fihrist of Al-Nadim* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 572-575.]

p. 193-194: adapted from Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Tan Matbaası, 1958), I.

p. 198: from Eşrefoglu Rūmī [adapted from William C. Hickman, *Eşrefoglu Rūmī: Fifteenth Century Anatolian Mystic Poet* (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1972), 164.]

p. 264-265: adapted from Chico Buarque de Holanda, “Teresinha,” in *Opera de Molandro* (São Paulo: Universal Records, 1978).

1

Alexandros

*You said: "I will go hence to another land,
I will betake me to another sea."*

Konstantinos Kavafis

Anna Davies
7 Leokoriou Street
Psyri
Athens, Greece

Rebecca Beale
London Society for Women's Suffrage
108 Hornton Street
The Royal Borough of Kensington
London, United Kingdom

5 February 1877

Dear Rebecca,

The first time I heard mention of Mr Alexandros Cleanthi was in a series of letters from Constantinopolis, the earliest of which arrived in our London offices inconspicuously on a Friday morning in 1876. I remember being taken by the letter's stamp; it displayed a seagull, the tip of the Golden Horn, and a tall stone tower. All of them looking out of the ordinary, and exciting because of that, encircled with Arabic letters like a protective talisman. The envelope was addressed to the Kensington Society, which no longer existed by the time the communication had reached us. We had reconvened as the London Society for Women's Suffrage a few months back, and you my dear, were stationed in our Edinburgh offices at the time.

The writer of the mysterious letter was one Perihan Hatun who said she was contacting us from a library in Istanbul. She explained that her father had been an avid collector of books, as well as the personal physician of two Sultans. Through his posts in Ottoman cities around the world, in such places as Algiers and Jerusalem, and through years of patient scavenging in bazaars and attics, archives of old mosques and dusty medreses, he had created a rare and fine collection of manuscripts on medicinal plants, dream and coffeehouse books, hagiographies, encyclopaedias, epics of Ottoman Sultans

embellished with miniatures, scrolls of magic spells from Muslim Africa, and much more, which he housed in a library in the district of Kuzguncuk. Perihan Hatun had inherited the collection upon his death and was now wondering if we might discuss a possible collaboration. Her tone was friendly yet succinct, professional but not devoid of emotion; she was inviting us to share our resources and to form a women's library together.

As you can imagine, I was exhilarated upon reading the letter. I stood on my chair and read its contents out loud to our sisters. The winter past had been one of disappointment and boredom. Every idea I had come up with had been rejected by the Society. The journal had caved in, which meant I had nothing to write or edit. My plan to teach the art of medicine to widows was put down before it got off the ground, the reason being my lack of official credentials. In other words, this Ottoman venture felt like a new beginning to me. It was both an opportunity to put myself to use, and a chance, perhaps, to leave foggy London behind. At least for a little while...

But the sisters were suspicious. How could an Eastern woman not only own, but also direct a library all by herself while we were still fighting for inheritance rights in England? We knew nothing about this Turkish lady, they said. The letter could be a joke at best, and a trick at worst. The sisters have an awful habit of dimming enthusiasm, although they mean well; be brave if they prescribe the same medicine to you.

I pleaded with our secretary, Ms Julie, to investigate the matter further. Because she has a soft spot for me, and because I baked her some soda bread, she contacted the former British ambassador to Istanbul. We asked him whether he knew of a library on the Bosphorus fitting Perihan Hatun's depictions. But he responded that he knew of no such place, and none especially that was directed by a woman. This was the end of the story for the Society, but it is in my nature to believe in unlikely scenerios, just like it is in yours. When the women left the offices at night, I wrote back to Constantinopolis. I remember

giving reign to childishness the next day, and choosing the most colourful stamp at the post office.

Ms Perihan's response arrived two weeks later and included a most lovely watercolour rendition of her library – with a red haired woman scowling by the entrance of a magnificent room, filled from floor to ceiling with rows of books. Perihan Hatun had posted me a hand written page in the Greek script too, the words surrounded another watercolour of a coffee cup. I cannot say I understood the reasoning behind this gesture, perhaps she had wanted to prove the books in her library did not contain empty pages. Upon seeing the pictures, our sisters were inclined to merit that Perihan Hatun, and the library she was championing, might indeed exist, improbable as they both were. The Society quickly and unanimously decided that I would be the best candidate to find out the truth of this matter. I don't blame them their wish to be rid of me; they must have missed the peace and quiet of their offices prior to my arrival. And so it was that I began a trip to the Orient with a single suitcase in which I placed the pamphlets from the anti-slavery campaign, and our petition to the parliament for votes – materials for a library that would be the first to chart the history of the fairer sex.

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I would cross the waters to France, and go as far down as Italy by train. Next, I would take a boat to Greece, and from thence set sail to Constantinopolis. My exchange with Perihan Hatun continued on the journey South. I read her letters in my train compartment which I was sharing with an English family off on their holidays to Tuscany and, as luck would have it, with a young Turkish student. She introduced herself as Handan, politely shook our hands, and then buried her face in a book. When I noticed its Arabic script, I struck up

a conversation with her, and once Handan learned I was on my way to Constantinopolis, she was anything but shy.

She had come to London to visit her uncle who was an Ottoman diplomat. “This is my first journey alone, and it took a long time to convince my family I was capable of it,” she said. Her English was accented, but otherwise very good. “I am close to my uncle and not used to missing him. This is his first assignment abroad.” Handan had taken advantage of this opportunity for travel. She was impressed by the libraries and museums of England, and with how all services ran like clockwork, but was appalled by the food and the weather, and found the people a little cold besides. “You will see how real tomatoes taste when you arrive in the Mediterranean,” she said, “and once you land in Istanbul, you must contact me and stay with us. We will cook Ottoman food for you. My sisters will quarrel to sit next to you at the dining table.” The journey to Italy passed much quicker than I had expected. At times I chatted with Handan, and at others I re-read Perihan Hatun’s long letters.

Her accounts were full of people; the life she depicted resembled those crowded miniatures of the East. She wrote of her best friend Kalliopi who was a Greek fortune-teller, she mentioned a playwright who only wore clothes too small or too short, and a handsome military officer. She referred to her husband, and her favourite singer from Anatolia who was expert at trilling, and to several religious teachers who came to study at the library. She said the four wooden walls that surrounded her contained a house, a salon, and a shelter for books all in one. Alexandros Cleanthi was just one name amongst the others at first. Perihan Hatun described him as an enthusiast of theatre. A freemason and a defender of women’s liberation, and I guessed he would be a man in the likeness of our own JSM.

Upon my arrival in Italy, the tone of Perihan Hatun’s communications changed. Her letters became shorter and distraught. She said the time she and her friends had been

planning for had come and gone, with unexpected consequences. In Athens another letter awaited me in the lobby of my hotel. In it Perihan Hatun mentioned that her friend Mr Cleanthi had relocated to Athens. She requested that I visit him while here, “for he must be sad, and in need of company,” she wrote. I know a prolonged stay in Athens was not in my itinerary, Rebecca, but how could I refuse?

To legitimize the delay to our Society, I quickly arranged two meetings with notable women from the city, one with a Callirhoe Parren who was planning to initiate a ladies’ newspaper, modelled on our discontinued ‘English Woman’s Journal.’ The other with a friend of hers who had established a cooperative where experienced embroiders taught needlework to newcomers. Both rendezvous were fruitful, but ultimately excuses to meet the man who would become my gateway to an unknown world.

**

All together Mr Cleanthi and I had five dinners. The earliest was at a simple restaurant with a view of the Acropolis, and the next four took place at his house in Psyri. It wasn’t long before I discovered food to be Mr Cleanthi’s favorite category. And since all transcripts need an order, I have decided to arrange this one according to meals.

It would not be an exaggeration to say Mr Cleanthi was disgruntled by his new life when I first met him. He had only just arrived in Athens, but was already homesick for Constantinopolis. For each of my visits he cooked a different Ottoman dish, and told me such interesting stories of the world he had left behind that I did not have the heart to forget them.

Our conversations were political. But to explain the diplomatic to me, to somebody from so far away, Mr Cleanthi had to start from his childhood. This is how he told me of his father, a noble man who taught his boy the legends of Emperors rather than fairy tales,

and who passed on to him a family legacy that reached back into the fifteenth century. Then Mr Cleanthi told me of who he was meant to be, and what he became instead, and how in his adulthood he made unexpected friends, a group of dissidents who desired to take down a Sultan. He told me of their clandestine networks that spread across the *polis*, and about how they succeeded in bringing Sultan Abdülaziz down. But in less than ninety days, Abdülaziz's successor Sultan Murat V had been toppled off the throne too, and subsequently imprisoned with claims to his madness. Mr Cleanthi then told me of a secret for which he would be hung in Constantinopolis; he had tried to rescue the imprisoned Sultan, and not just once. In his last attempt he had almost been caught, and this is why he was now a refugee in Athens.

You must be wondering why Mr Cleanthi chose me for such a hefty confession, Rebecca. There may be several reasons for this unexpected occurrence, the first being his desire to spread the tale of 1876 far and wide. In fact, with this very aim in mind, Mr Cleanthi himself had become a writer. He told me he had been communicating with European publishers ever since his arrival in Athens. I saw the pages of his manuscript multiplying on the kitchen table, which is where he chose to write. But that book was being penned in French, and Mr Cleanthi thought the English must hear of the events too. Despite his wishes for political dissemination, Mr Cleanthi had no proof he could trust me, Rebecca, with such secrets as I have conveyed above. Which brings me to the second reason he might have opened up to me: Perihan Hatun, the intermediary I was yet to meet. She was the one who had brought Mr Cleanthi and me together. He told me Perihan Hatun was the most intelligent person he had ever met, amongst both men and women, and I believe it was because of her that Mr Cleanthi greeted me like I was a long lost friend rather than a stranger.

But perhaps there is a third, and simpler explanation for Mr Cleanthi's revelations. He might have missed the company of someone who cared to listen, and who shied away

from judgement. After all I was a foreigner, someone who so lacked any knowledge of the region that she would believe everything she was told, even the fantastical. I suspended all disbelief, and indeed, don't we all desire such a listener to narrate our lives to?

As our conversations prolonged, I came to a realization. The stories Mr Cleanthi was telling me were exactly what you had been looking for, Rebecca. I know you want to re-establish the 'Woman's Journal,' and I agree with you, even if the sisters don't, that it must be a publication that discusses all topics men's journals discuss, including the politics of foreign countries. Yet there is a point to the opposition the Society raises; there is danger that we might bore the small readership we have gained after many struggles. So here it is, I have found a middle way. I am sharing with you Mr Cleanthi's testimony, a first hand historical account, women's journalism if there ever was any, and at the same time I am attaching a set of recipes to the transcripts to please the sisters. Something "womanly," practical, and of the home, so that if they disagree with you and consequently with me, you can begin cooking the dishes one by one and convince them otherwise.

While we are on the topic of recipes, I must make a confession. As time passed by and the stories Mr Cleanthi told me multiplied, the recipes came to mean more to me than mere instructions for cooking. I consider them a kind of culinary interlude, a music that enables the conversation. For me, Athens can no longer be separated from the taste of it. So cook and read, or read and cook, and in either case, tell me what you think of both the dishes and the transcripts.

If you would allow me to make an editorial suggestion, I would present Mr Cleanthi's account with a foreword. Something along these lines: "We, in England, don't really know what happened in the Ottoman Empire last year, in 1876, even if we fight together against the same enemies. Sultan Abdülaziz died; it is inconclusive whether he was murdered or committed suicide. His nephew, Crown Prince Murat V, rose to the throne but went mad in 96 days, and his brother Abdülhamid II is now the Emperor of the

Turks and the Caliph of the Muslims. But how did these events transpire in the course of just one year, and how will they affect our declining ally?" Mr Cleanthi gave me a possible answer, Rebecca, and I predict I will find others in Constantinopolis.

I sign off from Piraeus, where I watch the sea in accompaniment with *tourkiko kafé*, and a hand rolled cigarette. I smoke it from a holder Mr Cleanthi has gifted me, it is of silver and inlaid with turquoise stones. It makes me feel more elegant than I actually am, and as if I come from a land other than subdued England. Very soon I will be on a ship sailing to the Orient. The adventures, discoveries and all the danger this trip might entail only excite me. How glad I am to be away from the sisters and the strict code of the Society, but my heart longs for our camaraderie and night-long conversations. Please keep me in your thoughts and prayers, and do not leave me without letters. And I will send you more testimonies from Constantinopolis, accompanied with news regarding our women's library.

With love and affection,

Your friend,

Anna

A First Dinner at Monastiraki

EKŞILI KÖFTE – MEATBALLS IN SOUR SAUCE

Ingredients

1 kg of minced meat

200 gr onions (2 medium sized onions)

100 gr uncooked rice (about 6.5 soup spoons)

Parsley, a thick bunch

Salt and pepper

300 gr tomatoes (3 medium sized tomatoes, sliced)

½ liter broth (2 water glasses)

100 ml melted butter (½ water glass)

1-2 lemons

Directions

1. Mix the minced meat with rice, chopped onions, and parsley (keep some parsley aside for later use). Add salt and pepper. Make very small meatballs out of the mixture.
2. Place the left over parsley at the bottom of a pan, you can also use the stalks. Put the small meatballs on top of the parsley, in two layers. Lay the sliced tomatoes and some left over parsley in between the meatballs.
3. Boil the broth and pour it over the meatballs, parsley and tomatoes. Melt the butter and repeat the procedure. Add the juice of one or two lemons. The sauce has to taste a bit sour, so if more lemons are needed you can add those also. Place on medium heat until the meatballs are cooked.

Athens was built on seven hills; this is what all the guidebooks tell me. There are other cities in the Mediterranean which make the same claim: Rome, Cagliari, Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon and Constantinopolis, but they say Athens is one of the truthful ones. Still, Mr Cleanthi described our current location – the neighbourhood of Monastiraki

which lies south of the Acropolis mound – as nothing but a grand anthill. Even if he looks down upon it, I find the area very charming. It is filled with flea markets, vagrant musicians, and shops that sell anything from antiques, to books, to little evil eye beads. A steady crowd walks around the ruins inherited from the Romans and the Turks, or they eat and drink at the many cafes that line its cobblestoned streets. This is where Mr Cleanthi and I had our first meeting and where he began to narrate his story to me: in a restaurant called ‘Maiandros,’ with a view to the ancient temple of Athena, at about 20.30 in the evening.

“I have been in Athens for a few months now. The city is disappointing although my house suits me well enough, Miss Anna. It is small, and the wooden interior creaks whenever there is a storm, but then I don't need anything luxurious. I learned to be sparse with my belongings after I lost everything I once owned. Which is to say, I did not always have a stoic constitution. It is only now that my humility seems irreversible.

There are many friends I have left behind in the East, one who I am reminded of constantly is a man by the name of Edmondo de Amicis. The famous Italian painter, perhaps you have heard of him? He is writing a book about our city, accompanied with drawings. I think he will call it, ‘Constantinopolis.’ Both a simple and complicated title, if you ask me. He told me once that he couldn't write even two sentences when he first alighted at the Golden Horn. He was mesmerized, I guess, and also out of sorts; in Europe they imagine Constantinopolis to be so many things but then it always turns out to be a different thing. And more often than not, a bigger and better thing. In any case, he told me, ‘Alexandros, you can only write about this place from afar. You must forget it just a little so as to begin.’ I can say I am distant from the city of my heart now, Miss Anna, and even though I have not forgotten it one bit, maybe moving in that gloomy direction is inevitable. Besides, I am feeling old, but have been gifted with a young and beautiful listener like you.

I will tell you everything, and ask only that you transcribe my words in the most compassionate manner.

I was born in a majestic house in Phanar. The neighbourhood sits on a small corner of the Golden Horn and is home to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchy. Families like ours had lived in the quarter for centuries, close to our Greek centre and on the doorstep of the Ottoman Palace. We were intermediaries between these two powers and of noble Byzantine ancestry. All in the Empire knew us as the Phanariotes.

Our three-storied, rose-coloured residence was just one street up from the Church of St. George, Miss Anna. I grew up with a view of that church and the shimmering sea, in the company of seagulls and stray cats that acted like domestic animals. My childhood passed as I listened to my father's stories of Emperors who had ruled Constantinopolis. Mothers tell fairy tales to their children, sing lullabies, maybe even make up a riddle on the spot. But my father, who was a translator of important state documents, used to march up and down the bedroom like a soldier, each of his steps making the heavy chandelier tremble, and narrate biographies of ancient rulers. What was unusual about my father, Miss Anna, was that he told me accounts of both Byzantine Emperors and Ottoman Sultans. His father had passed them down to him, and he in his turn had learnt them from his own father, and in this manner the tales went back all the way to 1453, to when Constantinopolis fell to the Turks...Despite many testimonies to the contrary, some Greeks were celebrating on that fateful day. The noble families and the Orthodox Church decided to stay put in Constantinopolis even with the seven days of pillaging, and notwithstanding the murders of those brave Greeks who attempted to resist the occupation. Why do you think that was, when all of Europe had opened up its doors for us, unless, of course, we had a plan?

Let me explain it through a story my father used to tell. It concerns a meeting between Archbishop of Thessaloniki Agios Gregorios Palamas, and the second Ottoman

Sultan Orhan, and takes place in the 13th century, a time when the Turks were slowly approaching, but when the future of the Byzantine Empire was still uncertain. Archbishop Palamas was on his way to meet the Emperor in Constantinopolis when he lost his way at sea. He landed in Ottoman territories unwittingly, and was scared for his life. Turkish cavalymen found him at the shores of Tirilye, and took him to their Sultan's premises in Prusa. Sultan Orhan was a religious man, Miss Anna. He kept an entourage of *chiones*, or the wise ones, around him with whom he discussed all manners of mysticism. Palamas assumed these men were Muslim clerics but soon realized they were heterodox, selected on their ability to synthesize Shamanism, Orthodox Christianity and Shiite Islam. The Archbishop was most surprised by their knowledge, and conversed with them for a whole day, at the end of which the Sultan offered Palamas some bitter Turkish coffee.

The *chiones* turned over his cup once the Archbishop had drunk his fill. They then prayed many different kinds of prayers and proceeded to read his palms, his face, and the coffee dregs he had left in the cup. The wise ones then made a prophecy, that one day the ways of the Greeks and Turks would meet. Palamas was charmed by their hospitality and primitive methods, but laughed away their prediction. Nevertheless, as the *chiones* put him safely on a ship bound for Constantinopolis, he had a vision. He saw an offspring of Sultan Orhan with a golden cross around his neck, and the Sultan's ornate turban on his head, seated on a throne in Hagia Sophia. So certain was his daydream that it was tinted purple, the colour worn exclusively by Byzantine Emperors. He then told the *chiones* that if the Turks ever conquered Constantinopolis, the Greeks would have no reason to fear them; the prophecy of the wise ones was true. The Ottomans were destined to become Christians.

My father used to tell me this legend, Miss Anna, to emphasize the beginnings of our family's belief, which I can only describe as conquering the Ottoman Empire from within. Families like ours, and the Greek Church believed that the Ottoman Empire would morph into a Greek-Turkish condominium. They also believed Muslim rule would

preserve the Orthodox from Catholic threat. The cohesion of what was once Byzantine lands, further enabled the Greeks to spread Hellenism into the Balkans without European intervention. In short, once Constantinopolis fell, Phanariot families and the Orthodox Church decided to collaborate with the ruling Turks. It would only be a matter of time before they rose in important government posts, and shared the rule of the Empire with the Ottomans.

But let me simplify my story for now, Miss Anna, for at this point in the telling, in the house in Phanar, I am only a child and unaware of my family's loyalties. While my father had theories for his Helleno-Turkism, mine were strictly culinary, at least in the beginning. One evening, I must have been ten or eleven years old, we received an unexpected guest in our house. Her name was Katina, and it was her cooking that instilled Phanariot traditions in me. You see, Katina was a distant relative from Symirni, and she was married to a Turk.

I remember I had just returned from school, and made my way to the kitchen which smelled deliciously of garlic, and sautéed onions. It is a forlorn experience to fall in love when you are a child... Somehow at that age love has all its heaviness and none of its lightness. Katina heard me come in and looked up from the pot she had been stirring. Her large green eyes, which were lined heavily with kohl, made me feel shy. She blew on the wooden spoon of *ekşili* sauce embellished with cumin and parsley, and then placed it in my mouth. I can recall the taste to this day, Miss Anna, I am yet to have a more sensual first encounter. My eyes watered from a variety of feelings. Katina thought the sauce had been too hot and began kissing my cheeks and begged me not to tell anyone that she had burnt my mouth. But this only made matters worse. Her long hair cascaded down around me as she cajoled, her perfume mixed with the scent of food and invaded my nostrils. I felt a willing prisoner in a cave of her making. My mother entered the kitchen just then, and her laughter put an end to it all.

My first infatuation tasted of meatballs with bitter lemons. I shall share the recipe with you. Katina's Turkish mother in law had taught her the dish, and I had been her subject for experiment. Needless to say, the platter soon became a staple in our house. What is important is not so much that we cook similiar meals with the Turks, but that we taste food in the same way. There are many who say Turks are heathens, and Mongolians, that they don't belong in *Anatoli*. But the way we taste food, that should be proof enough, no? Watch a Greek and Turk light up a cigarette in Constantinopolis, and tell me if you see the difference, Miss Anna.

I lost my father soon after Katina's visit. His stories and my first love became equally distant memories as I turned into a young, ambitious man. Despite what was expected of me, I did not follow in my father's footsteps. The politics of the time seemed tainted, with the Greeks being trusted less and less. The Phanariotes had indeed risen in Ottoman institutions since the 15th century. They had become the secret keepers of Ottoman Sultans, had initiated European treatises, had become dragomans and merchants. In fact, their eventual partnership with the Turks seemed inevitable until the creation of Greece in 1821. The Ottomans considered an independent Greece treachery, and they had begun to call the Armenians, rather than us, the loyal people after its establishment. By no virtue of their own, the Armenians had suddenly become state officials, even if they convinced no one of their pedigree. Disappointed in the lack of trust granted to my people, I turned my back to politics, Miss Anna, and became a merchant instead.

I bought and sold silk, linen, and velvet for many years. It was a lucrative business, one in which I travelled frequently and made several interesting acquaintances – such as the painter I mentioned, Edmondo de Amicis, who had a weakness for Symirni cotton – but ultimately the ease and repetition of it all, bored me. Amidst the comings and goings to the silk market of Prusa, as I sat sipping tea on the tiny stools of Kozahan, I dreamt of a different life.

That was the time Sultan Abdülaziz and his entourage made a royal visit to Egypt, and the first time I heard mention of Crown Prince Murat V. Word got around that the Crown Prince was more forward thinking than his uncle the Sultan. The men frequenting coffee and winehouses said Murat wanted to establish an Ottoman parliament and constitution, but such gossip spreads like bush fire in Constantinopolis, Anna dear, and at first I did not believe the rumours.

First we heard of the Crown Prince's politics, then we heard of his humility. Some said Murat V had greeted them at the Friday prayers and inquired after their health. Others began talking of Murat's poetry and musical abilities. Sheets of his orchestral notes started circulating in the music halls of the city. But it wasn't until the royal trip to Europe that his popularity peaked amongst those who wanted change in the Empire.

I wonder if you heard mention of this visit Anna, but perhaps you were too young at the time. For us in Constantinopolis, it was the biggest event of the year. People crowded at the shore to see the royal ship sail off towards Europe, and there they were again cheering and shouting upon its return. Apparently Crown Prince Murat did not only outshine his brothers Yusuf Izzettin and Abdülhamid, but also the Sultan himself in the course of this trip. The reason therefore was a speech he made about equal representation. During their sojourn in London, the Ottoman assembly were taken on a visit to the Parliament. On the evening of this visit, a cocktail party was held. Crown Prince Murat V is said to have shared his dreams of an Ottoman assembly with the local politicians there and then.

They say the declaration caused quite a stir in the English capital, with the newspapers printing a transcript of the conversation the following day. Perhaps there was a journalist disguised amongst the politicians, or perhaps the men themselves leaked the information to the press. In either case, Murat was quoted as saying the remedy for the decline of the Ottoman Empire lay in a parliament that would comprise of 32 nations. The

article was translated and printed covertly in Constantinopolis. The Sultan was vehemently opposed to changing the ways of the Empire. It seems he was so angry with his nephew that he decided to send him back to Ottoman territories mid trip. It was his vizier Fuad Paşa who convinced him otherwise, suggesting such a move might suggest jealousy on his part.

I was lucky enough to get a hold of the newspaper article in question, Miss Anna, for copies of it were quickly destroyed. The idea of a parliament excited me; I saw in it an opportunity for the Greeks to regain their lost status. I believed Phanariotes were the only political fraction that could pull such a project off the ground. My family's legacy began to excite me once again, and I grew curious about this Crown Prince who seemed brave and humble, modern and Turkish at once. Even though discussions of an assembly were not wide spread, and quickly shushed when they did take place, I began talking in the coffeehouses and theatres of the city, hopeful about the Empire once again.

My chatter was not for naught, Anna dear. In the summer of 1865, I received an unsigned envelope in the post. Its writer was inviting me to a picnic that would take place in the Forest of Belgrade, in the North East of Istanbul. You have understood by now, have you not, that I would never refuse the lure of nourishment? I quickly sensed there was more to this picnic than food, however. The request to attend was written by an educated, elegant hand in Ottoman and yet the author had chosen to stay anonymous. I was a little scared as I embarked on a horse drawn carriage the next day. Our city had been filled with spies since time immemorial; I might be arrested for treason against the Sultan, or perhaps worse. Afterall, there were many places to bury a corpse in a forest. But I also knew the invitation may have come from a like-minded man. A man who needed to remain nameless to protect himself from the selfsame spies I feared. And so I clung to my cross as we left the city behind, and as the smell of pine filled the air. Once I found the wayward fountain

that was designated as the meeting place, I was greeted not by one, but several men. Not one amongst them a Phanariot.

Would you like me to tell you of my companions, Miss Anna, or would you rather meet them yourself in Constantinopolis? No, let me not get into details even if you persist, I am certain Perihan Hatun is making preparations for you to meet them all as we speak. Suffice it to say, the men I met in the forest all desired a change in governance, albeit not always for the same reasons. Our will for equal representation united us, as did the food brought along in baskets: *börek* with potatoes, spinach and feta, *kısır*, *mercimek köftesi*, and the *sucuk* we barbecued. We set our differences aside for the sake of our common goals, and created a secret society that would be known as the Young Ottomans.

Each and every one of us was against the rule of Sultan Abdülaziz, and each and every one of us wanted his nephew Crown Prince Murat V to replace him on the throne. We had deemed the Crown Prince key because he was the only member of the royal family who had made his desire for a parliament apparent. He connected us all, even if for the longest time he did not know of our existence.

But maybe, Annoula, can I call you that? We Greeks find it difficult to speak without endearment! Maybe, Annoula, all this, the Constantiopolis I have been recounting to you, the one that was idealistic and on the verge of change, was only a dream. I am too far away, too long apart, too nostalgic perhaps. You must go there yourself as you plan to do, and tell me what you see, and then please come back and prove me right or wrong.”

A Second Dinner at Mr Cleanthi's

YOĞURT ÇORBASI – YOGHURT SOUP

Ingredients

100 gr butter (about 6.5 soup spoons)

25 gr flour (3 soup spoons)

1 litre broth (chicken or meat, makes about 4 water glasses)

300 gr yoghurt (Mr Cleanthi tells me the yoghurt here is very thick, so that in England more yoghurt might be needed)

Salt

1 teaspoon of dried mint

Directions

1. Put the butter in a pan and let it melt. Add flour and mix until you have an even consistency.
2. Place the yoghurt in a cup, and mix it with a little broth. When the mix of flour and butter in the pan gets a darker colour, add the yoghurt mix slowly and stir. Pour the rest of the broth and keep stirring. Add salt to taste.
3. Serve the soup with dried mint on top.

My next meeting with Mr Cleanthi took place at his house which was located in the district of Psyri, a ten minute carriage ride from my lodgings. I spotted him at the entrance of his apartment, smoking a thin, wilted cigarette. He stubbed it out under his foot once he saw me approach, and helped me out of my coach.

We went up a narrow wooden staircase. From each window a dash of sunlight streamed in and lit the landing before us as Mr Cleanthi made small talk about the roads in Athens. I noticed his movements were slow and caring when he unlocked the door, like he

was petting a sick animal. Once inside, each step we took made the floors creak. They were of mahogany, the type in which you can see many shapes and figures.

Mr Cleanthi was in a very good mood during this second meeting. He was relieved I had not departed for Constantinopolis immediately:

“I realize my tale is a complicated one. It needs a certain amount of resilience and finesse to be understood. By turning up today you have proven that you possess both qualities, Annoula. And to celebrate your listening ears, I have prepared several dishes!”

And indeed, the apartment was filled with mouth watering, yet unfamiliar aromas. Mr Cleanthi led me to the kitchen, and lifted up the lid of each pot. At first the experiment was good fun, but then caused me to sneeze. “*Garifalo* and *sumaki*,” Mr Cleanthi mouthed, teaching me the name of spices in Greek, “these two can make or break a dish.” He told me experimenting with the flavours of the 16th century was a hobby of his.

“Sometimes I listen to church music in the process. It sounds bleak doesn't it Annoula? The pastimes of a man with nothing better to do. But just wait till you taste the food, it goes so well with the music! The Orthodox intervallic structures, the *makams*, Turkish classical music, the *piznonim* repertoire, they are all the same thing. This reminds me, music was the one topic we disagreed about with the Crown Prince. He preferred Western classical music and played the piano expertly, must still be playing the piano expertly alas, despite my love for him, I am more partial to Eastern melodies. Some evenings I sing whatever I can remember from my youth. The Muezzin of Kasturya, Cantor Moşe Cordova, the melodies I memorized from St Georges', they keep me company now. I live the life of a refugee. Don't be surprised if I take up opium soon!”

Mr Cleanthi's flat had a magnificent balcony facing the West where we enjoyed a glass of *metaxa*, which he told me was a mix of muscat wines, rose petals, and Mediterranean herbs the exact ratio of which was kept a secret. To me the balconies in Athens are one of the most pleasant features of the city. Strangely, as if all Athenians had

decided together, they are filled with dusty looking desert plants. Mr Cleanthi's had two chairs comforted with cushions and a table on which there was a velvety, purple violet. I touched its leaves. Mr Cleanthi told me he had brought it along from his house in Constantinopolis. "It travelled in my suitcase. One case is all I could take away with me. Look, 45 years of a life and what do I have to show for it? A purple flower!" But I would soon find out the plant had not been his only companion on the escape to Athens.

"Annoula, you may not believe me but sometimes I think I can smell Constantinopolis from here. Maybe it is something to do with the winds. Inhale now and tell me later if I am making any sense. The heat is similiar too – I guess I am fortunate to be an exile in Athens rather than somewhere else. England, say. I could truly forget myself in England, get myself a fresh start I imagine. But that kind of re-invention is impossible here, this city constantly reminds me of the other.

I remember it like it was yesterday; the night I met the Crown Prince was exactly like this one. Balmy, the *meltem* blowing in from the sea. I was wearing the same knitted sweater you see on me now; it was old and worn even then. I pay attention to my attire Miss Anna, but only at day time. There is something about the night that allows for secrets, for comfort, wouldn't you agree? I guess I used to lead two lives in Constantinopolis. One was of the day, the life of a merchant, a mason, a person of a certain social standing. And then another one at night, the life of a man who did not have to impress others, a man no one would recall, a man who became one with the crowds. When I went to the theatre in those days, I wore old clothes. Hardly anyone noticed me in those unsophisticated garments. On my way to Sakizlian's establishment that September evening, I had absolutely no premonition that I would be meeting the hope of the nation in such bad attire.

For wholly other reasons, the Crown Prince was clad in less than glamorous clothes himself: a simple coat buttoned up to the chin, leather boots and a red fez. He looked like

any other man in the theatre, though he did seem a little uncertain on his feet. I assumed it was his first time in the venue. The seats filled up quickly and he ended up sitting next to me in the back row. I noticed he wore an expensive cologne incongruous with his clothes, and then I saw his hands. They were white, soft and well groomed. He carried a ring that bore the imperial stamp. Either this man is a thief, I thought to myself, or someone much more important than he is letting on.

He was not very handsome, Annoula, no, you wouldn't believe me even if I said so. You must have seen pictures of him yourself. The *prince impérial* possessed a nose smaller than fit for his station. He had inset, drooping eyes and a moustache too thin to be trustworthy. His appearance did not betray his noble status, or the fact that he could decree death with a word. The lines on his face made him look like a man used to smiling and keeping secrets instead – a man akin a high school teacher, or the tailor next door.

He pointed at two perfectly round stains by the stage and asked me if I might know what they were. That is how I entered a new stage in my life, Annoula, because the Crown Prince was as curious as he was approachable. “Those are from Mr Souillier,” I replied. I happened to know, since I too am an inquisitive soul, that the theatre had been a circus a while back, owned by a French acrobat by the name of Louis Souillier. Sultan Mahmud II had invited Mr Souillier to Constantinopolis and this building had been made to house his entourage. The two circles Crown Prince Murat had pointed out were remnants from the pool of the dolphins. I explained all this to the prince in disguise. Looking back at my elucidations now, I feel mortified Annoula. The Crown Prince would have known the imperial connections of Mr Souillier much better than I. But I had wanted to appear natural, and to pretend that he was just an ordinary man.

After the performance the Crown Prince invited me for a coffee. It seems my tactics of nonchalance had worked. When he did not know where to go, I discreetly guided him to the nearest coffeehouse in sight, all the while conversing with him about the

performance we had just seen, which was an adaptation of Molière's *The Miser*. After our first bitter cup, we went to another coffeehouse. Crown Princes do not get many chances to leave the palaces incognito, Annoula, and once outside the royal gates Murat was keen to see as much of the city as he could. We went from Pera, to Beyoğlu, and onto Cihangir. The Crown Prince told me of the plays he must have seen at the imperial stages, and I reciprocated with anecdotes from the dramas, comedies, operettas and vaudevilles put on in living rooms, backyards and dingy playhouses all around Constantinopolis. I was careful not to question the Crown Prince about his occupation, his family or his neighbourhood; I didn't make any remarks that could give his identity away. We strolled through night-time Constantinopolis like old friends. It was only two months later, when we had become testers in backgammon, that he told me of his true identity and I admitted to having guessed it from the start. He was not offended, only thankful for my discretion.

I told the Young Ottomans of my meeting with the Crown Prince. In my own way, I became an interpreter between the state and the people, Annoula, the way my ancestors had been. But as talkative as the Crown Prince Murat was, he was also fearful. Each time we discussed the politics of the Empire, he made a point of defending his uncle Sultan Abdülaziz. The Sultan's anger regarding his declarations in England must have put him on guard. I waited patiently for the time he would share his heartfelt opinions with me. In the meanwhile, in the theatres the Crown Prince and I frequented across Constantinopolis, we began coming across familiar faces; my fellow Young Ottomans. They too began to greet the Sultan as if he was an ordinary man, and they too never gave away what they knew. We had decided to wait for the right time to disclose our support for the *prince impérial*, we would wait patiently till he grew into the role destined for him."

Mr Cleanthi and I were brought back to our surroundings by a small, insistent cough. A young boy – maybe twelve, at most fourteen years of age – had approached the dinner

table. He had a blanket over his shoulders and gave me a wide-eyed, bashful smile before sitting down with us to eat. Both Mr Cleanthi and I lost the thread of the conversation. That night, I learned the violet on the table was not the most valuable keepsake in this house; there was also this little boy named Mutlu who had travelled to Athens with my host.

Mr Cleanthi had light features, almost like a Northern European man, whilst the boy had an olive complexion, with thick eyebrows, and nervous lips. I saw no resemblance between the two, but their long time affection for each other was clear from their gestures. As Mr Cleanthi began talking about less mundane matters – had I visited the little church on the philosopher’s hill, would it not be a good idea to rest in Thessaloniki on my way to Constantinopolis – he handed Mutlu pills, which the boy swallowed with a bit of water. I thought they were far too many for a body as tiny as his, but it was not my place to offer advice unless it was sought.

A Third Dinner of *Imam Bayıldı*

IMAM BAYILDI – THE IMAM FAINTED

Ingredients

6 eggplants

3 onions (medium size)

2 cloves of garlic

3 tomatoes (medium size)

1 glass of olive oil

Some parsley

Pepper and salt

Directions

1. Cut the eggplants from the middle so that they are sliced open, but leave their ends untouched.
2. Heat some olive oil in a pan and put the eggplants in. Turn them several times so that they soften slightly, then take them out of the pan.
3. Slice the onions and fry them in the same oil. Add the garlic a bit later.
4. Fill the eggplants with the mixture of the onion and garlic. Add the chopped parsley. Sprinkle salt and pepper to taste. Slice the tomatoes and spread them on the eggplants.
5. Place the filled eggplants in a pan, and pour some boiling water in. Cook until soft.

This meal has to be eaten cold.

“Nobody is just one person, Annoula. I was a Phanariot, a Young Ottoman, a merchant, a Greek Orthodox, and in the year 1870 I also became the master of *I Proodos*. At the beginning, this was a secret between me and 64 other members. Even today, there are not a lot of people who know of my association with the freemasons of Constantinopolis.

The first Masonic Lodges in the Ottoman Empire were opened in port cities, in the Turkish-Greek triangle: Thessaloniki, Symirni and Constantinopolis. There is something romantic about the idea, no? Like the houses came to us from the sea. But they were planted in these areas strategically; the three cities were the ones from which Ottoman politics were directed. The world is a lot less poetic than we wish for, Annoula. The Lodges in the Empire belonged to the French and English lineages, the Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Orient de France. This made the Ottomans suspicious as to their inner workings. Justly so perhaps, as the two countries kept meddling with the internal affairs of the Empire. To make matters worse, most halls only accepted non-Muslims and foreigners as members. It was inevitable that the rumours began to circulate.

My dear friend Louis Amiable and I decided to remedy the problem. We wanted an Ottoman Lodge, an establishment linked to France's tradition but independent from its politics. We imagined a house that would operate in Turkish and Greek, and one that would accept Muslims within its midst. A local institution with connections to the world, rather than a global institution with local branches. In theory, the freemasons should not be opposed to the idea, Louis and I thought. *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* was engraved within the French symbols themselves. The Brotherhood was growing in popularity exactly because it was one above nations and religions. Still, despite the theoretical possibilities, nobody had wished to utilize Masonic rituals in native languages before.

We forwarded our proposal to the Grand Orient de France, and consistent with their principles, the masters there were nothing but enthusiastic about our plans. On 28 March 1868, *I Proodos*, or Progress, was established. Our members were Muslims as well as Christians and Jews. They were Turks, Armenians, Greeks and Levantines: 65 of us in total.

By this time, Annoula, I was in the habit of taking long walks with the Crown Prince. On one such evening, I happened to mention *I Proodos* to him. There was no

hidden agenda in my words; I touched upon the topic rather spontaneously. I had recently discovered an interesting article that studied the Sufi origins of freemason collectives, and in my enthusiasm, wanted to share the information with the *prince impérial*. The French and the English – the Europeans in general – believe freemasonry was their creation but they are terribly wrong. Its beginnings can be traced back to the East, and to Islam. Let me explain. As early as prophet Mohammed's death, the Muslims divided into sects. The Shia believed in the coming of a redeemer, a messiah if you wish, and formed a secret mystical cult, complete with its rituals and a grand master. During the time of the Moors these Shias settled in Corsica, occupied Carthage and Tripoli. In 1271, Prince Edward of England went to the shores of North Africa to join the crusaders, and there he met with the chieftains of Moors. Upon his return to England he established a secretive society of men that first spread to Scotland, and then to France, the Lowlands, Austria, Prussia and Italy. In other words, the Brotherhood of Freemasons would never have existed had it not been for a Shia faction in Islam.

Crown Prince Murat was intrigued by the history I offered him. He wanted to learn more about the philosophy of freemasonry. His inquiries ranged from the nature of our emblems, to our degrees, orders and organizational structure. Then, as the weather turned cold and windy in 1872, Murat sent word to my friend Louis that he wanted to join *I Proodos*.

This was a highly risky undertaking, Annoula. Everybody knew Sultan Abdülaziz was a jealous man. Matters of Ottoman lineage are complicated but the gist of the matter was simple; Sultan Abdülaziz did not want to leave the throne to his nephew. Crown Prince Murat's father, Sultan Abdülmecid, had died unexpectedly and left the throne to his brother Abdülaziz. In his turn, once Sultan Abdülaziz would cease to rule, his nephew Crown Prince Murat would have become the legitimate heir to the throne. Instead, Sultan Abdülaziz wanted to leave the Empire to his own son. Any mention that Murat might be a

better fit infuriated him. Added to this was Murat's support of parliamentarianism, which as I have mentioned, had come to the fore in the royal visit to Europe. As a result, most European nations supported Murat's ascendancy too, which angered Sultan Abdülaziz further.

You see, if it ever became public that the Crown Prince had joined the ranks of our Masonic Lodge, it would have caused a big scandal and played into Sultan Abdülaziz's hands. Even if we operated in Greek and Turkish, even if we accepted Muslim initiates, and despite the Islamic beginnings of the Brotherhood, many still considered us a dangerous cult. The Sultan would have found the perfect excuse in *I Proodos* to refuse his nephew's claims to the throne. So we had to keep Murat's initiation secret, even if only to protect his reputation.

As a result, the Crown Prince's ordination took place at the house of Louis Amiable in the neighbourhood of Kadıköy, on the 20th of October 1872. Prior to the meeting, we had turned one room of the residence into a masonic hall. There were eleven of us present on the day, eleven secret keepers. I was the one to officiate Murat's welcoming. It was my most joyous post in the Lodge, Annoula. I was not only legitimizing a great friendship, putting it down on paper so to say, I was also adding a potential Sultan amongst the members of *I Proodos*.

But our success did not stop there. A year and a month later, the eleven of us met once again. This time we were welcoming Crown Prince Murat V's brother Nurettin to the lodge at our headquarters in Beyoğlu. By then, Murat himself had risen to the 18th degree. His sense of justice, and passionate curiosity had enabled him to progress on the path faster than anyone I knew."

A Fourth Dinner of *Lahanondolmates*

LAHANONDOLMATES – STUFFED CABBAGE LEAVES

Ingredients

1 medium sized cabbage

500 gr minced meat

2 onions (medium sized)

Small bunch of parsley

½ glass rice

2 glasses of broth

Salt and pepper

Directions

1. Peel cabbage leaves and boil in salted water for 5 minutes. The leaves must be soaked but still quite firm.
2. Chop the onions and parsley. Add rice, salt and pepper to the minced meat, and then the mixture of onions and parsley.
3. Spread the blend on each cabbage leaf, and fold the leaf to form a small rectangular “package.”
4. Place each cabbage fold next to each other in a pan. Pour the broth, and place over medium fire until cooked.

My third dinner with Mr Cleanthi had resulted in confusion. Prior to his explanations, I had not known much about the Brotherhood of Freemasons. My rational mind found the idea of arcane cults suspicious, as well as unnecessary. But just as a good storyteller should not be deterred by the reaction of his listeners, I thought a good journalist should transcribe whatever the source revealed, regardless of her own opinions. Besides, it could not be

denied, a part of me was intrigued by this history that united English Kings, Moorish chieftains and Ottoman Sultans. I could see how such a mixture would suit Mr Cleanthi's eclectic politics. I was hoping to hear more of *I Prodoos*'s inner workings during our next dinner, but Mr Cleanthi chose to reveal another part of his secret past.

"Each Young Ottoman supported Crown Prince Murat in his own unique way, Annoula. My Brother and friend Arif, for instance, was a poet, journalist and playwright. He wanted to write and direct plays that would instil hope in the people, a hope which would encourage them to look for alternatives to the dire political circumstances. A search which would eventually lead to our *prince impérial*.

You see, most of the population in Constantinople was poor and finding it hard to stay afloat. As the Ottomans began to lose territory in the Balkans, refugees from those lands streamed into Constantinople, hungry and homeless. Unemployment increased and food stocks were low, the streets were filled with thieves. Fighting good battles, suppressing uprisings, winning wars: none of these were viable options for the Empire any more. The methods that used to work beforehand were no longer reaping results. Where one uprising against the Empire was quenched, another sprang up like weed. Sultan Abdülaziz was not addressing the underlying issue. In the Balkans, and in all lands where the people were rising against the Ottoman rulers, there was a desire for self-determination. The problem could only be solved by the will of the people, the Young Ottomans thought, and a parliament which would represent that will.

My friend Arif wanted to facilitate these discussions through literature and the theatre. He had been at work with Armenian actors to produce a play. At the time the Turks did not have theatre companies, Annoula, and the Greeks catered only to fellow Greeks. So Arif chose to work with an Armenian company, the same one where I had met the Crown Prince for the first time. The trouble was, as capable as the Armenian actors

were, their Turkish was heavily accented. Before he could make Armenian performers take on the role of Turks, Arif had to teach them proper enunciation. To this end he established a literary committee.

In 1869, the playhouse in question had gained a monopoly from the Porte, and become the only theatre in Constantinopolis that could perform in Turkish. Who knows why the government chose that particular business for endorsement. In any case, they must have decided a monopoly would be the easiest way to monitor the content of Turkish plays. Fortunately for us, the Porte's idea backfired. The owner of the theatre, an elegant Armenian called Sakizlian, was sympathetic to the Young Ottoman cause for equal representation. And not only that. He was an intellectual who wanted to open girl's schools in Constantinopolis and desired the rule of a progressive Sultan who would authorize such an endeavor. Sakizlian told Arif that they could use his theatre to enhance Crown Prince Murat V's popularity, and so he did.

Arif's play was staged on the 1st of April 1873. It was not a flawless production, Annoula, not by any means. It replicated the French plays of *drame historique* in style, and many of its scenes were unrealistic in my opinion. Nevertheless, the effect it had on the spectators was unforeseen.

The audience was enthusiastic even before the play began. Arif had not expected such a big turn out. I intuit that a mysterious, playful singer had something to do with that... Annoula, during your stay in Constantinopolis, you must make an opportunity to listen to Kibar Efendi, then you will see what all the fuss was about that evening. At the time Kibar sang as an introductory entertainer at the theatre. He was a virtuoso with a wide vocal range, and an ability to combine the Kurdish style with the Greek-Turkish. Kibar was also a man with Young Ottoman sympathies. He must have let everyone know that a spectacle would be occurring at Sakizlian's theatre. His devoted listeners turned up in dozens, and Hagop – the manager – had to scramble around for extra chairs.

Crown Prince Murat V and I were in the audience that night. We watched the *drame historique*. It was about the war in Bulgaria and did not have much to do with either the Young Ottomans or Murat on the surface. I was entertained to hear all the Armenians act out chivalric Turks, but had no clue how Arif would tie any of it to our wish for a parliament. The answer arrived at the end of the show which finished with a play on words. “Murat,” is a noun, as well as a private name in Turkish; it means hope, Annoula. The last sentence of the performance was, “*Muradımızı isteriz!*” or, “We want our Murat!” When the crowd heard those last words spoken, they began repeating and then chanting them out loud. At first I could not believe my ears. But those last words had taken the audience by storm; the people were calling out for a new Sultan.

Thankfully Murat was dressed in civilian clothes and I was able to get him out of the premises swiftly. How the crowd would have rejoiced to know their future Sultan was sitting amongst them! A part of me wanted to go on stage and introduce him to the people myself, but the dangers in such an undertaking were too grave – Murat could have been hurt in the chaos that ensued – so I stayed calm and guided him to my apartment in Pera, stealthily, via the backstreets.

Once inside, I could see the Crown Prince was deeply affected by the events of the night. His cheeks were flushed and his hands trembled as he took off his coat. No amount of pleading or intellectual discussion could have convinced him of what he told me next: ‘I always thought I would be laying claim to an Empire that wasn’t mine,’ he began, ‘I never imagined the people would support me.’ I offered him a glass of cold water to steady his nerves. I, myself, had two. It was a relief no one had recognized us, a relief too that no one had been arrested yet. I was wondering whether anyone might have followed us home, when Murat told me he was now ready to rise to the throne.

I will always be grateful to my friend Arif for enabling Murat to reach this conclusion, Annoula. The *prince impérial* was a gentle man prone to guilt. Lacking, if

anything, in a sense of entitlement. That one sentence was all the catalyst I needed. The next day, the Young Ottomans and I made a plan to cement Murat's newfound resolve.

We would need help. Amidst so many spies, so much doubt and fear in the capital, we required someone beyond suspicion to implement our scheme. The people wanted change but nothing would come about without an uprising, and such an undertaking would not be possible without a go-between delivering messages from house to house. Our choices were limited. We would have to come up with a woman, an old man or a boy. My friend, and fellow Young Ottoman the Dervish had an idea.

While Arif and I shared a love for theatre, my closest comrade amongst the Young Ottomans was a Muslim preacher and teacher with whom I had nothing in common. The Dervish lectured at mosques and a *medrese* in Sultanahmet, he came from the backlands and was not fond of entertainment whether it be in the form of music, food or theatre. But I liked something in him beyond these practicalities. In all the years of our cooperation, I never saw him judge, or talk behind someone's back. He listened to each idea, even if it was half-formed or pretentious, as if it might hold the secrets of the universe. The Dervish was an open-minded man, and because he also had a good heart, it was easy to trust him.

My friend the Dervish never forgot where he came from. Every year he brought a boy from his native village to Constantinopolis for purposes of education. The conditions in Turkish villages of our time are dire, Annoula, with half the population off at war and the women having to make ends meet. I had met some such boys over the years. Mostly they were innocent creatures, with a look of the land about them. They seemed more comfortable amongst animals than amongst men. And indeed some of them chose to sleep at the stables in the *medrese*, rather than with the city boys in the dorm rooms.

At first the Dervish opposed the idea of a go-between, but then he remembered a young boy without a future. He told me the midwife had announced death on the day the child was born, saying he had an irreversible disease, that she would be surprised if he

survived the first five years. But the boy had survived from the love of villagers. Apparently many things were difficult for him. Running was difficult, jumping was impossible; he was hardly involved in any boyhood games but he matured, with his mind showing no shortcomings at all. Even though no one told him of the midwives' predictions, he must have understood the body he carried was beyond healing. He had turned to religion as solace. The Dervish remembered him memorizing the Qur'an, falling asleep on the carpets of the village mosque, comforted in the repetitions ritual provided. 'Maybe the boy would like to see Istanbul,' the Dervish said, 'before his time comes to an end. He has grown up, but they tell me he is weak. I could take care of him here, and the truth is no one would suspect an ailing boy from Anatolia.' That is how we made our decision Annoula, from a strange mix of circumstances, necessity and good will. We chose Mutlu as the one who would facilitate an uprising, a dethronement, and he came to us unsuspecting. His only goal and hope was to advance in his studies in the *medrese*. He thought he had been chosen to study in Constantinopolis due to his piety. Neither the Dervish nor I ever thought any harm would come to him – even though the potential was there and the risks were inevitable."

Guilt darkened Mr Cleanthi's face. He looked towards the back room where the little boy Mutlu slept. I had not foreseen this disclosure and got drenched in a cold sweat. Mutlu was too young to be involved in such political matters. He must have been completely unaware of how he had been manipulated by Mr Cleanthi and the Dervish. I feared to ask my host what being a go-between had entailed. Had the boy carried letters? What would have happened had those letters been discovered? Had the strain of the task accelerated his illness? As if he had heard my silent reprimand, Mr Cleanthi did not meet my gaze until his account for the night was complete.

“Please believe me when I say that I grew fonder of Mutlu than I ever did of anyone else, Annoula. To him everything in Constantinopolis was new and different, and wonderful too, for the same reasons. He never complained or voiced opinions. The boy seemed a little scared of me at first. I imagine he had not met anyone like me before – a man dressed in King’s clothes at day, and a poor man’s at night, fond of the French language and vivacious laughter. I tried to be exceedingly nice. I told him stories and never left a moment of silence that may cause discomfort. Maybe I should have guessed he would be fond of silence, the way villagers are. The silence of a warm night indoors as snow piles up outside the windows. Silence so complete you can hear the soft paws of a cat moving through it. The boy liked simplicity, and he showed me that I had a longing for such things too.

I introduced Mutlu to theatre, Annoula, and after the performances I often took him to my house in Pera. The apartment you see tonight pales in comparison. My old abode was filled with grandeur, with high, ornamented ceilings, and silk carpets. You would have to take your pick from the five different seating arrangements. Into that house Mutlu came, and I poisoned him with my riches; that is the long and the short of it. By the fireplace I told him of poetry and philosophy, the architecture of Italy and memory techniques that must have confused his young mind. Looking back at it now, I see how foolish and unnecessary this new education was. I had wanted to present him with a whole new world, a better world than the one he was used to, when in fact it was I who needed him. Maybe I can be excused for my behaviour somewhat, Anna dear. There was a mystical quality about Mutlu, like no evil would ever touch him, and there were some strange coincidences that had solidified our decision.

You see, on the first day we had met, the boy had told me something unexpected. We were at a coffeehouse – the Dervish, Mutlu and I – and upon seeing my pill box on which a picture of Crown Prince Murat V was engraved, Mutlu commented that he had

seen the very same man in a dream! It was too random to be a coincidence Anna. How do you explain dreaming of a man you never met but who actually exists? I took it as a sign that Mutlu was destined for the job we were preparing him for.

To keep him safe, I taught Mutlu the art of memory. We drew buildings he knew by heart – the coffeehouse from his old village, the *medrese* where he now studied – and then put imaginary objects inside those worn out rooms. I showed him how to remember spatially, the way Simonides had done in sixth century BC. This way, if he was ever caught by the spies, there would be no proof of his guilt. No letters they could threaten him with, all the secret information would be in his head. When the time came I made Mutlu memorize seven special dwellings on a map, and he began delivering messages to and fro, from one Young Ottoman house to the other. The Dervish and I had been right; no one suspected him. He didn't suspect anything himself. Mutlu just thought he was being of service to his Dervish, and to me, the way he was of service when he memorized a *surah* or quoted from a master while studying.

One of the houses he committed to memory was the Biggest Library of Istanbul. That is where you are going Annoula, that is where Perihan Hatun lives. Did you know the woman you are planning to meet is a Young Ottoman, as well as an activist for women? It is good to be more than one thing. Perihan Hatun helped Crown Prince Murat V too, in her own unique way.”

A Last Dinner on the Beloved Balcony

RIZAGALO ME MASTIHA, SIKA KE ZAHARI – RICE PUDDING WITH MASTIC, FIGS AND WALNUTS

Ingredients

150 gr rice (10 soup spoons)

1 litre milk

5 pieces of mastic

1 ½ glass sugar

5 figs (if there are no figs, any other fresh fruit will do)

10 pieces of walnuts

Directions

1. Boil 1 liter of water in a pan and pour the rice in. Cook until the rice has absorbed all the water.
2. Add 1 liter of milk, 5 pieces of mastic, and 1 ½ glass of sugar to the rice. Put all this on very low heat for about half an hour.
3. Now take some serving cups, or glasses, and sprinkle sugar at the bottom. Cut the figs into small pieces, add the walnuts, and put into the cups. Then pour the rice pudding over the mixture.

I thought a lot about how to finish this strange transcript of mine, Rebecca. You must have found it a roller coaster, especially without the benefit of an Athenian balcony that opens to the world. Constantinopolis must feel even further away from you, drenched in the unceasing English rain, than it does from me. I am embedded in the Mediterranean now, in bright whites and radiant blues, already smelling Istanbul's seaward scents and tasting its spices. At least this is what Mr Cleanthi has been telling me. "Athens is half Constantinopolis," he said last night, looking both happy and sad. I could not have asked

for a better introduction to the *polis*, or for a kinder host in the interim even if he is one plagued with regrets, and a homesickness I cannot quite fathom.

I checked out of my bed and breakfast after the third dinner with Mr Cleanthi. He needed the talents of a nurse, and invited me to stay at his lodgings. The little boy, Mutlu, is really very ill. He is slowly drained of all hue and colour, yet his eyes remain compassionate even when they are filled with resignation.

Mr Cleanthi's request, and the idea that I could donate the hotel costs to the library we will build with Perihan Hatun, made me accept the offer to stay at his house. I was given a room facing the East. One of its walls was filled with postcards of Constantinopolis, "from the flea markets of Monastiraki," he explained, and another with small pots in which Turkish coffee is made, "*ibrikis*" he called them. He told me he had instructed a friend to inform him whenever an object from his city arrived at the Athenian bazaars. I have almost made up my mind, dear Rebecca, to stop at Mr Cleanthi's on my way back to England, with a suitcase packed full of trinkets.

Mutlu answered my medical questions calmly. He let me press his stomach and listen to his chest, even gave me a smile of encouragement but his pain was unmistakable. The boy's illness was something I had not encountered before, a degeneration of the limbs that appeared to be getting worse. It was hard to believe he was the same person who had walked the city carrying messages, and not only that. Mr Cleanthi told me Mutlu had kept watch over Sultan Abdülaziz during his last days. How this came about, I did not inquire. But Mr Cleanthi assured me it had been against his will and the plotting of a man named Hüseyin Avni Paşa. It seems the boy might have witnessed the sovereign's death, Rebecca. It is likely he is the only one who knows whether it was of murder or suicide. Apparently he never told Mr Cleanthi, and Mr Cleanthi never asked. I am wondering if other people have been witness, and whether the truth will be revealed to me in Constantinopolis.

There was not much I could do to help Mutlu, just as there is not much I can do to embellish Mr Cleanthi's story after this point. We don't know yet what the correct ending to this transcript is. It seems Crown Prince Murat V is currently imprisoned at a palace by the waters. Mr Cleanthi wants the help of England and France to reinstate him to the throne, he wants us to forward his words to as many people as possible. The politics of the region change so fast, and with the involvement of our governments, anything is possible.

By way of goodbye, I enclose a letter Mr Cleanthi has written to Murat V; he has kept copies of all their correspondence. He shared this last communication with me as he made his favourite desert, *sütlaç* with mastic. He says it tastes of his childhood, which I conclude, has a calm and earthy residue.

"My dear friend Murat,

I am doubtful whether the letters I write reach you in that cursed palace on the Bosphorus. I do not know if they allow a "mad" man to have contact with the outside world. I am unsure whether you still have the courage to read my words, my dear brother, or whether you have grown tired of my name. Perhaps you are weary of my handwriting, and of the memories of our conversations and plans. In this city that so eerily resembles our own, I have very little certainty.

On the 23rd of October I received your kind letter. The paper has already thinned from frequent reading, and I have framed it so as to preserve your words from the passage of time. Protected by a film of glass, it affords me regular perusal. You say you have overcome the melancholy, my friend, and that you are well. I am so relieved to hear it. You include musical notes to which I must add the baselines. Once the composition is complete I will publish them, and distribute the profit amongst the refugees as per your instructions.

You ask for more letters, you call me your dear and faithful friend. My Sultan, if you only knew how tirelessly I have penned letters to you...

There have been many attempts to save you, this much I want to convey, but despite my passion, they have all failed. The only remedy that remains is to tell the truth to the world. I am writing a book for the great powers, explaining what has come to transpire in the last year, demanding that they take you out of your imprisonment, and put you back on the throne. I send letters to your doctor Capolloene inquiring after your health. I testify at the mock courts in Athens, always and tirelessly, defending you and everything the Young Ottomans stood for. Few listen to me, my dear friend Murat, and amongst those who listen, even fewer understand. I feel like a man who has become illiterate overnight. The language I used to commune in, is suddenly only intelligible to me. A language you would no doubt continue to speak, had I been in your presence.

Friendships like ours come about but rarely. I recall the first time we met, do you remember? It was at Sakizlian's theatre. You had dressed in ordinary clothes but had neglected the royal ring on your finger. I told you the story of the building that had once been a circus. Our conversation was so pleasant, the mutual appreciation so clear, we continued in a coffeehouse. Later that same evening, I saw you cry upon seeing the rotten foot of a soldier back from the Bulgarian front. Before the clock stroke midnight you had rushed off to the palace, like an enchanted being from a fairy tale. I was dumbfounded to have met a Crown Prince as humble as you, and a man so good hearted.

I believe, stubbornly perhaps, and even naively, that this may not be the end for us. Your brother Sultan Abdülhamid II might be more generous than we give him credit for. Any day now, you might be freed and able to rule once again, for surely Abdülhamid II must see he is even less fit to the throne than your uncle Sultan Abdülaziz was. Stubbornly perhaps, and naively, but how else can a man of my disposition act? I long for a game of backgammon with you, in any house, in any city, but most of all in our own.

I have a suitcase with me here. In it I have put, in my haste and indecision, haphazard objects as I was fleeing Constantinopolis. What mementos does one take from a homeland he will never see again? Every item seems deficient. So here I have a violet, and the backgammon board on which we played many games. I have my father's watch – gold and inlaid with tiny diamonds, worthy of a true Phanariot – and the keys to my house in Pera. These articles construct my clumsy bridge back home.

We are, both of us, worlds away from what we dreamed of, but in this state too, my Sultan Murat, I am your loyal servant and companion.

Alexandros Cleanthi”

2

Perihan

For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.
Virginia Woolf

Perihan Hatun
The Biggest Library of Istanbul
Iskele Yarı, Tavuk Uçmaz Çıkmazı,
Kuzguncuk
Konstantiniye

The Publishers David and Samuel Nahmias Brothers,
Sultan Hamamı Caddesi, Numara 8,
Eminönü
Konstantiniye

1 Zilhicce 1293

To the Brothers David and Samuel Nahmias,

On a cold November day in 1860, our humble house on the Bosphorus received a parcel by way of sea. I was only a little girl at the time, but remember my father untying string and unfolding paper in the morning mist, and his jubilation upon discovering the books that lay inside. Even though I do not recall the title of those volumes, or their exact content, I have reason to believe the package we received that winter day contained the first volumes of your Encyclopaedia of Istanbul.

The booksellers of the city say your encyclopaedia has been out of print for a very long time, that no known copies of it survive, that its author is unknown, and its publisher forgotten. And yet, by a series of coincidences, not only have the books ended up in my library, but I have also stumbled upon your identity in the middle of volume six. At the bottom of page 260, underneath the article on Hadrian's waterways, I found an unexpected address belonging to the publishers.

It was the timorous manner in which you had disclosed your whereabouts that gave me the courage to contact you, dear brothers, and that now gives me hope that you may make time to read my words. I pray you do reside in this address, and I pray your printing

house is still in business – though there is a possibility you are now departed on to the next world in which case I would prefer not to know the truth of the matter.

For the duration of this year, I was busy remedying what I have come to understand as a crucial gap within your encyclopaedia. Even though the volumes are rumoured to contain all that is significant in Istanbul, they were short of one important entry. Within this envelope you will find a thin bundle. It contains, simply, and in as few words as possible, my contribution to your momentous work. If I have managed to kindle the embers of your curiosity, please also read the longer document I enclose; it tells you of how I came to write this missing article. You will discover my story is told in a series of letters addressed to my long lost friend Kalliopi. She too was fascinated by your magnum opus, but I doubt she would have an interest in contemplating my words now.

Dear brothers, perhaps it is not my place to say this alas; as full as your encyclopaedia is, it does not have one but several missing articles. You say little about the daily rituals of women: diaries kept patiently for years, how intervallic structures can uplift a mood, the order in which *imam bayıldı* must be baked, how best to foster a marriage and preserve a self. Hence, you may find the letters in your hands serve a historical purpose too, that they may be of help in correcting some significant oversights through a female perspective.

Whichever package you open or discard, I thank you for publishing the books that induced my childhood dreams. I have come to believe, alongside Kalliopi, that your encyclopaedia is indeed perfect. Not because it is full, as my friend claimed, but because it has space to grow grander yet. For the sake of love, I have filled one absence, and out of respect I let the others rest.

Yours Humbly,

Perihan Hatun

Kalliopi mou,

I have not done much else than sit by our frost covered windows since Sultan Abdülaziz's death. It is winter time, in more ways than one, and the glass clouds over with my sleeping breath at nights. Towards noon, the grey blue of the Bosphorus becomes visible, but other than the changing seasons outside my window, there is not much to mark the passage of time.

I am writing to you as a prisoner, Kalliopi. The room I am in, Father's study, is the one my husband has designated for my detainment. I cannot step out of it; I only have the books to keep me company. The silence of these last few months has provided me with opportunity to scrutinize the past. I have come to realize Father's death was a turning point in my life. Not only on accounts of its sadness, but also because it marked the beginning of misfortunes that rained down on the library and me, like the locusts mentioned in the three holy books. Father died and we discovered the encyclopaedia, our differing opinions on it led you to leave me, after your departure Sultan Abdülaziz died, the uprising turned into a military take over, and Murat V left the throne. The life I had judiciously constructed came tumbling down and culminated in me sitting here, contemplating my past mistakes in a room that has no time, and is blocked off from the world.

Sometimes Feride Nine brings me a different kind of dessert and then I know someone has died, or that there has been a circumcision, or perhaps the library has received guests. Like the prisoner I am, I have etched the days on my oud, but stopped once I moved from its neck to its body, as the instrument is too beautiful for incisions, and also because it is a remnant of you. The only judge of the passing days is the increasing number of pages under my hands. Some time ago, I discovered a missing article in the

encyclopaedia, and began research in order to compose it. It is the only activity that keeps me entertained these days, alongside the letters I will be penning to you.

Maybe you are wondering why I am writing to you now, after all it has been months since your departure. On Friday night I upturned the coffee cup, like we used to do every day when you lived in the house. The smell of mastic hit me. It made me recall our language against the spies, and your fortune-telling dictionary. I wished you were back in the library, Kalliopi, and I imagined talking to you once again, perhaps by this very window. It was then that I realized you are the only person who can bridge my past to my present. If I could explain what has been transpiring in the library since your absence, if I could imagine you listening to me, then perhaps I could make sense of it myself.

This does not mean I have forgotten the sum of our days: this friendship was based on your interests. You hoped my books, acquaintances and wealth would lead you somewhere important. I had little significance in your world. Time has made me understand all this. But time has also chiselled my pride, and I can only hope it has done the same to you, that you have finally forgiven me, as I have forgiven you.

Shortly after my father died you asked me what my favorite memory was, and we both know where that question led us. But that wasn't the right question to ask, Kalliopi. Let me determine how I remember this time. A first memory seems a much better place to start.

**

My earliest memory comes from when I was four years old. I remember a big adventure, a journey from Jerusalem to Istanbul that took days and days. My mother was already dead. I was in the backseat of a carriage with ice in my mouth, and with Father's most cherished plants at my feet. Next to me were two portraits covered in linen: one of Father in a

crimson fez, looking lovingly at Mother, and another of Mother in her embroidered veil looking away.

The velvet curtains shuddered as the horses galloped. Father's concussions in the blue bottles rattled, but I grew hot with an all-consuming fever despite their efficacy. Father's beard was long and bushy when I closed my eyes, short and tidy when I opened them again. In the painting, I saw my mother's veil flutter. Each time I awoke, the landscape was different.

We stopped in many towns and hamlets. We stopped in a city the colour of sand. A giant Kurd took me by the hand at a caravanserai. My father followed us up the winding stairs, with the portraits sliding down his back. The giant led us to the roof. The moon was as big as a plate. All night long the wind blew through narrow lanes, and donkeys brayed as they carried rubbish through the streets.

A man was brewing coffee on the flat, stone roof. It smelled different than the coffee I was used to. Later in life I would cause tantrums to drink it, but at that age I did not know the smell of cardamom. It was piercing and woke me up in the middle of the night, snapped me out of my fever.

The giant Kurd and my father sat me on a throne. The giant told me scorpions were colour-blind. If they saw me asleep in my blue throne-bed, they would think I was caught in red fire. He whispered that the scorpions would feel sorry for me and come closer to pray. The giant was kind and wore broken glasses tied with ribbon.

The night was as cold as the day was scalding, and he tucked me in under woollen blankets that smelled of smoke. Father looked happy. The man who was brewing coffee made him laugh; their shoulders shook like earthquakes. Father took the *cezve* off the fire, the way you must, three times in a row. Three is the number of chances Allah gives you. At that time I had used up only one. The coffee man put his hand to his ear and sang a

dengbej song. The giant sat next to him on the floor and sang another. I watched their throats wobbling and fell asleep to winding stairs, cardamom, little earthquakes.

I woke up with a heavy feeling on my hand, like it was tied to a sinking stone. There was a little scorpion perched on it. I saw an abyss in its eyes. The animal got scared and fell to the floor with a thud. The giant stepped on it with his bare foot, which was ten times the size of the critter, and I began to cry because surely the scorpion was now dead and I no longer had a door to the abyss, no longer an invitation to commune with a strange being. The giant, the coffee man, and my father turned and twisted my body, looking for a puncture mark, but the little scorpion had not bitten me. After a week of tear stained cheeks, they took me to a *hoca* despite Father's protests.

The *hoca* had a henna beard. As bushy as my father's when it was long, but in red. His room was not as nice as the roof; it was closed off with walls, windows, and the smell of cinnamon. He brought over a tea glass filled with golden-green water, then read the holy book and spat in the glass. He looked into my eyes and with his fingers did as if he was locking a door. I was wailing by now. He washed the thick liquid around in his mouth and then spat it back out. It had been purified by his holy tongue, so the giant told me. I was to drink it. It looked pretty and sun-lit but was slimy in my throat.

My eyes watered from the charmed olive oil. The *hoca* smiled at me and said if ever a scorpion or a snake came close to me again, I must know, for always, that the animals had come to serve me. If the snake showed me its tongue, it was singing for me. If the scorpion walked on my hand, thud thud thud, it would be tracing out a map. He said those animals were protective djinns in disguise.

**

With the horse-drawn carriage we moved from Jerusalem to Amman, Beirut, Homs, Aleppo, Mardin, Adana, Konya, Bursa to Istanbul. When we arrived at our destination, Father knew exactly where to go. We were to live by the Bosphorus, in the neighbourhood of Kuzguncuk. The Jews considered it the holiest place after Jerusalem; our neighbours put extra slippers before their doors for the return of the messiah. Madam Sara put two sets, in case the messiah was a woman this time. The Greeks here were small shop-owners or fishermen. There were not many Muslims around.

We moved into a crumbling, old Turkish *yalı*. I asked my father why we had chosen this house. Because there is a herb here that grows nowhere else, he said, *piyan kaya çayyezi*. By the water there was a little yellow flower. It smelled bitter and sour, like a mix of cumin and seaweed. I remember asking him if I could eat it; I was used to honeysuckle vines from the dusty streets of Jerusalem. “No,” he said, “it is the medicine His Highness Abdülaziz will require.” Ever since the Empire had begun to lose land, Father had taken a single book, and a single velvet sack of earth from each place we had lived. By the time I write this letter, Africa is no longer ours. We brought 3600 dried plants with us. “Vegetation may live or rot, but a dried sample is always preserved,” Father said. We had chosen this house because he wanted to cure ailments belonging to Sultans, and to preserve the flora of a dying Empire.

The house did not come empty Kalliopi; it came with a red haired slave the way some houses come with cats, rats or djinns. Father was not surprised. “She is to be your nanny,” he said. Can you believe Feride Nine had ruled over the harem quarters even when the buildings were empty? She had cleaned, cooked, and complained I am sure, but not minded the garden, which was now overgrown with tulips. Father dug up their bulbs and replanted them by the sea. Then he covered a huge area with glass. Half of it became a herbarium, and the other half a greenhouse; we produced our own eggplants in there, and pink tomatoes with thin skin, dill and parsley for *otlu kek* – the pie you liked the most –

and rocket for fish. We had cherry trees and strawberries even in winter and soon the turtles moved in. Father put candles on their thick backs and the lights in our garden walked about at night.

The soil was pliant but the crumbling house was not. The settling-in had to happen slowly. My father guessed, and I knew in my bones, that the *yalı* and Feride Nine had the power to throw us out. You would have approved of our superstitious tactics, Kalliopi. We moved into the entrance first, bedroom and kitchen next, *selamlık* third. Only when the first floor was captured did Father begin to venture up the stairs and once he did, the rest of the books started to arrive.

They came by post from land, and they came on boats from the sea. They came in different sizes and shapes: in boxes, trousseau caskets, envelopes and suitcases. I do not remember a time in my childhood when books were not arriving at the house. We placed them on the stairs first, allowed them to make an entrance. Then the coffee cups went on top of them. For a few months they jiggled continuously. Feride Nine kept the censer busy to get rid of evil eye residue, reciting incantations, spitting North and South to keep the djinns at bay. Then, on a misty morning a drunken caique appeared before the house with yet another casket full of books and my father said, “Now we are even bigger than the Süleymaniye archives, even bigger than the libraries in the Topkapı Palace.”

We conquered the house in a year, Kalliopi. Within three, we had become the Biggest Library of Istanbul. When we had secured both honours, my new mother arrived.

**

My new mother's complexion was on the light side and she had surprisingly big feet. Every morning she took a walk in the garden and I followed right behind, my feet disappearing in her footprints, her shawls loose on my hair. With her floating gowns

matching her seven pairs of bejewelled slippers – one pair for each day of the week – she enchanted both Father and me, fitting into the *yalı* much better than both of us. She was of the Mediterranean, and we were still covered in desert dust.

My father did not like talking about the past. As the memories of that fevered journey in horse carriage began to recede, I made up stories about how we came to live in Konstantiniye. My favourite was of arriving to the rainy winter of Istanbul in a trousseau casket. They had found us in a bazaar, and placed us in the pretty house by the sea. I told this story to my new mother repeatedly – sitting on her lap and forcing her to be still until I finished. One night, perhaps as way of encouragement, she gifted a trousseau casket to me. She must have collected it from the shore since there was moss on it and night snails stuck to its sides.

“Did you know that there is a special name for people that collect things from the sea?” she asked, “They are called *lodosçu*. They are poor and patient men. They wait for *lodos*, the wind that blows strong and hot from Crete. The waters get muddled. Things settled deep, start floating up. The waves carry them to the shore, and the *lodosçu* take whatever the water gives them.”

My second mother opened the heavy lid for me and we found seashells, big patches of salt and an oxidized copper ring inside. She told me that the big eunuchs stole women from all over the world and put them in caskets just like these. They carried them to the harems in the palace. The journeys were so long, the women forgot where it was they had come from. Some even forgot their own names.

“That is why,” she said, “beautiful women see strange cities in their dreams, and miss things they can’t remember terribly.”

My new mother dreamt of unknown cities all the time. As she blew her warm breath into my cold hands, she told me it was good to have *tavşan kanı* tea, and to patiently stir coffee on charcoal and to always have guests in your house.

“These things make one happy. If you sigh too much, the eunuchs will throw you back into the waters.”

How I wished to see strange cities as I slept, but I was not as beautiful as my new mother and could only fabricate the kind of dreams she naturally saw.

Unlike my birth mother, my second mother left me a number of things. She left fragrances in blown glass bottles from Venice, two cigarette holders, and a brooch with a three leaved clover fashioned from jade. I also held on to the seven pairs of slippers.

The third winter we had together was especially cold. They said it was the fiercest in a hundred years. The Bosphorus froze over and my father, my new mother and I went walking on it with many other people, some of them on home made skates. I remember seeing a small frozen fish under the ice, Kalliopi, motionless as if it had been bewitched. After our day on the Bosphorus, my new mother couldn't stop coughing. Father and I mixed anise with honey and smeared it all over her chest, but it didn't help. No matter how many cups of warm milk and *nane limon* she had, the cough grew worse. We lost her to pneumonia that winter, and my father never married again.

Kalliopi mou,

After the death of my second mother, and with no women in the house to look after me other than Feride Nine whom I considered uncouth from the very beginning, several governesses were employed. I went through Madame Marie, Mademoiselle Isabelle and Miss Allison the way I went through books, quick to learn and keen to move on. To my father's disbelief, none of the nannies stayed in our library for more than two weeks. They cannot be blamed for picking sweeter girls over me, Kalliopi. I complained about their lack of beauty, waited in the shadows to discover their faults. I made them feel they could not teach me much and that they lacked grace. Madam Marie bit her nails till they bled, Miss Allison underlined her books, Mademoiselle had a strange leniency towards my unsuspecting father.

Nowadays the tables have turned and I am left to the mercy and care of that red haired servant with the foul mouth. It is hard to bridge my lifelong dislike of Feride Nine with my present dependence on her. She is the one who prepares the coffee and sweets Ruhi brings to me. When night falls and the library becomes silent, she sits by the door and talks to me through the keyhole. Sometimes, when the loneliness causes me to panic, I call out her name and she taps her old fingers on the wall, like a cat scratching to come in. The gesture is enough for me. How I wish I could go back in time and repay her kindness. But we both know the past becomes an island, don't we, Kalliopi? With hardly a bridge to lead you back. So when I was on the verge of youth, the only woman I let plait my hair was our Greek neighbour Marika. Feride Nine was not allowed to adorn me.

Marika's voice was raspy and sweet, the way I imagined my first mother's to be. She sang lullabies about apples whilst combing my hair. I have figured out how to play some of them on the oud, though their words escape me. When Marika was married off, I

was convinced my three chances were all used up: birth mother, second mother, and Marika had all left me. I lay in bed with a fever that would not dim. Feride Nine called on *hocas* without telling Father, and again I was made to drink strange things.

Finally it was decided that I had to be close to Father at all times. If not, I got heartburn, insomnia, hiccups and hair loss – most of which were conjured up on a whim. Meanwhile Father had become the personal physician of His Highness Sultan Abdülaziz, which meant his presence was often required at the palaces. That being the case, I was to spend my days in the Sultan's harems. Father and I would return to the house in Kuzguncuk in the evenings.

The neighbours thought the harem would make me forget my two mothers and Marika, at least for a little while, that I would doze in the arms of one beautiful woman after another and heal. As you know, Kalliopi mou, things did not quite turn out that way.

**

Soon after my father became Sultan Abdülaziz's doctor, preparations for an imperial trip to Europe commenced. Do you remember the excitement it caused in the city? Previous Westward visits had all aimed at conquering land, but this one was initiated for purely diplomatic reasons. Europe was uncertain as to whether the Turk would not change his mind again and appear in full war costume at the Paris Exposition. But Sultan Abdülaziz wanted only collegial debate, and to prove that Crete was ours no matter how much the Greeks rebelled. He wanted to tell the French, who were allying with the Russians, about Turkish policies in the Balkans so as to nip another war in the bud. He also wanted to show off his poetry, music and love of animals. But it is said that the foreigners noticed Sultan Abdülaziz's nephew Crown Prince Murat V more than they noticed anyone else in the entourage. More than they noticed Sultan Abdülaziz's son Yusuf, or his other nephew

Abdülhamid, both of them contenders to the throne. They deemed Crown Prince Murat progressive because he made a speech about establishing a parliament in our Empire, during an outing organized in honour of the Ottomans.

Now that Father would be gone for so long, I was to stay either with a new nanny, or alone at our house with Feride Nine. Faced with these two unpleasant options I declined food. Reluctantly it was decided that I would spend the evenings at the harem too, until the Sultan and Father returned from their expeditions.

On my first night in the harem I thought the lights in it were all wrong. The chandeliers were too bright and looked as if they might take the ceiling down. The shadows that spread in the corridors were too inky and long. Sultan Abdülaziz had put birds everywhere; sculptures of them, mosaics of them, even murals on the ceilings. Their wings, eyes, and beaks were bejewelled, so that when we lay down to sleep it felt like I was under a strange sky, with an unknown set of stars.

There were scenes in the harem that befit the expectations. The women moved from room to room in a like manner, danced for each other, sang, spoke, napped and it was all a joy to watch, like it is a joy to watch children at play. But amidst the seeming innocence, I witnessed spine chilling glances, jealousy and greed. There was beauty in the harems, yes, but you could never rest in it with comfort.

The truth is, I did not like the women's quarters very much, and in return the harem liked me even less. It all began with the Circassian mistress. She was Sultan Abdülaziz's favourite, and deserved nothing less with her moon white skin and coal black hair that tumbled down like a waterfall till below her waist. She did not walk, but rather glided; you could never spot her feet, maybe she was continuously on tiptoes. The first time I saw her, innocent still to the ways of the harem, I blurted out that she was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. She crunched up her nose, like she had smelled something bad, and told me I was an ugly little thing myself. Then she threw her head back and laughed. I saw her

choker glisten, a necklace of silver and amber that seemed to suck all the light out of the room.

I wanted to be invisible after that exchange, but the women had taken notice of me. They were bored in the absence of the royal entourage and looked for entertainment anywhere they could find it. One day after dinner, the Circassian ordered me to do the rabbit dance. I was terrified, but tried to copy what I had seen the other women do. The mirrors reflected back a slumping little girl; she neither moved like the harem dancers, nor resembled them in appearance. My uncertain features were typical of a girl on the way to womanhood; I know that now. But in the palaces I got to know myself as an “ugly little thing.”

After the rabbit dance, anger and jealousy began to eat away at me, Kalliopi mou. Once I saw myself in the mirror, I understood I would never possess the Circassian’s beauty. So I decided to take the one thing that was brighter than her. It was not that difficult; she took the choker off each time she went to the hamam. My mistake was in the choice of hiding place. The inside of my cushion was the first place her maid looked. I was punished, and not by reprimands or slaps, those would have hurt me less, but by loneliness. The harem women stopped conversing with me. Even the sweet ones chose to ignore me, afraid no doubt, of the Circassian’s wrath. Days went by without me uttering a word.

I prayed for time to pass quickly so I could return to my old life. I missed the days in which I was quite unaware of my looks. I missed the library on the other side where I could sit by the Bosphorus. I missed my innocent daydreams of these very palaces where my father worked. Then one evening after the *ezan* was called, you came up the marble stairs.

I had to imagine your face before seeing you, Kalliopi. The Circassian had ordered me to sit at a corner of the dining hall during meals, facing the empty wall. The women whispered you wore discoloured clothes. They ran to hug you and gave you *lokums* they

had hidden in their skirts. Your visits started during Sultan Abdülaziz's 46 days of absence and were never repeated again so overtly: fortune tellers are not welcome in the harems if it can be helped.

**

One woman tells another about someone who reads the cups. She in turn tells her friends and relatives, and the news of the seer spreads across, and then beyond the neighbourhood. Houses link to each other like pearls in a necklace and map shelters in Konstantiniye through which the teller can move with safety. Shelters where she will be greeted with drink and food, and sometimes also grief and despair. As she listens, consoles, and sees, the fortune teller becomes famous, proud, itinerant. I assume this is what happened to you, Kalliopi, but you kept your beginnings a secret. Palaces are where you chose to start your history.

You went about your predictions in the old-fashioned manner, the way grandmothers commence stories by the fire side. "Once it was there and once it was not there. It evaporated, dwindled, leaked, and was lost. First I was me, but then I was not. The camel was a town crier, the dog a porter, and the cat a barber. The frog was a merchant, the snake a hawser, and the cardigan was my duvet. Grandmother was five years old, I was fifty years old and rocking her cradle from side to side, singing the lullaby of the calf, *dandini dandini dastana*. Once here and once nowhere: Once there was a troubled girl whose name was..." you turned to the Circassian from whom I had thieved, whose coffee cup you held in your hands, and whose eyes must have turned docile like a needy cat's, "*Matia mou*, what's your name?"

You talked a little like a storyteller, and a little like a dictionary. "You have been finding it difficult to sleep, you have many nightmares so you keep your eyes open: you

have insomnia.” Or, “There is no end to this street, the street you are on is a corridor, it is not a street at all: it is a dead end.” I think Turkish made you uncertain. This pausing and searching for the right words gave you an enigmatic air. Had you talked in Greek, I might have met a lighter and more flamboyant woman.

You had learnt your craft from black milk-mothers who taught you how to read pebbles, and from gypsies who taught you how to foretell from beans. Your methods were determined by your client’s mood, her *halet-i ruhiye*. You also read coffee cups and cards if that is what was required. “Pebble telling is for those who do not fear bad news, beans for the poetic, the cards for those who are patient.” You also made predictions through books. Some were from the *Homeromanteia*, others were Muslim texts – the poetry of Hafez and Ibn Arabi’s *Bezels of Wisdom* – but you asked the mother of Christ, the Panegiae, for help each time you consulted those.

On the night we met, you read the coffee grinds first, threw the beans second, and played the cards last. After three tellings you took a break and in this manner read the fortune of twelve women. After the twelfth, the women said sleepless circles appeared under your eyes and that your lips turned the colour of light choral. They whispered from ear to ear that this was how all fortune tellers were; eventually depleted because they tempted the ones whose names should not be mentioned out loud, the ones who should stay in the good hours, the djinns.

I did not see any of this, Kalliopi. I only heard it. At the corner of the room, facing the wall and waiting for forgiveness, I must have been a sorry site. “*Kuzum*,” you called me, my little lamb, “why are you all on your own?”

You pulled at my sleeves gently. My body was stiff, you turned me slowly around. I had not expected the face I saw; it was as thin as a scarecrow’s. Your eyes were big and filled with a sad love. I don’t remember what happened next. I woke up in the pantry of the

palace kitchens where they kept the potatoes and the onions in big sacks, with you asleep by my side.

They must have told you of what I had done, but you didn't abandon me. Instead, we stayed at the pantry where I would not be punished. You told me cheerful stories, village tales from the islands and Thrace. When we left for the dining hall at fortune telling time, my status in the harems had changed for the better. You told me to look everyone right in the eye, to never turn my back to them, and to walk with purpose at all times. The women stopped calling me names soon enough. Not so much because of my changed bearing, but because they hung on your every word for dear life.

**

Our nights in the harem came to an end when Sultan Abdülaziz, and with him my father, returned to Istanbul. The women of the harem put their green dresses on – the colour of granted wishes – once they heard the ships were close to the Bosphorus. My arm in yours, and in heels too high for me, we dangled to the seashore.

You took out the tinderbox you always carried with you – where did you keep that box Kalliopi? An inside pocket? A pouch necklace? I never figured it out. You rolled two thin cigarettes with the fingers that resembled dried up winter branches. I knew you were poor not from your clothes, like the harem women did, but because you had no cigarette holder. You said you were sad to leave me behind, but women like you, free women, had to always move on.

“*Cicim*,” you said, “maybe I will come to read your fortune one day, when you become the mistress of a house. When you are with a child or two, *inşallah*.”

I never forgot the taste of that first cigarette, which made me think tobacco was a sweet thing because you mixed vanilla pods with yours. And in my mind, I made a promise to you. If I would ever get married, my husband and I would be your sponsors.

The crowds had become restless to see the royal ship arrive. Some were already shouting, "Long live our Sultan." The strait was dotted with small and big boats, and by caiques decorated with lanterns; the celebrations would continue well into the night. I felt a tangible excitement in the air. You kept fidgeting in your dress. Some women and children burst out crying when the ship appeared on the horizon.

There was an evening gathering to which the whole harem was invited; the women insisted that you pose as the Jewish fabric seller, since you wouldn't be welcome as a fortune teller. The men would never know the difference. We assembled in the dining hall where you had read cups in the men's absence. It was now divided in two by a folding screen on which pheasants walked. Their green blue heads were of precious stones.

I positioned myself close to the screens, in hopes of catching sight of the Sultan. Sultan Abdülaziz was a well-built, handsome man and we all rose when he entered the room. After His Highness, the Crown Princes followed, and then other state officials, their translators, and scribes. My father appeared three steps behind the last officer. It took all my strength not to run and embrace him. But Father kept his eyes on Crown Prince Murat V, who looked unsteady on his feet, still seasick perhaps. My father had told me the Crown Prince had a fragile constitution like mine, and that he went to extra trouble finding herbs to suit him.

After dinner Murat went to the piano and played tunes for us, the likeness of which I had never heard before. It seemed the harem women were not very familiar with European classical music either, but the foreign envoys stood up in applause when the Prince's performance came to an end. "This kind of *makam* will only make his health worse," you whispered into my ear.

It would take another five years for me to hear your voice again, Kalliopi. A period in which I would delve into a new stage of life. A stage which, on accounts of being poor yet self-sufficient, you had been able to avoid.

**

Once out of the harem, and back in the library, I put Feride Nine to work with many elaborate mezes so as to prolong my fireside conversation with Father. For once she did not complain. She called him the pillar of this house and planted a kiss at the back of his hand, like children do to their elders during feasts.

Father told me that the volcanic mountain in Sicily had splendid trees growing on its outskirts. He gifted me a new invention bought from the Paris science fair: a blood circulator. It was supposed to cure all manner of diseases, from headaches to indigestion. Then he sat down at the old mother-of-pearl table, and with great pleasure dipped his pen into a smoky Irish ink to make a list of all the cities he had seen. “Not enough,” I appealed. Details were crucial. I wanted to know the names of the palaces they had stayed at, the scenery out the windows, the taste of the breakfasts he had had. I was certain Father could not have told me everything in such a small list.

“Well, my little rose,” he said while taking out a thick envelope from his pocket, “might this be the *everything* you had in mind?” And with these words Father handed me a hundred-page report of the journey, kept by no other than the Sultan’s personal scribe.

“Mütercim Halimi Efendi wrote these transcripts by the day,” he explained. “He even woke me from sleep once, to ask if I had checked the time as we passed the Islands of the Peloponnese. He wanted to know just how delayed we were so as to record the changes to our itinerary.”

I studied the hundred-page document like it held the secret to life. The pages Father gave me were indeed perfect little schedules, Kalliopi mou. On the 21st of Rebiyülevel Sultan Abdülaziz had left Istanbul after his afternoon prayer in the mosque of Ortaköy, he had embarked on a ship called *Sultaniye* from the palace in Beşiktaş, they had arrived at the Sicilian Messina harbour on the 25th of Rebiyülevel.

As I went through the curled handwriting I half fainted with jealousy and half pitied the scribe. How could Mütercim Efendi have managed to render the first peaceful European adventure so profoundly boring? There were no notes on the men sick at sea, no remarks as to how the royals dressed on board. Just how strong was Sultan Abdülaziz's stomach? Had there been rivalry amongst the Crown Princes for his attention? I guess you would infer my frustration was the beginning of the end, Kalliopi. Perhaps this is the document that can be blamed for my editorial eye, but I beg to differ.

That day I realized a lesson of profound importance: an interesting thing will be lost in the telling if you leave its narration to a lacklustre person. Consequently, living an adventurous life does not necessarily make you remarkable. By this logic you could lead a boring life and still be noteworthy if you were a good storyteller. This discovery gave me hope because my chances of travelling Europe or Egypt were slim. I may never even set foot out of Konstantiniye. But I could, perhaps, learn to keep transcripts more colourful than the Sultan's scribe.

Kalliopi mou,

It may come as a surprise but I still have that yellowed piece of paper on which Father jotted down the European cities he had seen. Their names had sounded like church bells: Napoli, Turin, Budapest, Bologna, Vienna, Brussels, Paris, London. He must have found writing them a pleasant chore as he framed the paper himself and put it on his desk like a memento mori. This desk, which he placed by the window to overlook the herbarium, is a monster of a thing. Its pointed feet are firmly planted into the carpet. I tried to move it for a fresh perspective but it wouldn't budge. This is where Father wrote his letters to bookkeepers and horticulturalists, and where I now pen my notes to you.

We began keeping a similar list of cities, you and I, once we stumbled upon the encyclopaedia. Do you remember? This second list was much longer than Father's. We wrote down every city mentioned in the volumes, in hopes of finding where the encyclopaedia had originated. We pinned them on a map, which soon resembled a moth eaten cloth, but even in that state it induced dreams of foreign lands. I guess there was no way to dim the desire for travel in us. We had been given a taste of it: I from childhood, and you from traversing the city. We were given a tiny double roasted *lokum*, so to say, and then were allowed no more. You were luckier, Kalliopi – I hope you don't mind me saying so – on accounts of your class. Nobody minded seeing a poor, ordinary-looking Greek walk alone and absentminded. But as I became a woman, Father's responsibilities to invisible neighbours, relatives, and strangers could not be ignored.

I was sixteen when it was made clear to me that I had grown up and must hence engage in grown up activities. My cheeks were like apples, my breasts had blossomed; I was to be married. This is what Feride Nine told me in any case. She also said women with

heavy buttocks were pretty, and that I had a remarkable rear. My father approached the topic from another angle, “I am growing old,” he said. “I have little time left in this world. In Europe I got sick twice. I need someone to take care of my petunia.”

No matter how I protested his threats of untimely death, the despairing expression on his face did not alter. He lifted up my chin: “Do you not want the joys of motherhood, do you not want the conversation of an equal husband?” I did not, and I told him so. I hadn’t known my mothers for long. He was all the family I needed.

But my father kept on saying, “I have such little time left. Who will care for my jasmine when I am gone?”

**

I heard them first. Back in the entry they argued over who would wear the softest slippers.

“*Haşa Efendi*,” the guest said. “Who am I to use your house shoes, *haşa*. Please put your rosy heels in them.”

“But you must.”

“No, I cannot,” the compliments went back and forth. Then the stranger came in wearing Father’s rabbit fur slippers.

His name was Ruhi, and he bowed to greet me. Ruhi was not handsome, but I thought he could be nice. He was short and fat, with a prominent black moustache. His eyes were small, and his eye sockets deep so that it was hard to see into him.

“Ruhi Efendi works in the translation office for the Porte,” Father announced. “Everyday he reads newspapers in ten different languages and he translates them for His Highness Sultan Abdülaziz.”

For somebody like me who could only read Ottoman, Persian, French and English, the knowledge of ten languages was impressive.

Father took his usual seat on the divan. Feride Nine readied his nargile. I warmed the coals on the *mangal*. “Make a smoke for Ruhi Efendi too, *canim efendim*,” he said. So I went to the pantry to get the second nargile. I was frustrated Father’s ritual was now shared with an outsider, rather than with me.

When I re-entered the *selamlık* Ruhi Efendi said, “I heard you like reading too Perihan Hanim.” I looked at the dessert plate Feride Nine had brought in: *baklava*, *bülbül yuvası* and *şekerpare*. While Father’s were waiting to be savoured, Ruhi Efendi had already gulped his down. And I realized that, despite the locked up eyes, Ruhi Efendi was nervous.

Feride Nine rushed in with another plate of sweets and her untypical generosity confirmed what I had anticipated, Kalliopi: Father had been at work on his plans. I calculated my odds. If I objected to Ruhi Efendi, Father would find another man. If I protested the next candidate, he might die unhappy. If he died without seeing me married, his ghost would haunt me. I was haunted enough by two dead mothers and Marika. All women marry eventually, I thought, whether they like to or not. I would go along with the plan as long as I did not have to bear children. I was against putting another person through a mother’s death.

“Now can we have our coffees, apple of my eye?” Father asked.

“A sweet one for you, Father,” I said, “How would Ruhi Efendi like his?”

“Sweet as well.”

In the kitchen Feride Nine was peeling potatoes. “Don’t use the guest set for the coffee,” she said.

“Why not?”

“If you break one, then the whole set is ruined.”

“I won’t break any.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“But I am not,” and she handed me one cup with yellow roses, and another with red tulips. They weren’t even the same size.

If a girl wants to marry, she must serve the perfect cup of coffee: well frothed and appropriately sugared. She must take the *cezve* off the burner thrice, must divide the froth equally between the cups. As she walks, the thin layer of cream must not dwindle. She must walk straight and make an effort to look pretty, patient, flirtatious and fertile. The girl who does not want to marry will put salt in the prospective groom’s coffee. This is a silent understanding between girl and boy. The groom-to-be gets out of the picture if he is the unlucky one.

I was certainly not enthusiastic when it came to Ruhi Efendi, so I did not add sugar to his coffee. But I didn’t use salt either because I was not sure of my resistance. Ruhi Efendi would drink a bitter cup. He must know I am undecided on the matter. Then he could choose for himself whether he wanted a half-hearted bride or not.

Father stroked my cheek when I served him. He took a peek at Ruhi Efendi’s cup and seeing the plentiful froth he winked at me. I wanted to read Ruhi Efendi’s eyes as he drank, but I saw nothing in them. “How deliciously sweet, Perihan Hatun,” he said after the first sip, and I doubted for a second whether I had not mixed up the cups.

As the two men chatted, appearing quite satisfied, I made a plan. I would marry Ruhi only if you came to live with us, Kalliopi. I knew you went from one woman’s house to another. But, in your own way, you had been a woman of the palace. Many respected families hosted retired harem ladies in their homes; the hospitality signified wealth and class. If I took Ruhi Efendi as a husband, I could bargain for you with father.

**

Once father was convinced that I was not violently opposed to Ruhi Efendi *canım efendim* – meaning when he realized Ruhi Efendi was not going to cause me incurable hiccups, tantrums and heartburn – my prospective husband was invited to the library.

He was told about my delicate health. He was told I would be the only wife he was allowed. No second, third or fourth wives, even if he was permitted four. It was admitted that I would be unlikely to bear children, given my fragile constitution, though Ruhi Efendi was not told anything about my feelings regarding the matter. He would have to be an *iç güveysi* upon marriage: it would be our house, the Biggest Library of Istanbul, where we would reside and both the house and the library would be run according to my wishes.

My flirtation with Ruhi Efendi would consist of six meetings according to Islamic rule. This was deemed sufficient amount of time to investigate one another's characters and to see whether we would be an appropriate fit. Father assigned Feride Nine chaperone during these dates. As she huffed, puffed and dusted, the two of us talked.

Rather Ruhi Efendi did. On our first meeting out of six he talked for three hours without stop. At first I thought his chatter might have something to do with his nerves. As politeness required, I listened. But Ruhi Efendi was in a state of *jouissance*, the continuity of his speech was beyond him. Later I would learn this was not a case of apprehension but his natural composition: he rambled like a bear among cherry trees. He was trying to impress me, and anyone who cared to listen, with his infinite knowledge. As you can testify, Kalliopi, this habit continued into our marriage.

He began by telling me of his first encounter with Father. "We met at a secretive picnic ten years ago," he said, "I was invited to it by a translator at the Porte. We met at the forest of Belgrade and we ate *börek* with potatoes, spinach and feta, *kısır*, *mercimek köftesi*, and we barbecued *sucuk* and peppers and tomatoes for the pita bread. The real purpose of the picnic was not the food but the initiation of a society, of course. We decided to call ourselves Young Ottomans. We met in cells of seven. To keep safe, we only knew

the six other members of our unit. The head of our faction, knew the leader of another. That is how the groups communicated.

Moldavia and Wallachia had gained autonomy, the uprisings in Herzegovina couldn't be stopped for two years. The evacuation of Ottoman fortresses in Serbia made our moustaches droop. The Porte had not been quick enough to solve the conflict in Lebanon and the French troops had stormed in, with a pretense to protect the Christians. Turks were being forced out of their houses in Crete. On all fronts, the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse.

What we needed was to establish a parliament, that was the only way to save the Empire from dissolution. We needed a constitutional monarchy that could unite the Balkans rather than lead them to more revolts. A representative assembly had the potential to dispel all separatisms. That wish brought us together all those years ago but,” and here Ruhi cleared his throat, “we were, and still are, very different men, Perihan Hatun. I am a translator, your father is the best doctor and archivist there ever was, then there is a Dervish from the Sûmbüliyye sect, and a Levantine enthusiast of theatre called Alexandros, they say he created the first mason lodge to operate in Greek and Turkish rather than French. Do you know about these lodges? Better not to discuss them anyway. There is also an army officer, a Süleyman Paşa, who has fought in Yemen and Crete. He joined the group because he saw first-hand how the battles were not eradicating the real problem. There is also Pazarköylü Ahmet Ağa, a village commoner. His task is to spread our ideas in the countryside.”

During a pause for breath Ruhi raised his eyes shyly, “These matters are perhaps too serious to discuss at a first meeting, Perihan Hatun, and also dangerous, but I don't think there should be any secrets between beloveds... And my wish has always been to wed an intelligent woman like yourself.”

Before I had time to reassure him the matters were of sufficient seriousness, Ruhi Efendi continued, “There are some fronts in Europe and beyond who are in support of our activities. They see us as the continuation of the Italian Carbonari, and of Young Spain and Young France. That is why we also publish Bulletins in French.” Ruhi stood up. “I will read you an excerpt,” he said and buttoned his jacket:

“In Publishing a French Bulletin our aim is to instruct republican Europe and America of the democratic tendencies of the Muslim Orient. Brothers across the ocean, as well as across the desert, let us give one another our hand. Let us unite to establish Liberty, let us associate to arrive at Equality, let us cherish one another so that Fraternity might reign on earth!”

Ruhi Bey finished his oration with drops of perspiration on his forehead and a raised fist, which I took as cue to applaud.

“*Canim* Perihan, all of this to say, your Father and I were comrades before we became father and son, and with your permission, we will continue to be both comrades and family from now on.” I thought he would let this moment linger, but no. “Wishing for a parliament was just a first step, Perihan. We needed to find someone powerful who could realize our dreams for the nation. After all, we still wanted an Ottoman institution to be run by a capable Sultan, the hand of God on earth. The problem is that Sultan Abdülaziz is not that Sultan. He is overpowered by his own viziers and lacks vision. There is but one Crown Prince who wants a parliament in the house of Osman, and that is our Murat V.”

At the mention of Crown Prince Murat’s name I felt excited. “I have seen him play the piano,” I said and Ruhi was very pleased with me.

“Something about you is so encouraging,” he sighed, “I cannot help but open up to you.”

“I guess I make shy people comfortable,” I said, half joking, for there was nothing shy about Ruhi Efendi, but he blushed nevertheless. “Efendi please, continue,” I insisted. “The things you tell are so interesting,” and that is all the encouragement he needed.

This is how I met my husband, Kalliopi. What would you have thought of him, I wonder, if you had been in my place? Would you have been taken by him, or would you have refused the marriage? Would you have been overwhelmed or entertained? I know Ruhi did not like you, but I never found out your honest opinions about him.

Despite his company, I felt very lonely at the end of this first meeting. The insatiable hunger of my prospective husband was plain; I could see the desire with which he gulped down his food, and I sensed how he wanted to be, and do, a hundred things at once.

We would soon build a new, bigger kitchen to accommodate the longings of his stomach, and the library would expand seawards to acquire new sections on Parisian politics, Italian independence and alternative theories of resistance.

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I was married three months later. There was a crescent moon in the sky. Other men might have limited me, and I chose being bored over being trapped. The certainty that Ruhi loved me – and who knows how I developed that certitude – made me feel justified in my decision. Not only had I pleased my father and made a marriage of the least inconvenience, I had also granted Ruhi, a nice and harmless man overall, a chance at happiness.

But something strange happened on our first night of union. After the terrible business of showcasing my purity, first to Ruhi, then to Feride Nine who confirmed it to Father, I walked in to the bathroom downstairs. Blood stained my legs. I had a sensation I was bleeding rubies and precious stones and wanted to stop the loss terribly. A wish to

walk back on my decision seized me. I made coffee instead, and then another cup for my newly-wed husband. This time I added the salt. There was nothing I could do to change my fate now, but I would allow myself this small act of rebellion.

A few minutes later I was sitting before him on the marital bed covered in clean, white linen once again. His eyes were sparkling. As soon as he took the cup to his lips, I regretted my decision. For the first time since we had met, Ruhi had unguarded his gaze. He had been looking at me with relief and hopeful expectation. The moment he tasted the coffee, I saw his eyes cloud over and they were never fathomable for me again. “How deliciously sweet Perihan Hatun,” he said. And I knew: marriage with a man who lies about his coffee twice could only be a marriage of convenience.

**

The growth of the library continued into my married life, Kalliopi. The first year was filled with construction work, you were not living with us yet. Father ordered wings to be built on both sides of the house to accommodate new arrivals from the sea. Expanding meant we could make the rooms fit the books, rather than force the books into compliance.

The coffeehouse volumes you would grow so fond of were placed in a room with inbuilt shelves to keep the elements at bay. Embers burnt in the braziers to fight the damp. Father and Ruhi placed a big oak table in the middle of the room. Later, you and I would put a map on that table to see where the volumes had come from. We would try to solve a mystery, and fail.

We had the noisiest house on the Bosphorus as the work to enlarge the library never really finished, nor did the complaints of our neighbours. Father invited them in; gave them pastries, took them on tours of the library. But once I married Ruhi Efendi, he took Father’s place as man of the house, and the neighbours stopped visiting us all

together. Ruhi would begin telling them about the articles he was translating, about a discovery in the new states of America, about a civil war far away, and the neighbours who were once disturbed by construction noise would think it the lesser evil.

The greater evil was Ruhi's bad breath. Later you would notice this too, Kalliopi, but I assure you, the poor man was not aware of it. I am sure he would have opted for a smaller laugh if he had known, but I did not have the heart to tell him. Instead Ruhi ate garlic vehemently and thought it cured all diseases. When he was sick, he left a half cut onion in the room to collect the illness. The onion turned black by the morning, and got paraded as proof of his medical theories. His habits regarding garlic and onion made me doubt his origins. How could an Istanbulite believe in such lore? Was he, in fact, from the East? Was he harbouring a secret childhood? I would get excited about the possibilities of unsaid things, but sigh with disappointment soon enough. Nothing could hide in his continuous talk, in his sustained eating: everything with Ruhi Efendi was out in the open. Life would have been easier perhaps, if I had let him overwhelm me. If I had let him crown me with his octopus arms – heavy, salty, wet and safe – but I did not look for solace in him. Instead I wanted you to come and live in the library.

I began crying as our first year of marriage came to an end, showcased silent tears one afternoon as Ruhi and I were having coffee and mint liqueur. I had opened up to Father about my wish beforehand and he had agreed to your presence. But he had also advised that I get my husband's consent. Even if we were masters of the library, he was now master of the house.

To my husband, my tears were sudden and inexplicable. He asked me what was wrong several times. He cajoled and begged. I pulled my shoulders in response, but did not abstain from my nightly duties. Nor did I neglect my role as intelligent listener and confidante – which meant more to Ruhi than nuptial games. After a week I told him I was missing a friend. Ruhi Efendi was relieved.

“And which friend is that?” he asked.

“A palace lady,” I said, “by the name of Kalliopi.”

I cooked a dish of lamb with prunes for him, even if I had to fight off Feride Nine to gain control of the kitchen. I made a *gıllaç* desert, with extra rose water and *kaymak* in between the layers, the way they make it in the imperial harems. I decorated it with pistachio shavings and pomegranate seeds. Ruhi ate the way squirrels do; his cheeks puffed up with reserve food. I grew very accommodating in bed. I gave his feet a slow massage after each of our unions. “I want you to be so happy,” Ruhi said. Then I asked him whether he would be so kind as to give my friend Kalliopi a room in the house.

Kalliopi mou,

The first letter I ever sent you was written five years ago, and straight after Ruhi told me you could come and live with us. I remember one passage from it clearly, as it took me a long time to strike the right balance between excitement and lightness. I wanted to tell you of everything we could do together, the music and the conversations, and the confidence of friendship, but feared there might be others with whom you shared such sentiments. So I decided to add another pearl to your necklace of safety.

“I would have loved to roam Istanbul the way you do, the way a well-loved fortune teller can, or a Jewish matchmaker, to walk one of its shores to its inevitable end, but seeing that this is not an appropriate thing to do, I am inviting you to come and live with us.”

I assume you were nearing the end with your Persian employer at the time. A household with six children to entertain could not have been easy. Little did I know this was a habit with you; easily bored, you did not stay in any one place for too long. The houses you chose had to have a certain allure. The fortune tellers you had lodged with had all taught you a trick and advanced you in your trade. At the harems you had gotten the biggest tips of your life, plus the love of imperial ladies who would soon offer you new housing opportunities. I guess my one virtue was the library and all the sources you could consult in it as you wrote your books. But at the time I thought you had come simply to keep me company. You cannot be blamed, Kalliopi mou, I had my reasons to trust you. But I had done nothing to build your confidence in me yet.

The attic had to be emptied to make room for you. Since Feride Nine objected to the intrusion, Father and Ruhi Efendi moved the furniture and I soaped the floors. I noticed drawings of ships on the ceiling, and waves in tints of Persian indigo. Faded roses appeared on the cupboards after some scrubbing. Only masters like Behram the Deaf would have known how to use those colours properly. I wondered how old this house really was, and from whom we had inherited it. The attic where we had kept unwanted objects became my favourite room and your new abode.

You sent in a suitcase, a white slave, and your European furniture first. Feride Nine was not happy with the new competition; I was ordered to let your servant go. “There is but one slave in this house,” she said, “and her name is Feride.” When we finally embraced in the garden, our yashmaks stuck to our faces. You looked exactly as I remembered, with in drawn cheeks and a thin face, with a dress coarse to the touch. Do you recall your first sentence, Kalliopi mou? It was, “*Poli poli omorfi!*” You had the power to bless with the simplest of words; in the harem it had been “my little lamb,” and at our reunion, “very very beautiful.”

The summer had stayed for too long that year, so we turned our first night into a *helva* evening. We settled in the attic and placed our feet in buckets filled with ice. We dressed in our warmest shawls and laughed as the wool bit into our skin. “Is this not the coldest winter you have ever seen?” we asked and then ordered Feride Nine to come and tell us Kurdish stories in her thick socks. This is how the ice between her and you melted, the red haired slave could not have asked for a better listener. You sighed, shrieked and laughed at all the right places and I watched you in contentment, happy at last.

**

We spent the first week drifting through the rooms in the library. You barely looked at the *tarish*, the woodblocks, gravures and lithographies. What interested you most were the hand-written books, it was the room with the embers constantly ablaze that charmed you. We quickly moved to the thick, leather-bound editions: the coffeehouse books in which you could trace several handwritings and which arrived from Aleppo, Mardin, Konya and Izmir, and sometimes from villages and hamlets we had never heard of. I used to dust them every two weeks before your arrival, not realizing they were more special than the others. You were the one who began telling me about their construction.

“Some books are the property of the coffeehouse. They stay on its dusty shelves for a very long time, Perihancım, for eternity if the establishment survives that long. Those books record every story told inside the four walls. Different scribes take turns writing in it, but the transcripts of the first scribe in the coffeehouse are seen as the most important. The ones that come after him only note down derivations, or the new tales as they are being told.”

You put one such book on the table, for me to see. Then made a circle in the air with your index finger, before opening the volume at a random page. “Some of them are really beautiful, see, the stories here are encircled within talismans. They are protected that way from the evil eye and also from being lost or burnt.” You closed the book with care.

“But that is only the first type of coffeehouse book. There are three other, more valuable varieties. The second type does not belong to a coffeehouse; it belongs to a scribe. It is a book in which he collects all the stories he has ever listened to, a personal record if you like. The third type also belongs to the scribe rather than the coffeehouse. You see, sometimes a scribe will dedicate his whole life to a single story,” you continued. “He will follow it through different lands. He will grow old with that tale, have grandchildren and continue writing different versions of it down. You will have a coffeehouse book devoted

to *Leyla and Mecnun* for instance, or to *Şahmeran*. This kind of book is very precious, as it shows single minded focus.”

Your eyes wandered over the shelves with excitement. You took several volumes down, glimpsed at their pages and put them back, searching no doubt, for the variety you had just described. After several tries you found what you were looking for, a velvet covered specimen, and gave a little jump.

“*Panageia Soumela!* Take a look at this *kuzum*. The beginning notes the dedication. See, this one is the book of *Tayyarzade*. Each tale that follows is a different take on the Tayyarzade story, with the date, the storyteller, and the place noted down. Sometimes the location is a private house and at other times a wine house; it doesn’t always have to be a coffeehouse, although it usually is. Nobody knows the scribe who writes the story down. He chooses to have no name. Out of humility, you understand, to signify he is lower in standing than the story itself.”

I found it liberating that a life’s worth of writing could never be traced back to the scribe, and that he would choose this from the start. “The fourth type of book is the most special. Sometimes not one, but several scribes will dedicate themselves to a single story,” you continued. “This is very rare as it requires all the scribes to love the same tale. Plus, in order to write together, they all must get along. To create the fourth type of coffeehouse book, the scribes must be lower in standing not only to the tale, but also to each other. I wonder if you have any examples here on the shelves...”

Ever since your arrival, I had been trying to make my father and Ruhi appreciate you, Kalliopi, but they considered you a whimsical hobby of mine. I told them you had passed the tests of true friendship. But since I had never told them of my difficulties in the harems, of how you had kept me safe, they did not understand my devotion. All they saw in you was an enthusiastic researcher – always reading, always writing – no different than our regular library guests.

My father and Ruhi made a habit of meeting in the afternoons, for coffee and companionship. After your appearance in the house, perhaps because I was less available, these sessions in the *selamlık* intensified. They analyzed poverty, discussed war, condemned the Russians, and pitied the refugees. I began to wonder whether Father had not picked Ruhi as a son for himself, rather than a husband for me.

Then came the day you shared a secret with me, and I finally felt I could be your confidante, the way you had been mine. We had been busy studying a book on *Keloğlan*, “*Canım efendim*,” you began with a twinkle in your eye. “Do you want to see a really special coffeehouse book? No one else has ever seen it.” We went to the attic. You opened the trousseau casket behind your mirror. I thought it would be filled with bed linens, and cushion covers, but it was filled with books instead.

You opened a thick volume. It had ordinary cow-leather binding, nothing too precious, but what lay inside surprised me very much. Every page had a drawing of a miniature coffee cup. They had been turned over for fortune telling and then re-opened and each drawing was surrounded by sidenotes. The shapes in the cup were the main story, I think, and the notes on the side foretold other possible futures. But it was very bad luck to read your own future, everyone knew that, I told you so with three clicks of my tongue.

“Perihancım,” you said, “These are not my cups, they are the cups of my clients. I am keeping notes to remind myself.” You looked proud, with your hands on your waist, and a cheeky smile.

Yes, your book was more beautiful than all the coffeehouse books I had ever seen. But it was also new, and so, less valuable. Your pages were not stained with different fingertips, they did not smell of tobacco, were not made dirty by drool and sleeping

cheeks. They didn't have the traces of men huddled in one single room night after night. I asked if your clients knew of these drawings.

"They would think I was trapping them in a book," you said, "*Mazallah*, they would think I was closing their *kismet*."

"You *are* closing their *kismet*," I wanted to say, but bit my tongue. This was the first secret you had ever shared with me, and I did not want to condemn it.

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Everyday you foretold my fortune, and that ended up in tales of other lives. You called yourself the storyteller of the cup.

"Perihancım, I see what is hidden in the grinds. The stories come to me once I take the cup in my hand. Once I read a woman's whole destiny, from beginning to end. Swear on my heart. It began in a house that was split in two. Her first task was to get out of that house. If she managed that, her path would be relatively straight. But, of course, we all come across obstacles on the way. Each difficulty this woman would face was disguised as an animal. The first was a lion, the second an ostrich, and at the end of the road, a scorpion. None of these animals were what they seemed. The lion was docile, the ostrich was proud, and the scorpion would rather kill another than itself. I told her she had to be like them to survive, to take the animals as example. She had to appear as one thing, but be another inside."

I loved it when you took my fortune in your hands, when you stared at the bottom of my cup, when you told me the moon had risen on my house, when you popped evil eyes with your fingers, and told me my life would be filled with travel and learning.

You said, “Matia mou, I swear I was going to say it before you, I see a fish here. Again. It is so big, *maşallah*, it is like the fish has wings, *Panageia*! This fish will take you everywhere. I see you will travel far and wide. With Ruhi maybe, or your Father.”

It was sad to see how much you liked my father and husband. At every opportunity you mentioned them in conversation, and complimented their various attributes. You respected them, perhaps because they owned such a big library or perhaps because they had money, or maybe simply because they were men and we depended on them.

“Their work will take them abroad again, except this time they will be going to a mystical land, and you will travel with them. To India maybe, or to America. You will take note of their travels, like a scribe. You will write many books. I see crowded assemblies. You will meet so many people. Women in long dresses. These women are helping each other, *Perihancım*, carrying each other. *Vallah billah*, I see they are black and white women. Ah, look at where my finger is, isn’t that a fat black woman? Swear on my heart.”

We had been reading about the suffragettes in America, and their work against slavery. No doubt your divining was inspired by their deeds. To us they seemed impossible and brave; I wanted to join them. Or to meet the suffragettes in England, that was another dream. To one day join forces with the Kensington Society, perhaps to organize a similar group of women in Istanbul. We contemplated writing to the Society, Kalliopi, do you recall? I eventually did, but that is a later story.

There were a lot of Istanbulites who interested us too, at the time. We talked about Crown Prince Murat V’s music as we readied our ouds, as we rubbed them with oil. We also talked about playwright Arif Kemal.

The first time I had heard of Arif was in 1873. Father had returned from one of his outings to the theatre with a cut eyebrow. He was bleeding slightly but looked enthusiastic. “A single play moved the people in a way no army ever could!” he had said as Feride Nine and I tended to his wound. Feride Nine reprimanded him for poking a beehive with a stick.

He told us the audience had taken to the streets after Arif's play. They had carried torches and called on Crown Prince Murat V to take the throne and then left a thank you letter at the offices of *Ibret* where Arif wrote. *Ibret* had published the letter, but the Porte had shut both the theatre and the newspaper down.

You knew of Arif through an article he had written on women at a slightly later date. I remembered it too:

"Some shall accuse me," he wrote, "of condemning our sisters, wives and mothers to a life outdoors, to a life from which it is our duty to protect them. But this is merely nostalgia for a past that no longer exists. Nations go forwards and never backwards and it is imperative that our women soar for the bird of civilisation to take flight. Our greatness is conditional on their freedom."

Arif was now penning a series of articles titled "What went wrong?" The themes he pondered were various. "What went wrong with the education of our children?" "How to keep the streets of Istanbul safe from cholera," "All the problems with arranged marriages," "Habitual patterns of the highest civilizations."

As I was cutting Arif's daily column from *Ibret*, you left the room with a cigarette hanging from your mouth and a cloud of vanilla smoke around your head, and returned a minute later with an envelope.

"We have to write a letter to Arif," you said, "Surely, he would be happy to know women like us are reading him." Your plan soon gained a new dimension. We were not only to write to Arif, we were to write to him in disguise. "Don't stare at me like a nightingale with a mulberry in its mouth, let's get to it." This was the only way to draw the man in to the library, you said.

“My name is Ruhi, a humble translator at the Porte. I follow your work, your daily articles, plays and poems in *Hürriyet, Ibret, Vatan*. It is time to construct a better nation. Like you, I believe we must mould new words for concepts that previously did not exist. Words like freedom, homeland, and justice.

It would be my pleasure to discuss these notions with you, face to face. Would you honour me with your presence? Let us meet in my house by the sea where you might also find some books of interest.”

How could we have known that Ruhi and Father already knew Arif intimately, that he was one of those present at the secretive picnic? We decided to make rice pudding and celebrate our artistry, Kalliopi mou. I hope you remember our playfulness as fondly as I do. And yet I can’t help but wonder, would you still be with me today had we never penned that letter?

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When Arif arrived in the library, I felt like I was six years old again, or perhaps three. Our little game had worked; we had fooled him. Arif came in curious, with a big smile, and in clothes that did not fit him properly. I saw Feride Nine frown, sewing arms and legs in her head. She tried to pull his cardigan down so as to cover his behind sufficiently. Arif gave her a startled look.

Since Father was at the palace, Feride Nine guided Arif to Ruhi’s office where he sat and waited for my husband to start the conversation.

“So which books are of interest to you?” Ruhi muttered, posing a grunt rather than a question.

“You have been hiding a whole library from me, my friend,” Arif said reclining in his chair. “Start from any book you like.”

Ruhi raised his eyebrows to indicate the comment had not been appropriate. Even though many people were not aware of it, he explained, ours was the biggest collection in Istanbul. This had not been hidden from Arif, not at all; it had merely been unannounced. The collections were open to all those who took an interest in them, as Arif must have noticed, there were two signs in the library, one at its entrance, and the other in the hallway. The first said, “Step inside for books,” and the second, “This is the house blessed by your curious heels.”

Ruhi said his father-in-law had always dreamt of having a library, he had collected books from all his travels and also the regions where he had been stationed as physician: Ninawa, Thessaloniki, Jerusalem and Cairo. These samples alone had made up an exquisite visual assemblage as each city had its own calligraphy, illumination and bookbinding techniques. He had then gone further down into the throat of Africa, and since he had been beloved wherever he went, he had gained entry into the circle of copyists in Timbuktu, a rare feat. He had duplicated books from a long line of collectors known as the ‘Guardians of the Manuscripts,’ which were filled with magical incantations and spells from religions in which Islam and the heathen African traditions had mixed. Understandably, he had grown very fond of his rare collection and had decided against advertising it. But whenever anyone found him out, or stumbled upon the library by *kismet*, he was happy to guide them. Everyone in this library trusted word of mouth would reach the right ears.

Ruhi went on, “Once in Istanbul, my father-in-law spent years frequenting the mosques and copying their special collections by hand. He bought copies of all the scholarly books taught at the *enderun*. He visited the book bazaar in Beyazıt everyday. We have Byzantine and Ottoman dream books here, we have coffeehouse collections from Damascus and Alexandria, we have encyclopaedias of herbal cures and Friday sermons

and rare copies of the Qur'an. One of our most special specimen is the Qur'an copied by Ahmad Al-Nayziri and dedicated to Fath' Ali Shah Qajar of Persia. The writing dates back to 1112, while its illumination was completed in 1237. Father's dream is to one day put together all the dispersed pieces of the Blue Qur'an – which, as you know, is written on indigo coloured vellum with gold lettering and silver decorations – but he is too old for extensive travel now. ”

“May I possibly see the philosophical discourses of Epictetus, translated by Ali Ibn Mousa el Ridha?” Arif had to interject, aware, no doubt, of the difficulties my husband had with listening.

He probably posed the question as bait, not hoping anything would come of it. But copies of the dissertation were on the East wing of the library, in room eight. Ruhi led the way and I ran to wake you from your ill-scheduled nap, Kalliopi.

We kept our quiet until Ruhi excused himself to use the bathroom. Then you moved stealthily close to Arif, like a *peri* by evening waters. In the dimming daylight your eyes were more flirtatious than ever. You whispered in his ear that we were the ones who had penned him the letter, and done so without Ruhi's knowledge. Arif's surprised look was reward enough, but life got even better when he responded to us the next day.

**

All letters sent to you or me were first read by Father, and then Ruhi. Arif, knowing the customs and oddities of Turkish men, addressed the letter to both men but talked to us in between the lines. He told Father it might be a good idea to turn the library into a literary salon, “the best Istanbul has ever seen and the best for *our* purposes”.

“I can think of no better location,” Arif wrote, “right by the water overlooking the new palace, but still inside the city and not along the embassy crowds. We would have all

the reference books we need under our hands, access to all the great minds of the present and past. And from what I understand, there are also two women in the library, Perihan Hatun and Kalliopi Hatun, who would be keen to join our discussions. Being progressive men yourselves, I am sure you see the importance of women to political awakening.”

We were so excited by the idea of the salon that we didn’t realize we had set into motion a much bigger plan. The intellectual gatherings would in fact be a cover up for the meetings of the Young Ottomans. We didn’t read this in between the lines, but Father and Ruhi must have. The men would use the library to plan nothing less than a Sultan’s deposition.

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The Young Ottomans my husband had mentioned on our first meeting – the Dervish from the Sümbüliyye sect, the Levantine enthusiast of theatre, the Cretan army officer Süleyman Paşa, the villager Pazarköylü Ahmet Ağa, and others – began frequenting the library soon after Arif’s letter. While you kept busy with your coffeehouse books, your fortune telling dictionary, and your work on the *makams*, they asked me to keep transcripts of their conversations. I wanted to boast, but you laughed and said I was destined for greater things. Could I not come up with projects of my own? Why did women always have to serve others? How ethical were the discussions these men conducted in the library anyway?

You may have been reluctant to get involved with the Young Ottomans, Kalliopi. Afterall they were a secret society, and one that opposed the Sultan. I admit the Greeks get blamed for mutiny before the Turks, and revolts had been raging on your island for years. Maybe you were scared of the men, perhaps you were uncomfortable with the changing dynamics of the library; in either case, you retreated to the background once Arif’s friends

arrived. Your relations with him did not proceed beyond our initial game, and you made no special effort to meet the rest of the group. But I want to tell you of them, Kalliopi mou. The letter we penned together changed this library, and my destiny no longer makes sense without the Young Ottomans.

Arif had hoped our library frequenters would be talkative types, the way they are in Jewish libraries, so that their presence would veil the secret schemes plotted in the house. But the men who used our collections were young scholars oblivious to life, men who got obsessed by a sentence or two of mistranslation. Or old men with time to waste on their hands, booksellers from the back streets of Beyazit. There were a few who came just to be in the presence of the Qur'ans. They did not have a tendency to mingle or talk. With no debate to veil their conspiracy, Young Ottomans had to come up with a new plan that would mislead possible spies.

Arif must have taken notice of Kibar, whom you had invited to the house in your attempts to complete your *makam* book. You used to place him on a stool in the corridor and experiment with his vocal range, do you remember, Kalliopi? Kibar had given a few concerts in the house before, Father enjoyed listening to Turkish classical music when he felt melancholy. It turned out that Arif knew Kibar from some years back too. The two had met when Arif had staged his famous play, the one that had given Father a cut brow. The Armenian directors of the theatre had used Kibar to lure the Turks in; he had sung before each performance. Now Father and Arif had a similar idea.

"I used to fall asleep to his voice when he worked at the pier wine house," you said when I told you of the scheme, "The Persian lady I served lived by the docks. Kibar was poor but well respected. He had a following of men who cut their arms with razors as he sang. Small cuts but bloody never the less. Kibar can never erase that childhood poverty, it lays on him like a layer of dust." And you were right: there was yearning in his voice. We grew parched as we listened. The Young Ottomans decided Kibar would join us weekly to

give sunset concerts in the *selamlık*. They would listen for at most three songs, then go up the stairs to plot. The rest of the audience would never notice their absence.

And so Kibar sang in the living room while upstairs the Young Ottomans discussed ways to bring Crown Prince Murat V to the throne. I sat in on their discussions. They were charismatic men who talked not only to solve problems, but also to impress each other. Amidst their winding conversations, I noticed Ruhi began to miss his monologues. Rather, Ruhi missed me listening to him. He began to cling to me in our intimate moments; alternately like a savage beast and a crying babe. I tried mumbling words of comfort in his ears but they did not lull him into acceptance. Ruhi had never seen you as a threat, Kalliopi, but he was jealous of the men in the library. His one conquest, his intelligent, thoughtful wife, had abandoned listening to him so as to transcribe the words of Young Ottomans.

Kalliopi mou,

When I look back upon it, I think I can pinpoint exactly when my husband's long disappointment turned into despair. It was the day we added a new member to our entourage. You were working in the room of the coffeehouse books, and I was reading a book in the garden – I recall it was Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Letaif-i Rivayat* – when someone called out my name.

“Perihan Hatuncum!” Ayşe Hatun was crying behind the garden fence, her headscarf askew. She had a wooden suitcase in her hand. Very much like the one you had come to the library with, do you recall?

“That worthless husband of mine did it again,” she began. It was not the first time Ayşe Hatun had run away from home, but it was the first time she had chosen our house as refuge. Her husband, Ali Bey, was a weak yet sweet mannered man, reminiscent of stale coffee. Ayşe Hatun would hide money inside cushion covers, spice containers and under the mattress, but Ali Bey would find each secret spot and go to the gambling table. “This time he sold his honour, the worthless good for nothing,” Ayşe Hatun began to explain.

It was a terrible tale she told. This time Ali Bey had played a military officer at the coffeehouse. When he lost all their money, he had offered his home and “the woman in it” for the taking. After his tearful confession, Ayşe Hatun had broken a few plates, ripped the satin duvet covers down the middle, and beaten her husband with her fists.

“Ali said the Paşa would kill us both,” Ayşe Hatun told us. “I can clean for you, cook, sew, whatever you like.” But her life would be much easier than she imagined; Feride Nine never allowed anyone else to do the housework. All Ayşe Hatun did in her

time of hiding was to keep you and me company, and we were both glad for it. She might even have postponed our eventual separation.

Ayşe Hatun was one of those women who made everyone feel prettier and more intelligent than they gave themselves credit for. When the women in Kuzguncuk heard she had moved in with us, they began to visit the library regularly to hear her compliments, and to add a bit of spring to their steps. She was resourceful, too. Fed up with her husband's gambling, she decided to earn some money of her own. She asked us whether we could implement the gold days in our library.

I was opposed to the idea at first; I had an inclination to stay away from the habits of the poor. But you gave Ayşe Hatun the benefit of the doubt, Kalliopi. You even told me the gold days could be a way for us to reach out to women who normally had no access to a library. Once here, we would get them to talk about their true desires, about what they wanted to accomplish in their lives. And who knew, I thought to myself, perhaps some of them would decide to become activists and join the Young Ottomans. And others might want to read books, or perhaps make music with us and help you in your *makam* research. Maybe we could make clothes for the refugees who kept on coming from the Balkans, or help the sick together; the possibilities were endless.

"Every woman participating in the gold days puts a little bit of money into a joint pouch," Ayşe Hatun explained, "whatever she has managed to salvage from her useless husband. The money is then used to buy a gold coin, which is gifted to the host. Nothing much is done in the meeting apart from the usual gossip and banter. In later weeks, the same group collects money again and this time gifts a golden coin to the next host. You contribute whatever you can and the hosts take turns. In this way every woman ends up owning gold, which she could not have afforded on her own. Do you understand why I am asking you to host a gold day here? It is an investment for rainy days."

We sent out word. All the women in the neighbourhood were welcome, on the condition that we sit down and think together. “Meaning an organized manner of drinking, eating and chatting,” I said. My plan was to first replicate, and then to surpass, the meetings held by the Young Ottomans upstairs. There was no reason we couldn’t hold parallel discussions the way we led parallel lives.

During these assemblies you read the cups and predicted resourceful futures. I opened up each topic we had discussed with the Young Ottomans, we even went over the articles Arif had written. We debated schools of our own, earning wages for housework, working outside the home and earning a salary through professions we chose, performing music in public, writing and translating like men did, getting some seats in the parliament soon to commence. I remember us being happy, Kalliopi, but perhaps you would recall the time differently. First the women were shy and small. Then, your predictions, accompanied by Ayşe Hatun’s compliments, let them expand. They began coming up with new ideas: “We could perhaps divorce our husbands with three words, the way they divorce us,” one of them said, “or we could start teaching each other skills.”

If each woman taught another what she knew, and on she went and taught three others, and on they went and did the same for another three, soon all women in Istanbul could embroider, take care of wounds, bake for the Ottoman army, and keep minutes of important meetings.

**

It had been Ruhi’s idea that I keep records of Young Ottoman conversations. “That will help with our archiving,” he had said. Once the gold days took off, I began transcribing those too. The women’s folders I locked up in a cupboard, just in case. I know you

unlocked that cupboard, Kalliopi, and that you continued to collect fortunes for your book in this way. Your perfume permeated the transcripts, but I said nothing.

My life felt complete. You were with me. All the books I could ever want were under my hands. Our house had become a meeting place for the brightest minds in Istanbul, and the only place I knew where meetings for coffee, cakes and fortune telling had turned political. Yet as life got progressively better for me, it got progressively worse for my husband.

Time and again Feride Nine found him in the kitchen outside of meal hours. She marked her territory clearly, outlining the oven, the samovar, the pots and pans with her bony fingers, and said she was the Sultan of this kitchen. The Sultan, the mistress, the Emperor, the Queen. But my husband continued to appear in it without invitation. "Like a fat, tormented ghost," Feride Nine commented. She threw Ruhi out of the kitchen with a broom. His moustache was soaked in syrup, his pride was hurt, and yet food was the only thing that supplied the comfort he sought. Feride Nine began moving the desserts to secret locations in the house.

Ruhi gave up eating, and started to talk instead. He announced each thing he thought, felt, did, wanted, read, dreamt. "I am trying to become one with you Perihancım," is how he put it. He talked till I fell asleep and even as I slept, and sometimes I awoke at night to find him talking still. I escaped to your room. When I told you all this you clicked your tongue, which was neither here nor there. Father was the only one who sympathised with Ruhi. Sometimes he listened to him, and at other times he dozed. While this offered some consolation to my husband, it did not satisfy him in the long run.

Ruhi began to build a shed outside the house, just where the herbarium began: a place only for himself, a shelter where he could be King. Seeing his melancholy face from the tiny windows made me joyful, there is no reason to lie. Even though Ruhi had treated me fairly thus far, and even though I was as free with him as was possible within the

confines of a marriage, I couldn't help but feel his presence diminished mine. Him being in the shed meant I could organize my days as I pleased. But my husband held my hand, and told me he was lonely. When I did not respond appropriately he withdrew altogether. In spite of his distance, every morning I brought him *cilveli* coffee with double roasted almonds and every afternoon sage tea from the islands. I guess I felt guilty, and despite myself, I also missed him a little. Especially when he looked at me with sad eyes and did not utter a word. Soon, perhaps to discard me altogether, Ruhi took a *mangal* to the shed and began brewing his own coffee. After a while, what could I do but ignore him? Only time would tell how wrong that decision was, Kalliopi.

I continued to file the transcripts. I pushed pen onto paper every day; each page felt like it had veins. I re-read what I had written in bed, which felt colder than before but also bigger. I corrected spelling mistakes in the morning, and then, slowly, and with trepidation, the mistakes the Young Ottomans had made. With Ruhi gone, I had all the time in the world. All the time and all the focus. First I changed a word or two, then I shortened boring passages, then I began to add what should have been said.

And soon enough, I was writing in the real sense of the word: thinking through words.

**

Hüseyin Avni Paşa's entrance into the salon disoriented us all. I remember Ruhi making an unusual appearance out of his shed to introduce him to the Young Ottomans. "You may know the Paşa from his successes in Crete," he said. I did not know much about these battles, we were used to losing wars as of late, but for the men in the room the Paşa's presence signified victory.

Hüseyin Avni Paşa had risen in the Ottoman army quickly, the Young Ottomans told me, and had been one of Sultan Abdülaziz's favourite officers until a disagreement. The word in the streets of Istanbul was that their fall out concerned a woman of the imperial harem. The Sultan had exiled the Paşa to the East as punishment, from whence he had just returned.

Before Hüseyin Avni Paşa, the Young Ottomans had had tame conversations, Kalliopi. They had believed public opinion could depose Sultan Abdülaziz. Arif told me that at their first picnic, ten years ago, the plan had been to expose the misdeeds of the Sultan's viziers with a petition. But an exiled state minister had done much better. He had voiced what the Young Ottomans thought, but had not dared to say: the minister had sent the Sultan a draft constitution. The Young Ottomans had taken it upon themselves to print 50.000 copies of it. They did not know if the proposal ever reached Sultan Abdülaziz, but it had surely made its rounds of the city. Nobody, until that exiled minister, had dared suggest such a concrete solution to the Empire's decline; a charter and a parliament headed by Sultan Abdülaziz. That letter had caused Istanbulites to discuss a change of governance, could the Ottoman Empire become a parliamentary monarchy?

The Young Ottomans had put all their energy into publishing critical essays once that discussion began. They wrote for both the Ottoman populace and European publications, criticized a variety of official policies, and offered parliamentary representation as remedy. It hadn't taken long before the Porte began shutting down their journals and banishing their writers, editors and redactors to islands cut off from civilisation. The forbidden words Young Ottomans wrote in Turkish, French, English and Italian, the walks they took every morn to their clandestine offices, even their angry trots on board ships heading for exile, they had each seemed to serve a purpose. But now, ten years into their secret society and without any viable impact, Young Ottoman hopes were ebbing.

They had faced several difficulties. The Young Ottomans had to come up with a new journal every month to divert the Porte. The changing titles confused their readers. Some of them began subscribing to wrong periodicals and lost their convictions in the process. Financing the printing costs was another problem. Young Ottomans never had enough money to return their losses and were forced to go under different sponsors whom they did not fully trust.

Now Hüseyin Avni Paşa was offering a solution that had little to do with words. He suggested the group act on behalf of the people, rather than wait for them to rise to the occasion. The Young Ottomans had done all they could via publishing, and the public opinion had turned. There was no reason to stall any longer. They should demand that the Sultan leave the throne. Requesting such change from Sultan Abdülaziz would be suicide, of course, unless they acquired the help of the military which Hüseyin Avni was willing to provide.

Süleyman Paşa was the first to cave in, “Only because the alternatives have been exhausted,” he said as way of apology, “and on the condition that we guarantee a parliament after the event. The truth is Sultan Abdülaziz will never agree to an assembly, and we must replace him with Murat V if we are to have any hope of inaugurating it.”

At that secretive picnic many years ago, Alexandros had made a similar offer. “Nobody took him seriously then,” Arif told me. Alexandros’s dream had been to create a new Byzantine Empire ruled by an Ottoman Sultan, a Greek-Turkish enterprise: “I can confirm there is no better Emperor for the Greeks than Crown Prince Murat V, and I can organize a loyal brigade of soldiers to make him Sultan.” The men Alexandros had in mind were all in Greece, dreaming of the day they could reconquer Istanbul.

“But he also wanted a parliament, so we let him be,” Arif said. “And we were clear with him that we needed a people’s uprising, not a military take over. Plus the point of the assembly was to give everyone equality, not to privilege the Greeks over the rest.”

Now Hüseyin Avni Paşa was repeating history, minus the Greek soldiers, and the dream of a new Byzantium. The Paşa had Ottoman battalions positioned in Taşkışla, ready to serve without asking any questions. Ten years in, the suggestion of arms received less opposition. But could a parliament really be the people's will if the military were involved?

The Paşa sat quietly amidst the guilt that had settled on the shoulders of the Young Ottomans. As they voiced opposition, frustration, disagreement and worry, he smoked. When his *nargile* stopped gurgling, he excused himself and went downstairs to listen to Kibar.

I joined him a short while later. He turned to me and asked "Perihan Hatun, may I bother you with a question?"

Half timid, half excited I nodded yes.

"I have been wondering," he said, "about where you have hidden my treasure."

I did not understand at first.

"Is she behind one of these curtains? Or is she perhaps hiding within a closet?" He talked to me pleasantly, almost purred. "Ayşe Hatun's husband is a worthless man," he continued, "we agree on that. But you understand, I cannot be blamed for his weakness. I must be given what I was promised. Has she sought refuge with you?"

My first instinct was to get away from him, Kalliopi, yet I felt glued to my chair. Kibar kept on singing, passion distorting his features, clueless as to the content of our conversation. I tried to be as charming as the Paşa himself.

"She might be behind the curtains, efendim. But you are a gentleman, a *beyefendi*, and such a man would never force a woman out from her hiding, if that is where she chooses to be." With these words I excused myself and climbed the stairs up to your room, two at a time.

When I relayed the conversation to you and Ayşe Hatun, she began to cry on the spot. “What kind of a man would gamble for another’s wife?” she asked. “How could such a man be an officer?” you joined. “How can he be a member of the Young Ottomans?” I wanted to know.

That night, after all the guests had left the library, I visited Father in his room to ask for his take on the unexpected discussions in the salon. The Young Ottomans had kept looking his way for encouragement or admonition, but Father had remained quiet throughout the meeting.

“These are no longer my decisions to make, my rose,” he began, “I have collected all the books I could, and taught the young ones everything I know. They are the ones who will have to live with the consequences of their actions. They must choose on their own.”

“But I want to know what you think Father,” I persisted.

“If we follow the Paşa we succumb to brutal force,” he said, “but if we follow our reason, we have no strength against the Sultan.”

**

I must admit my feelings for Hüseyin Avni Paşa were confused, Kalliopi mou. I felt both attracted to him, and threatened by him. Each time I caught his sharp gaze, I felt he saw right through me, and that he liked what he saw, which added a feeling of gratification to my disarray. You distrusted the Paşa completely, and Ayşe Hatun was justly terrified of the man. She locked herself in your room each time he came by. On one of these visits, as the Paşa handed his coat to Feride Nine to hang, he said something that froze us on the spot: “The streets are filled with spies, don’t think there won’t be a familiar face amongst them.”

The library was always busy with visitors. I was afraid the Paşa had expressed a legitimate fear. Worse than that, I suddenly realized the easiest way to spy on the men in the library would be through the women. Maybe holding parallel meetings in the *haremlik* had not been such a good idea.

But your research came to the rescue, you even seemed happy with the possibility of a spy. “Not to worry,” you said, “What is the one thing we do everyday? I will develop a coded language.”

We would discuss all of our secrets through the coffee readings. The dog in the grinds represented an enemy, but for us he would stand for Sultan Abdülaziz. Rats were thieves so they would be the Sultan’s viziers Ali and Fuad Paşa. The Young Ottomans could be a number of things – owls lined up on a branch, ducks going up a hill, cats huddled under awnings – because they always moved in cells of seven. The moon rising on the house was the news of the dethronement, which we also referred to as “the auspicious day”. If the heart at the bottom of the cup was heavy, it was because we were in the time preceding that ascendancy. These new signs were only shared with Ayşe Hatun, Feride Nine, Esther and Roza – the eldest members of the women’s meetings.

“Under the nose of the spy,” you said, “we will replicate the discussions upstairs and she will understand nothing of it. I will prepare a dictionary tonight.”

I appreciated that you cared, Kalliopi, and that you made an effort to keep us all safe. Still, this plan seemed whimsical at best and did nothing to gauge my fears. But my consternation paled in comparison to the loneliness that was soon to follow. On an ordinary Thursday, while Kibar sang and Hüseyin Avni Paşa got into a heated discussion with Alexandros on the revolts in Crete, Father excused himself to retire for the night. He told Feride Nine to prepare *ayran* with salt as his blood pressure was low.

It was after dusk, I remember because the Muezzin coughed before reciting the call to prayer. Feride Nine found Father lifeless on the floor when she entered his study. I must

have felt him leaving us, for I found myself running towards them before she had a chance to scream. Deep wrinkles had appeared on his beloved face; suddenly he had grown old. Feride Nine said the lines looked like a map of all the places he had ever been, then she covered my eyes and led me out of the room.

**

The room of the dead should not be disturbed till the 40th day of *mevlut*, that is what tradition calls for, but I had an acute need to be in his company. We entered it by candlelight. The only remedy was to sit where he used to sit by the window side divan, cramped around his objects, seeking a whiff of his lingering smell.

The first things I saw were his house slippers. They were in the middle of the room, looking stranded. “What do you remember most fondly?” you asked, as I slipped my feet inside them.

I begun to tell you that it took us months to occupy this house. Even when we reached the third floor, even when all the calligraphy had been hung, and all his favourite dishes cooked, Father was distressed. He didn’t say as much, but I could see he was still waiting. Each time a package of books arrived at the library, there was a clambering and a sighing, as if after a lost lover, and with every single unpacking, I could see he hadn’t received quite what he had hoped for yet.

Then, a first parcel came to us by sea. Father untied its strings to reveal two large books. Their leather bindings had paled, but the gold ornamentations on their covers shone despite the morning mist. Father picked one of them up, opened its boards, and ran a hand over its title. A smile I had not encountered before occupied his face; he looked like a little boy who had launched a ship made of matchsticks into the waters. Soon his happiness would leak into every nook and cranny in the house because with each passing day we

received a new package. It was like pieces from a long lost puzzle were finally coming together, pieces that had managed to travel continents; one package came from his beloved Timbuktu, another from Jerusalem, another from Mardin, and other places the contours of which I remember Father tracing on the map, but whose names I forgot. Father set the books next to each other on a separate shelf. They stood tall, proud, and golden, and were the first thing you noticed when you entered his study.

I remember feast tables; Feride Nine spent hours in the kitchen making mezes to accompany Father's strange celebration. She began to hate the postman, who reciprocally hated the library. I remember Father coming home after a day of work at the palace – spring had given Sultan Abdülaziz a weak yet constant headache – and finding the postman tied to a chair with kitchen string. Feride Nine had not allowed him to leave the house just so he could return with another package.

"There is a limit to everything," she told my father with a raised index finger, "to my patience and to your books as well."

My father curled the little finger back into obedience with a smile that revealed his dimples, "But you are wrong about both things, *canım efendim*."

I vaguely recall the stories inside those long awaited volumes. They were about forlorn lovers, Genoese towers, spells of *muska* in curtain folds. I couldn't wait for sleeping time to hear more of them. The pages smelled like trapped sea. Those were the happiest days we had as father and daughter. That is my favourite memory, Kalliopi.

You asked whether I recalled the titles of the books, but I didn't. I only remembered they were taller than ordinary and that I disappeared behind their covers.

I wouldn't have thought of those childhood books had Father not died. Now that he was gone they seemed like a lifeline to him. As we searched for them I thought about why we had never read them again. I guess I had grown up and grown dissatisfied. Looking at the shelves lined with three rows of books, I knew they would not be easy to find in

candlelight. But the task of searching set an order to the 39 remaining days of mourning. On the 20th, it occurred to me that the books might be closer at hand than I thought. Father kept things he loved close to his heart. I knew the portraits from Jerusalem were underneath the divan where he napped. If the books were precious to him, he might have put them by the pictures. I threw away the cushions of the divan and you lifted the lid of the ottoman.

The solid frames of the paintings were visible under a velvet blanket. I unwrapped them and the smell of a horse-led carriage filled the room. In candlelight, mother's face looked distant still. Side by side my parents were beautiful, yet sad. Father did not mind that mother was looking elsewhere. Right under the portraits I glimpsed the old, familiar faded covers.

I had no strength left in my legs and sat right down on the carpet. Seeing the books without Father had made his absence palpable. I closed my eyes because I didn't want to see their title or the name of their writer. I didn't know whether I wanted to unearth this secret or to bury it back out of respect. I decided to leave it up to you.

"Perihancim," you said finally, "matia mou, this is no story book. It is an Encyclopaedia of Istanbul."

**

For the next nineteen nights we did what Father and I used to do back when the encyclopaedia first arrived in the house; we sat by my bedside and read together, disappearing behind the covers of the thick, leather volumes. I will always be grateful to you for those nights, Kalliopi, despite what happened afterwards.

The first entry in the encyclopaedia was about stairs, the next one about a passageway. The third article contained a list of dead-end streets: 'Hurt by this Town,'

‘Daughter of the Midwife,’ ‘Enter without Knocking’. The writer continued with entries on Istanbulite lunatics who resided on these streets, and recorded memorable events that happened to them in the houses, brothels, and wine sellers of their neighbourhood. The entries were not in chronological order; some took place in this century, others in the sixth. I remember your eyes growing like fortune stones, you were torn between consoling me and rejoicing at having found this book.

We skimmed the pages and came upon an article on alchemical instruments. The vessels had arrows with descriptions jutting out of them that clarified little to you and me: the alembic, the retort, the cucurbit. We saw drawings of wooden pestles inscribed with four letters ‘Ma’an’, and it occurred to me to inscribe all the books in the library with Father’s name. How long would that take?

We read the Galata bridge entry next. I knew it was your favourite landmark in the city. The article had a footnote in it about a coffeehouse. This coffeehouse, the author wrote, hung from the bridge and was made in the 15th century. Its base was of wood but its walls were of glass. Fishing vessels stopped by it to order frothed coffees on the way out to sea. The best view of the sunset in Istanbul was from a seat in this establishment – a chair before which there were long queues every dawn and dusk. It watched the sun glitter on the waters of the Golden Horn, and saw the Marmara turn a darker blue with its absence.

But you and I were certain, Kalliopi, anyone who lives in Istanbul knows that there never hung a coffeehouse from the bridge of Galata. And yet the author had drawn it, and given directions to get there from Beyazıt, Pera, Kadıköy and Kuzguncuk.

You planted a kiss on my cheek, took the oil lamp and told me you would be back in just a second. Once you were gone, the room started to feel heavy. It was like Father was here, but unable to speak. I closed my eyes and read all the prayers I knew, which were quite a few, but by the time I finished you had still not returned. In all likelihood you

were searching the shelves, seeing if any historical source mentioned a coffeehouse on the Galata bridge.

When you re-entered the room, your face glowed. You had also prepared a glass of warm milk and honey. You told me to drink it, stroked my hair and said yes, it was utterly incredible, but there was one such mention of a coffeehouse, in Çelebi's guide to the city. You had never come across it before. Could it be that this encyclopaedia held the whole city within it? Could we just read the encyclopaedia, and know Istanbul much better than we ever would by walking it? Who did I think wrote this encyclopaedia, had my father ever mentioned where he found it, did I think we could find out who its author was, could we perhaps start tomorrow. But the more enthusiastic you became, the more I wanted to tame you.

"There must be something missing in it," I said.

"No, it is absolutely perfect. Every street is in it. Every building. Even the forgotten coffeehouses."

But Father had died, and it was clear to me, beyond a shadow of a doubt, like a rock heavy on my heart, that nothing would be perfect henceforth. I was beginning to dip in to loss, and you could not see it.

"It must contain several mistakes," I reiterated. "We can't even know whether those places ever really existed."

When I look back on that 39th night, I can see it was pivotal for us. On the one hand, the encyclopaedia had gifted my childhood back to me. On the other hand, the 39th night was the beginning of your withdrawal.

"You always want what is not there," you said. "It is exhausting."

You stood up and pranced the room, uncertain as to whether you should keep silent or speak. But then you were never one to keep thoughts to yourself.

“That husband of yours, there is nothing wrong with him. He talks a lot, so what? Tell him to stop. His breath smells, so what? Stuff cloves in his mouth. You say he uses you, but you used him to get me in the library. You should learn to appreciate what you have, Perihancım.”

If I had wanted to hurt you at that moment, I could have. I could have told you what my husband really thought of you. That you seemed hollow, and that your hair was thinning. I could have mentioned that I defended you against him.

Instead, I watched you shake your head, “I find it so gloomy to talk to you,” you said and your curls gave off a rose scent. It was unfortunate, really, that you found my pessimism so unbearable, when you were the only thing I considered absolutely perfect.

My life changed, Kalliopi, because Father died, because we found the encyclopaedia, and because you tired of me just as my dependence on you peaked.

Kalliopi mou,

It has been two years since Father's death, six months since your departure, and about four months since my confinement in this room. I must admit, I have brushed elbows with madness more than once. When you were in the library, even in moments of sadness, there was reprise. You would chatter away, read my cup, play the oud, or sing. If boredom overtook us we would walk up and down the corridors like small children, and imagine we were on route to another continent. It is the stillness that is most disconcerting now. I do not like the silence. It reminds me of all the life that used to pulse in this library, but is no more. Still, not all is dark, Kalliopi. Some time after the keys were locked on me, I received a guest. Someone who knows the old days well, someone you like very much. There is one day in the week now in which I am blessed by a beautiful voice.

He comes strictly on Thursday evenings, and through the window. The doors of this house are not only closed to me, but to anyone who may want to pay me a visit, and so Kibar, the brave soul that he is, climbs up the ivy that has overtaken the library. This is the only way he can avoid Ruhi. He gets in through the window, then sits by me with scraped knuckles and holds my hands. It makes me cry. Kibar tells me portions of the Ma'an story. Remember the four letters carved on the vessels for alchemy? They were not letters, Kalliopi mou, but rather spelled out a name. A woman's name. I later found a little entry in the encyclopaedia mentioning her again, and decided to conduct further research.

Many things make me hold on now: the hope that you may read these letters one day – where there is a will, there is a way – Feride Nine's steps up and down the creaking stairs, and Kibar's disjointed ramblings about the girl Ma'an. He gives me the illusion that I am travelling towards the East, that I have finally moved out of this house and this city.

Perhaps, any day now, I may be forgiven for what I have done and the doors of the library will open for me once more. Till then I shall continue writing to you from the desk that is firmly planted by the window.

Once you began tiring of me, after the 40 days of mourning were over, I started frequenting Father's room on my own. I tried to please you, truly, I tried to believe our discovery was perfect, but I could not stop thinking about the flaws in the encyclopaedia. I read the entries at night when the library grew quiet, for the Young Ottoman meetings continued despite Father's death and the rooms were filled with conversation. Only when darkness fell could I hear the cicadas in the garden, and then my own thoughts.

One part of me wanted to agree with you Kalliopi. If the encyclopaedia was flawless, people could cease walking Istanbul's meandering streets. It is easier to read than it is to live, and might even prove more pleasurable. Also, if the encyclopaedia had every single detail in it, I would have been the most interesting person I knew. My life indoors wouldn't have been a source of sorrow. But after days of thinking, while I was reading the third volume with pen in hand, I finally discovered what I had been looking for. Rather, I found the absence of it.

Why would an encyclopaedia that had entries on the most beloved lunatics of the city throughout the centuries, articles on its notorious women, singers and swindlers and its vessels for alchemy, as well as the methods of its fortune tellers, healers and saints – why would such an encyclopaedia have no entry on Istanbulite djinns?

I am not sure that for the Greeks the djinns are as important as they are for us, Kalliopi. I never asked you whether you believed in them because that would have required talk of the encyclopaedia, and you no longer wished to discuss it with me. You have the Panageia, your angels, and saints. We have faith in them too, but additionally, we believe in the djinns. There is not one Muslim household that doesn't mention them in

conversation, in passing, in hopes and fears of the future. Yet there was no trace of them in the encyclopaedia.

The more I read, the more surprised I was with the accuracy of my discovery. I couldn't find anything on the djinns under 'Smokeless Fire', or under '*Surat al-Jinn*'. I checked 'Hidden in Plain Sight' and even 'King Solomon' but my search proved unfruitful again and this failure thrilled me. The encyclopaedia suddenly gained vistas, ruptures, and crevices. It began to breathe under my hands. Its misspellings and forgetfulness charmed me. With such a crack in its architecture, I could enter the majestic building. I commenced to construct the missing article.

**

The Djinns of Istanbul

Djinns are shaped by their country of residence, just like we are. The djinns of Bombay, Naples, and Damascus might as well be different ontological creatures, but the ones in Athens, Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Alexandria resemble each other closely. They are like distant relatives thrown across the East Mediterranean: similar, yet with subtle deviations. There is necessity to distinguish them and hence a need to write this additional entry to the encyclopaedia.

In Istanbul, djinns like sitting on island stilts and windowsills so as to watch the city go by. Every city has its pleasant corners, but not all of them have a room in which beautiful women are curated for the pleasures of a Sultan. Naturally, the imperial harems are hugely popular with the djinns. All that fuels their fiery psyche can be found in those rooms: bosoms, rabbit dances, jealousy, the fatigue of daily love.

Every city has its own music. Djinns in Istanbul move according to the rhythms of makams. They have understood these intervallic structures from the Orthodox priests in black robes, from the call to prayer, from the Cantors in synagogues, the alaturka and lullabies drifting out of latticed windows. Hüseyini makam for days of sloth, Acemaşiran for pompous pretensions, Rehavi for forking paths. They also like ordering their days in accordance to these melody types: Uşşak for dawn, Segah for midday, Nihavend for their nap, Zengüle for sunset, and Neva for the pregnant night. But before I get into their movements, we must ask ourselves a question that is obvious but enigmatic: what are djinns really?

**

Father's room was bound to turn into an obituary, a tombstone, a summary, of who he used to be. After the 40 day *mevlut* was over, Feride Nine began taking guests upstairs so that she could narrate the dark destiny of the man whose room they were about to visit. Do you remember the clamour she caused, Kalliopi?

She concluded Father's death was from the evil eye; "a punishment for travelling too much," she said, believing the lines that had mapped his face had a supernatural origin. "And a punishment for wanting to own all the books in the world. Only God can do that. Even to dream of it is preposterous. Do the books remember him now? No! His clothes are still in the closet, the cup here is the one from which he had his last coffee. This cup remembers him more than the books."

If Feride Nine had known of the museums in Europe, she would have realized what a great guide she indeed was. She had the perfect knowledge of, and distance from, the exhibited object: the residue of my Father. Feride Nine had served Father for years and had

loved him in her own way, but like a cat, her loyalties lay with the house rather than the master. Even better than a museum guide however, Feride Nine gave inside information.

“He used to paint here,” she would tell the visitors, who were mostly strangers to us. Bookbinders Father used to visit, horticulturalists, acquaintances from the Porte, fellow doctors, and one or two random men who had happened to pass by just as Feride Nine was starting her tour.

“Sometimes he would sit by the window and stare at the waters – never a good thing for the healthy mind, I tell you – and he would write. He had many files listing the diseases of his patients and the details of their deterioration. It is sad; he wanted *ayran*, and the next thing I knew, he was dead. With a map imprinted on his face. I swear you could see Aleppo on it and the Holy Land.” Then, in whispers, “I don’t think he died of natural causes. I tell you, he must have contracted a curse when he went on his European trip. A man does not age like that just before he dies. Any day now Sultan Abdülaziz will die of it too. People should stay in their own houses, if you ask me. The devil likes strange countries. A perfectly healthy man does not expire like that overnight. It is a European malaise, mark my words.”

During the first months of Father’s absence, the easily irritable Feride Nine even made sherbet for the guests and seated them on the library chairs. I scolded her like never before, for shame. “Do you think we are a spectacle, does the whole city have to learn what happened to us?” But Feride Nine stood her ground. You told me to let it go, Kalliopi, I know, but I told her she resembled a goat on the bridge. Her superstitious ways were testing my patience. Looking back at it now, I cannot deny strange things had been happening in the house.

After we had discovered the encyclopaedia, the very next morning in fact, I had found Father’s room in complete disarray. Books were on the floor, cushions torn, glasses broken. Had one of the library frequenters wanted to pillage Father’s memory? Or perhaps

a Young Ottoman? I did not like any of the possibilities so I cleaned up the room myself, and told no one of it. I even talked to the room, told any djinn that might have occupied it to leave us in peace.

Then there was the case of strange litter in the corridors. Along the first and second floor, I found small balls of paper. Some were burnt, others wet and regurgitated as if a cat had been at them. Feride Nine took to rolling the lot into an even bigger ball, spitting on it with prayers, boiling the mess in holy water from Aya Pantelamion, and then chucking it into the sea. As you can imagine, I wanted to share all this with you, Kalliopi, but you had stopped talking to me beyond the necessities.

I sought a man's take on the events, but Father was no longer there to supply it. After his death, Ruhi had checked on me regularly, even if he had not moved back into the house. He must have felt lonely in the shed; the only people who visited him were two friends from the Porte, and sometimes, Hüseyin Avni Paşa. I noticed my husband had developed a new, nervous tic in my absence; he blinked rapidly for several flutters and then stared straight ahead like a stone. I decided against telling him about the litter.

After our confrontation, Feride Nine changed tactics and began taking the guests to see 'The Special Collections' instead. The Special Collections were no other than the reference books in Father's room. Some were behind glass-covered shelves, some in rotating libraries. He never changed their locations so as to find his sources easily. Feride Nine thought I wouldn't get angry if she labelled the room a different way, but then the incident with the books happened.

Every six months Ruhi Efendi would count and record our inventory of books. One misty November day he finished his calculations and instead of returning to his shed, he prepared himself a glass of mint liqueur.

"Perihan Hatun," he said, "I might be mistaken, but there seems to be a hurdle in the accounts."

“What kind of hurdle?” I asked.

“We are missing a few books.”

His comment jolted me. Garbage was a nuisance, as was Feride Nine’s behaviour, but losing books was a problem. Ruhi told me ten books were unaccounted for, and that there were gaping holes on the shelves where they used to stand.

The only good thing that came out of this was Feride Nine’s repentance. When she heard of what had happened, she put an end to ‘The Special Collections Tour’ and told her visitors that their faces would turn black, that on one foot they had told her a thousand lies, that she had loved them but her love had bit her in the ass, that the summer was a lie and only winter was real, and that they were, the whole lot of them, book thieves and “itinerant pussy lice.”

**

Following the loss of books, my husband and I united around the library the way estranged spouses unite around a child. We decided to put cages around the reading chambers. These caged rooms were ten in number. They occupied the first floor of the house and the wings. Ruhi had once read about a library kept by a priest up in the cold Northern countries, a priest who was also an avid collector. He had specialized in medical books and the lives of saints, and had cuffed his reader’s hands lest they attempt to steal rare manuscripts. That priest thought reading was prayer; Ruhi said reading in chains was prayer plus penance. You found the idea abhorrent, Kalliopi, but I was somewhat entertained by it.

“It is only appropriate,” my husband proclaimed, “We cannot risk losing books again. It would be such great disrespect to your Father’s memory. So we can either chain the books to the shelves or put cages around the readers.” Since we did not want to see the leather covers torn, Ruhi made the cages. They were of brass and shone when the light hit

them. Everyone who came to the library locked himself up willingly once we told them of the missing books. I brought the readers tea and sweets for their sacrifice. They would stop copying passages and smile at me with grateful eyes. If they wanted more tea, they would ring a bell. And if tea or coffee was ever spilled in those cages, no one thought to mention it. In time some volumes began to resemble coffeehouse books, that way we knew which ones were loved the most.

The Dervish and Arif came to the library often, in the early morning hours. They liked sharing the same cage. The Dervish prepared his classes for the *medrese*, while Arif worked on his theatrical works. Arif was tormented by the play he wrote in 1873, the one that had introduced me to his work and given my father a cut brow. He wanted to write a fiercer play that would turn the wish for Murat into a people's revolution, rather than just an eventful evening. But he was at war with himself. He crumbled up papers as quickly as he filled them. I would later straighten them out and be surprised at how bad his writing really was.

"There is a curse on me!" he said one day as I served them tea, "I wrote one good play and can write no other."

The Dervish looked up at him over his glasses, "Maybe you invited a curse upon yourself," he said and turned to his prayer beads. Once in a while, he blew a prayer on Arif's face to sooth his agitations.

**

The Nature of Djinnns

Djinnns were created to obey God and to prostrate before him five times a day, just like the rest of creation. The Qur'an says we were fashioned out of soil and that they were

fashioned out of flames. But Djinns live for much longer, and can traverse great distances in just a few seconds. They can see us but we cannot see them, unless they choose otherwise. Consequently they are knowledgeable about our kind and we are ignorant about theirs. What we have learned about the djinns, from the beginning of time until now, would not even fill a book.

Many curiosities about djinns remain unexplored and unanswered. I wonder about their families for instance. How many generations live together? Do they have fathers? Are there orphan djinns? One must remember that these creatures are made out of fire, but what does it mean to be of fire? It means to be dependent on fuel. Djinns are fuelled by beauty, by passion, by music. They love smoking. You can offer them cigarettes, ideally of Afghan tobacco: they like foreign goods. They adore gifts. They have a soft spot for mastic, especially if tied with red ribbon. In general they enjoy ribbons, and variations on the colour red. They like to watch sunsets. Some djinns are alone, some are married. Others live in large families.

Ruhi and I thought the cages would have solved the problem, Kalliopi. But one day, as I went about dusting the books in Father's room, I noticed our beloved encyclopaedia was no longer there. First I thought you might have borrowed it, and I checked on you, but you were reading one of the coffeehouse books in the attic. I went around the library in a storm, leaving no shelf unturned, till I arrived on the second story, and found the volumes at different racks. Their tall spines and golden patterns almost looked apologetic. Books weren't just going missing now, they were also being misplaced. The cages had not helped at all.

I tried to make the best of the situation. The changed locations led me to new discoveries. For example, under normal circumstances, the first volume of the encyclopaedia would be next to Evliya Çelebi's 'The Book of Travels,' but now it was adjacent to travelogues of Zanzibar. So I began reading about the fascinating history of this country, about its fat belly-dancing women who could undulate their private parts, and the young muscular fishermen who carried their boats ashore every evening.

I found the ninth volume of the encyclopaedia by a book on palace murders. The author was a Greek by the name of Adonis Andonyadis. I had to share this finding with you, our silence as of late did not matter. Do you remember the day Kalliopi? Feride Nine was making *kapuska*, and the whole house smelled of cabbage. At first you did not look up from your notes. But when I mentioned the theme of the book you were all ears and before I knew it we were sitting on Father's divan once again. Andonyadis had judiciously noted down the blood stained history of all the Emperors who had ruled over these lands. The ones who had suffocated the women they loved, who had put inattentive slaves in sacks destined for the Bosphorus, who had knifed enemies from the back, who had killed their own brothers, cousins, fathers and mothers. Andonyadis also wrote about Crown Princes poisoned by soup and *helva*, wounded with envenomed spears at war, during processions, in restful caves. Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans, they had chosen to kill in the very same poetic ways. In this, above all else, they had been united. The author had categorized the palace murders according to the tools employed, and this made for a gruelling and gruesome document.

I know Father had entertained several ideas when it came to the organization of the library; he had considered having an equal number of books on each floor. Every floor would have a theme, and the rooms would constitute subheadings. One day I heard him murmuring, "Is each book a unit or are all books by the same author equal to one unit? Maybe the union of complete works makes up an autobiography, hence only an oeuvre

makes one unit.” In such manner having confused himself, he had opted for random lists. He used to say that disorder could spell out new order. The library had made sense to him through memory, and it made sense to me because I had spent my childhood in it. But the random lists proved utterly useless when it came to recovering lost, or misplaced books.

**

Types of Djinnns

In ancient Egypt djinnns were the enemies of Re, and could appear in animal disguises as scorpions, snakes, lizards or sometimes as humans with very dark bodies. According to ‘The Book of the Dead,’ djinnns in the shape of crocodiles and monkeys could travel to the next world and then back, in just a few seconds.

Assyrians believed in different classes of djinnns. The ‘Gallu’ were sexless djinnns. The ‘Labartu’ were female djinnns from whom children had to be protected by necklaces of amulets. The ‘Rabisu’ liked stalking and bothering humans while the ‘Utukku’ enjoyed trapping them in deserts. There were djinnns that appeared half human, the ‘Lilitu,’ and djinnns that appeared as monsters, ‘Ardat lili.’ Then there were the ‘Adar Malik’ who liked to manifest as bright yellow birds. Assyrians thought only the pure hearted could see these sun coloured apparitions.

**

We grew distant from each other progressively, Kalliopi. You played your oud, your *lavta*, and your *armudi kemençe* but there was no peace in the music. You left many of my coffee cups unturned, which made the fortunes stick to saucers and viable futures disappear as

quickly as they had appeared. We were tired. Young Ottoman meetings grew more frequent while you applied yourself to your makam book, and to your ever expanding fortune telling dictionary. We couldn't sleep. The Young Ottomans were discussing the take over but they still had their disagreements.

One particular evening of discussion I grew so fatigued that I mistakenly added salt to their coffee, and the men worried whether I was capable of writing their thoughts down. I did write, exactly what they said, and I also summarized because my abbreviations were clearer than their full accounts:

1. Sultan Abdülaziz must receive the best of treatments once deposed.
2. Our deeds, words, and actions must coalesce religion and modernity. Everything modernity believes, Islam has said a thousand years before: for example *Biat* which corresponds to the social contract, *meşrevet* which corresponds to consultation, and the distinct roles the *ulema*, the Sultan, and the military fulfill corresponds to the separation of powers. These principles together make up democracy.
3. Crown prince Murat V must:
 - a) Create a constitution,
 - b) Bring the political exiles back,
 - c) And establish a parliament the moment he becomes Sultan: an assembly of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Turks and 28 others. Any hierarchy amongst these peoples must be demolished.

The men had grown too weary to speak their discontent or dissent, but I knew: Alexandros disagreed with the second premise as he was first of all a Christian and then a freemason; Arif was so taken by Crown Prince Murat V, he did not much care about what happened to Sultan Abdülaziz; Hüseyin Avni Paşa never uttered a word about a parliament or

constitution, he was only passionate about displacing the present Sultan, unable to forget how he had been banished East due to jealousy over a woman; the Dervish was the sole content person in the room, so he suggested they go to Eminönü for some pickle juice.

After they left the library I went to your room, Kalliopi. You were already asleep so I put myself next to you. We slept in perfect harmony, but only for an hour. Then an uneasy dream prompted me to wake up. I opened your coffeehouse book with the drawings of the cups and the foretellings. I could not help but correct your spelling mistakes, and I also added a dash of colour to the animals you drew.

“What have you done?” you asked me the next day, the coffeehouse book spread out like a stuffed bird in your hands.

The peacocks you drew, the dogs, mountains and rivers were all filled with the right tints of pigment. I flicked through the pages. “It is so pretty,” I managed, even though your face said I had done something terribly wrong. Even revolting.

You told me I had ruined the book, and that I had had no right to change it without your permission. I responded you had had no right to draw those fortunes in the first place; you had not asked the coffee drinkers’ consent. You closed the book so harshly its last page folded in on itself.

“Kalliopi mou,” I said. “Please rest, the last few days have been strenuous. Please forgive me.”

But you packed a bag and left the house in the middle of the night, just like a common woman. The next day you sent a carriage around with a big burly eunuch. He took all your research and European furniture away.

**

At first, I did not have much time to think of your absence, Kalliopi, because suddenly the glass had flooded over. Our luck had tipped. With one unexpected development: Sultan Abdülaziz was dethroned one day prior to the date the Young Ottomans had set. I did not understand why this was such a big problem at first.

Arif paced up and down the room like a caged tiger cub and swore flamboyantly at the absent Hüseyin Avni Paşa: “ungrateful villain,” “son of a donkey,” “feed the crow and it will poke your eye.” Arif had learned the details of the event from the messenger boy Mutlu and thought the events despicable, all the Young Ottomans did.

According to Mutlu’s account, Hüseyin Avni Paşa had gone to retrieve Crown Prince Murat V alone, like the deposition had been his idea only. He had instructed the soldiers to surround the Dolmabahçe Palace by land and sea, had taken Sultan Abdülaziz off the throne and upturned order without ever mentioning the Young Ottomans, the will of the people, or the wish for a parliament. He had not announced the beginning of a local modernization, or the need for a constitution. These were the reasons for which the Young Ottomans had dared depose a Sultan. Without the necessary declarations, the act would seem violent and random to the people; the work of a deceitful general. Which is exactly what it had become. “He hijacked our plan, and did the worst he could do with it!” the Dervish said. A revolutionary act, a people’s uprising, had become a mere military take over. Alexandros began to chain-smoke.

Hüseyin Avni Paşa himself appeared at the library two days later: proud and unbothered. He did not regret having changed the date of the deposition or acting on his own. “You wanted the old Sultan gone and I took care of your wishes,” he said, “what is there to complain about?”

Arif looked like he might attack the Paşa who was three times his size. Alexandros said they should get down to drafting the constitution, now that the events could not be reversed. But Hüseyin Avni Paşa was not interested in a constitution, nor did he think a

parliament was wise in an empire of 32 nations. “In fact, it is the ideal recipe to ruin it altogether,” he announced. It was the first time he had voiced such clear opposition. Arif said that they had fed a snake in their midst, the Dervish’s face turned chalk white, Alexandros shut his briefcase and left the library without a word.

In the *haremlık* I told the women you had left us. Before they could comment, I also told them about what we had achieved: a tyrant no longer ruled the empire. Instead, our new Sultan would be Murat V, and he was a sovereign open to innovations in all aspects of governance, including rights for women.

Your departure paled in the face of our victory, Kalliopi. Ayşe Hatun made a little dance that made her bosom jiggle, Feride Nine cupped her saggy breasts in both hands and squeezed them in relief. It made me laugh when we continued sipping coffees as if nothing had changed. Except, there was no longer any need to camouflage the Young Ottoman meetings with music. No longer a need for your secret language, or for your dictionary of symbols. That day we read the cups in a simple manner, for the first time in a long while.

I wrote to the Kensington Society in the evening, certain that we presently had the means to do something no one had thought of before. There would be collaborations with European organizations now that Murat V was our sovereign. The Kensington Society and us, we could establish a women’s library together. The first of its kind in the world.

**

Djinns amongst the Arabs and Turks

Before Islam arrived to the lands of Arabs, they believed djinns lived in fountain depths and treetops. Those of Kureys thought the djinns to be little gods who ate, fought and lived in clans. Storms could be traced back to the djinns, as well as madness and the plague.

Turks used to worship rivers, mountains and lakes before they became Muslims. They thought all of nature was imbued with grace. Turks, before Islam came to their lands, prayed to a go-between spirit of water who is now forgotten, but who, once upon a time, protected them from beings of fire.

Kalliopi mou,

During my first days of imprisonment, my thoughts were quick and my emotions undisciplined. I grew agitated and angry almost every hour and tried desperately to claw myself out. Then came the time I accepted defeat, which is when my thoughts calmed and the days grew longer.

I have had plenty of time to reflect since then. My life can be summarized in three simple headings: the encyclopaedia, the Young Ottomans, and Kalliopi. And yet I am not sure I managed to decipher any one of them. Of these three, you were the one who hurt me the most. A simple case of unreciprocated love, I know. Yet it feels much less mundane when you are on the receiving end.

I imagine you have found a new shelter in Istanbul, Kalliopi, and that you are busy as always. Working on your music, books and fortune telling. Reading and learning. Sometimes I wish you happiness, but mostly, I wish you were back in the house. Even if we were distant and silent, and even if you stayed angry with me, I would still prefer a life with you, to one without.

This is where I stand now. But when you first left, with every passing day, I had mourned you less and less, *matia mou*. For a short time, I even felt fuller and more like myself. I must admit, the thrill of a new Sultan had a hand in my well-being. After the tainted Young Ottoman victory, the smells in the library intensified and spread like a veil. The rose whiff you had left behind, Feride Nine's delicious fried onion aroma, Ayşe Hatun's powdery incense, but mostly the bouquet of coffee with cardamom or mastic. I asked myself over and over, Has *Allahu Tealla* imbued a double dose of fragrance to everything? Has my nose grown larger? Has the world expanded? Why did I not smell

these things when Kalliopi was here? But the changes did not only occur in my sense of smell.

I began to see in minute detail; even the veins of the sweet basil by the windows grew visible. I watched how they carried water upwards. How the tomato plant in the kitchen stretched towards the ceiling. I could sense a small trembling of the ground from Feride Nine's steps, and hear the melody of her breaths like my own heart beat. I also felt more like a woman, and everyday the coffee cups proved it. The friends who read my fortune were all too polite to name what they saw. "I see a very steep hill," they said. "A mountain," "Sharp rocks," "An umbrella," "A tent." I found myself longing for Ruhi and was dumbfounded. I found myself longing for Hüseyin Avni Paşa and was appalled.

My senses were awakened. I felt hands caressing me as I walked. A gentle palm rested on my buttocks, stroked its heavy, slow movements. A bird's feather fanned me as I slowly dripped sweat. I felt small kisses on my breasts, a slight pull at my nipples and all the while a warm whisper in my ear calling my name, though with a strange accent. Ordering me to open myself. You will be amazed, he said, at all the things I will show you. But as hopeful as the days were, my nights were heavy with convoluted visions. In one remarkable episode I was taken to a sunken palace, Kalliopi.

It was a rainy day in the dream. I had a wish for travel. A wish to re-take my childhood's journey from Jerusalem to Istanbul. But I had grown old. I looked down at my hands to check if this was true. Was I old? My hands were veined, and misshapen; they trembled. The Bosphorus rose. The rain pattered louder and louder, it blocked my ears. I could only hear my own breathing. The same voice whispered: I will take you to see the fruit of your labour, but I didn't want to go with him. I had a dress of red velvet that felt like lead. I squeezed my eyes shut.

When I opened them again, I was in the palace. It looked like it had been underwater for years. The carpets were no longer red. They were covered in sand and

seaweed. The wallpaper had come off in batches. On the pillars there was moss. All around me it was quiet and dim. I walked behind a shadow, he led me up stairs of marble.

We came upon a corridor with many rooms. Walked towards the third door on the right. The shadow pushed it open. We saw a man sitting at the corner. It was the Dervish. He was reading the Qur'an, but he was naked. After looking at me with hollow eyes he went back to reciting. There was another man looking out a window with his back to me. He sat before a desk and watched the rain erase the other side. I walked closer to him and could smell holy water.

Suddenly there was a clamour behind me. Two men entered the room. They lifted the man by the arms. I saw he had been carving his signature, his *tuğra*, all over the table: Abdülaziz. They forced him on his knees. Arms outstretched like wings. They found the lifelines and cut them with jewelled daggers. The blood spurted out. It was darker than real blood. I looked down and saw my dress was black too. The shadow went to sit on Abdülaziz's chest. Like a *karabasan*. I went and sat on Abdülaziz's stomach, and with both of us weighing him down, the old Sultan died.

**

Djinns in Islam

According to Ibn Farabi, djinns are of those who do not talk, or die. In Ibn Sina's writings djinns have transparent bodies and an ability to change shape. Frequently, they are talkative and eager to please.

The experts of kelam say djinns can be known only through revelation, and never through the senses. No one has paid this warning much heed however. Interpretations of the Prophet's hadith and the verses of the Qur'an regarding djinns have created new fields

of science. The intricacies of manipulating the djinn have led to sorcery manuals, and a discipline called 'Ilmul Azaim'.

Various sources agree that prophets have been sent to the djinns, but there is disagreement as to the nature of these prophets. Some claim they were of the djinns, others that they were human. Yet others claim there were assigned messengers amongst the djinn who borrowed revelations from our world and carried them on to theirs. The Qur'an states in surah 'al Baraka' and surah 'Ibrahim': "Hear us djinns and humans: have we not sent to you prophets of your own kind?" It is safer to conclude then, that djinns have prophets of their own whom we will never get to know.

I wonder about the female amongst the djinn. They too are of men and women, the Qur'an says, "I have made you in pairs so that you may know one another." How do their women pray? How do they tame their husbands? How do they satisfy themselves? Would they befriend us if we did something remarkable?

Order was restored soon after Abdülaziz's dethronement. Sultan Murat V granted amnesty to those in exile. The journalists, playwrights and storytellers who had used forbidden words began to return to Istanbul. Any day now, we hoped, the new Sultan would hold a meeting to outline the first parliament of the empire. It would not matter then that Hüseyin Avni Paşa had turned an uprising into a take over. And so the Young Ottomans continued to frequent the library even after the deposition, and waited.

They drank and chatted; Kibar sang. Every night beds in shiny satin pinks and yellows were unrolled from out of the cupboards. The men slept next to each other like boys and were too drunk to mind. In the mornings Feride Nine made coffee in pots, the *cezves* were too small for our number. The library too, was beginning to get too little. But

the men brought olives with them. They went out and came back with garlic and yoghurt and cucumbers for *cacık*. Arif shopped for melons everyday. Alexandros taught Feride Nine how to make *musakka*, despite her complaints. We crammed on to the balcony, no longer just yours and mine but also Feride Nine's and Ayşe Hatun's and we buried our faces in the cool, red flesh of watermelons. We spat out the seeds into the garden. By the rose bushes, a hill of pips might give birth to a strange tree one day.

I liked watching the faces of the men as they slept. Ruhi was not here to reprimand me, or to tie me to one room to sleep in. You were no longer in the library to keep me company. I dozed in Father's room, and sometimes in the attic. Sometimes I just walked in the house, from floor to floor till the morning hours. I paused to read different books, at different desks, on different floors, with the different sleepers. I watched Ruhi's candles flicker in the garden.

In the morning, I found Hüseyin Avni Paşa on the third floor. He was clean-shaven and dressed in full army glamour, pacing the *selamlık*. To avoid any conflict I approached him with exaggerated respect.

As I walked towards him, we heard a distant scream. It came from across the water. I went for the windows to see what was happening. Hüseyin Avni Paşa and I bumped into each other as he rushed past me, and then down the stairs without an apology or explanation.

The men around the house woke up one by one. They joined me in the living room. We read by the window that faced the Çırağan Palace and the Feriye. We leafed through the pages in anticipation, certain that something unpleasant was coming our way.

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There are texts the Muslims revere whose meanings are not clear, 'Havas,' is one of them, 'Azaim,' is another. Their words attract the djinn; studying these texts is considered an invitation. It is interesting to note that 'Havas' and 'Azaim' predate the Islamic canon.

The djinns like fortune tellers. Since they live long lives, a good story must be crucial to pass the time. The best fortune tellers do not make eye contact, they stare straight at your head. This is because djinns like sitting on the heads of clients to read their destinies out loud. Fortune tellers merely repeat what the djinns announce. They talk slowly because they leave out the continuous jokes the djinns make. And if they are considerate, they also leave out news of death.

Djinns like storytellers, as much as they like fortune tellers. This is why storytellers have a far away look about them, and why they stare at walls when they narrate their tales. At the backs of coffeehouses, families of djinns dine as they listen. Some take baths, others fornicate. The helpful ones tell the storyteller how to continue the tale.

The holy book says djinns and humans can affect each other. It is widely acknowledged that the Qur'anic verses 'Felak,' 'Nas,' 'Bakara' and the 'Ayete'l kursi,' are the best methods for receding out of this influence. Djinns might get involved in lives for so many reasons. Sometimes they fall in love and are aroused, sometimes they want revenge because they have been disrespected, sometimes they are intrigued. At other times a woman or a man has a plot, a grand idea, and the djinns want to be a part of that.

A few hours later, we all got the news, Kalliopi. The whole of Istanbul did. The 32nd Sultan of the Empire, the falcon bearer, the idle wrestler, the man rumoured to love Napoleon's

wife princess Eugenie, the man who let the Empire down, let its people down, had died in his room in the morning, Abdülaziz's wrists had been cut; he had bled to death.

When Mutlu arrived at the library, the Young Ottomans were in silence. The boy was distressed. He kept on apologizing and said it had happened in a split second; he had not seen whether Sultan Abdülaziz had cut his own wrists, or whether they had been cut for him. Hüseyin Avni Paşa had been called to the palace immediately, it was he who had called on the doctors. They were thirteen in total, most of them with foreign names. They all agreed the Sultan had taken his own life. But Mutlu heard Dr Capalloene express his doubts as the thirteen of them left the Feriye for a wine house.

Arif started to pack in a rush, "We must go to the funeral procession. If we don't, they will think it was us." I saw the men panicking, looking for their proper clothes, asking Feride Nine where their night cardigans were, hugging me goodbye.

After the men left, I walked down the stairs and into the garden, Kalliopi. I headed towards the shed. Ruhi was reading inside. I pushed the door open. He turned around to look at me. His eyes were blood-shot, he had not shaved in days. A silence rose between us. It was in that small instant that I understood he was as disappointed in me as I was in him, that he had been feeling this way for a while.

"Hüseyin Avni Paşa had the Sultan killed, didn't he?" I asked him, "You brought him into this house on purpose. You knew what he was planning from the beginning, you collaborated with him behind our backs."

"I don't run this house anymore, my little rose," Ruhi said, "you have seen to that. It is not clear what you are accusing me of. Please don't be unreasonable. Go back to the library and rest. "

Many thoughts went through my mind after this conversation, Kalliopi. Perhaps I should never have offered another coffee to Ruhi after his first lie. Perhaps over-talking had been his way to cover up deception. I should have guessed the shed had only little to

do with me. It was hidden in plain sight and as such, the perfect meeting place for Hüseyin Avni Paşa and my husband to conspire against the Young Ottomans.

Hüseyin Avni Paşa had become the new minister of war; no harm would befall him now. If my theory was correct, the Paşa would protect Ruhi too. My husband would deny all his connections to the Young Ottomans. The blame for the Sultan's death would fall on Murat V and the Young Ottomans who had supported him. Murat V would be disposed before he could establish a parliament, and the Young Ottomans Hüseyin Avni Paşa disliked would be exiled, or worse. The two men had come up with a cunning scheme that left all of us in danger.

**

I took pen to paper and wrote "Sadly, because of the death of our Sultan Abdülaziz, we will not be opening the library today," and nailed the notice to the entrance.

The transcripts I had been keeping were in Father's room. I was slowly going to make my way to them. But first of all, I brewed Ruhi some tea. I left it by his door, which he had locked after our conversation.

On each floor I took the witnesses. I took books on revolutionary organizations from the first floor. From the second, I took Arif's poetry. I collected his newspaper articles. I took away proof that they had all been financed, once upon a time, by the minister who had sent a constitution to Sultan Abdülaziz. I took away the crumbled drafts of plays I had straightened and then filed, the ones that could not compete with his first, eventful play in support of Murat V. I took away the discussions on the Carbonari and their cells of seven.

On the third floor I took away our coded language. Your notes on divorce, the discussions we had held about the representation of women, anything that bore your name.

I took the summaries of the fortune telling sessions. I got the folders of correspondence between the Dervish and his students, all the lessons he had taught them, all the preparation that had gone into it. I took his sermons away.

From the right wing, I took Alexandros's drawings of imaginary and real buildings. The Gedikpaşa Theatre when it was still a circus. I took the drawings of memory Alexandros made for the little boy Mutlu, and the names of the hiding places – the little maps, the stairs, the directions to the seven houses to which he had been sent to deliver secret messages.

From the left wing I collected traces of the sevens. Then I went back to the main building and up to Father's room and took the transcripts. The notes I had begun making because I had believed I could be a better scribe than the Sultan's. Then I took the encyclopaedia that had made me believe I could spot absences and mistakes, that had made me lose you.

On my way back, the stairs were littered with what I had collected. I hugged each pile to my chest and walked on tiptoe. I placed them all in the garden, close to the water.

When the pile was big and beautiful, and as the sun began to set, as the heavy mourning canons were fired for Abdülaziz, I lit a match. The grass was dry. There was a hot spell. Had I blown my breath on the pile, it would have ignited. One match did the job. It was like the papers had been thirsting for fire, speed and strength. I took a step back and sat by the water's edge, dangling my legs, watching the Feriye Palace where a Sultan had died. Now they would have no reason to suspect us. Now Hüseyin Avni Paşa and my husband would have no proof.

Only when the fire roared did I hear the tea glass by his door shatter. Ruhi came out but he was too late. We are safe now from eavesdropping ears, whispering mouths, evil eyes.

**

Habitations of Djinnns

The 'Havas' mentions the favourite abodes of djinnns. Djinnns in Istanbul like the Yerebatan Cistern since it is always humid and dark. They take long walks on the Golden Horn, watch the city from the Galata tower. But only the 'Azaim' mentions their palace, and that only in passing.

The palace of the djinnns is not upright, the 'Azaim' claims. It was built downwards and onwards into the deep of the Bosphorus, and is made up of many corridors, and many rooms which you enter through different types of doors – a bit like our library, I think. But the doors in the underwater palace are of wood, and metal, shells, stone, and gold. Revolving doors, folding doors, sliding doors, hinged doors, a butterfly door. All surfaces within the descending palace are covered with moss and discarded objects.

Djinnns lock stories up in the rooms for safekeeping. But in going down deeper and deeper in to the Bosphorus, in collecting more and more tales, they are in continuous danger. Water does not agree with them, so they proceed through underground tunnels. Were the tunnels to crack, the deep blue would put them out.

Nobody knows just how deep the Bosphorus is. When you see a ship sinking in the strait, you don't see a trace of it again. Down it goes at a ninety-degree angle. If you part the red velvet curtains of the underwater palace, you can see ships sinking all around you. Trousseau caskets drifting with memories of far away places. Perhaps even a drunken octopus, seasick, shy animal of the deep.

**

Women who burn things must be kept safe from themselves. But I wasn't kept safe all at once, Kalliopi, it happened in stages. Perhaps Ruhi loved me after all. Maybe he needed time to take leave from me.

I was first locked within the compounds of the house. The garden gate, which had always been ajar, was closed. I sought but could not find the key.

Then Ruhi closed the doors of the library. The garden gates first, the entrance doors second, the kitchen doors third. Then he took me by the hand, and guided me towards my room. The room that had been home to the encyclopaedia, the room my father had left behind for me. He locked the door after himself. I waited.

I know I waited for a long time because I ticked off the days on my oud, the way prisoners do. After a week I began shouting his name. The Young Ottomans had left, they must have had plenty to worry about. You were no longer there. It is too optimistic, Kalliopi, to expect such devotion from friends.

The only food my husband gave me was *helva* and coffee. He wanted me to die of sweetness. He wanted me to die from the things I loved: the room, the books, the desserts, and the coffee. And the terrible order in this silence.

I pounded on the door, but fists make little sound and they hurt easily. My voice became coarse. I managed to repeat one sentence, till I no longer could: you will not bury me alive.

**

The 'Azaim' mentions a djinn named Kehribar, of the 'Adar Malik.' Born and bred in this city. Kehribar wears a purple dress with an infinite number of pockets in which he places an infinite number of keys. He makes a terrible jangle as he walks the streets. But to the pure hearted, he may appear as a peaceful, yellow bird.

I have come to discover that this Istanbulite djinn is old. He has seen more lives unfold than I can imagine. In time, he has grown fond of certain floors in the underwater palace. Fond of certain rooms, certain stories, certain people within those stories. For instance, the floor of the sailors with the unyielding noose, and the floor of the scribes with their crumbling books. The floor where the last gentlemen of Istanbul planned a revolution, and then failed.

That is where I like to imagine myself Kalliopi mou, in one of those myriad rooms. I am a part of a palace that keeps growing, that never has to end. A rusty old key opens me. A creature of God holds it. I have so much to tell. Kehribar loves me. I am sunken but not drowned.

3

Kehribar

The Messenger of Allah said: “The djinn are of three types: a type that has wings, and they fly through the air; a type that looks like snakes and dogs; and a type that stops for a rest then resumes its journey.”

As reported by Abu Tha’labah al-Khushani,
Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w)

This Being the History of Our Family

On an ordinary Sunday sprinkled with cotton candy *poyras* clouds, my father Zümrüt sat on a Golden Horn bench with his favorite lunch packed in oiled paper: fish on bread, topped with extra onion, rocket and a splash of lemon juice. It was the Christian year of 1698, my sweet children. The Muslim month of Recep, the Jewish day of Yom Rishon, and an hour that would change everything.

Your grandfather Zümrüt considered himself a “creature of polished habits,” at the time. Fancy language for boring, if you ask me. He was inclined to take the same walk every day by the shore of Eminönü, and to buy his fish and bread from the same vender around noon. The vender’s name was Yorgo, may Allah bless his triceps. An olive skinned, bulky man whom many locals had thoughts of seducing, but then Yorgo’s wife was blessed with an ample bosom. No one succeeded in disrupting the ardour of those two. Once your grandfather’s lunch was ready, he would sit at his beloved seat and eat his sandwich, with a view to the sea. He would look at the caiques, and at the bigger boats, and the rich people that came from Europe, and the poor people that went to Europe. And he would observe their small wooden suitcases, and how they carried so many dreams in their little hearts which thrust forth like a bird’s when they set foot on to those vessels, heading somewhere/elsewhere/anywhere out of Konstantiniye. My dear offspring, little Zümrüt, who was my father and your grandfather, used to be most reliable – so reliable in fact that he bordered on the unimaginative – until the day with the cotton candy clouds in which he found an encyclopaedia on the edge of his seaward bench.

The book your grandfather found was bound in faded leather, probably of goatskin as it had a grainy texture. Geometric lines had been indented on its coat, and then filled with gold leaf. “Like the calligraphy in the palaces of Alhambra!” your grandfather announced. “Like contours of pretty cheekbones!” He said its boards opened smooth like

butter, and that its endpapers had been marbled. Your grandfather was taken by the artistry of the encyclopaedia's binding and gilding, before he was enticed by its insides. He opened it with careful hands, mostly so that he could see its dedication. The encyclopaedia was larger and taller than ordinary so that Zümrüt's small body disappeared behind its covers. "Who would such a book be gifted to?" he wondered. Your grandfather was more interested in people than he was in books, and more interested in dedications than he was in stories until that fateful day.

But, my sweet ones, instead of a dedication, Zümrüt encountered the following somewhat confusing preface:

This is the Foreword of Those Who Have Prepared the Pages for Publication

We found these pages written in different handwritings, compiled in over fourteen books, packed in straw-coloured paper and tied with a simple string. The volumes were left on our doorstep, us being the brothers Nahmias, the famous printers of Konstantiniye, Κωνσταντινούπολη, قسطنطينيه.

We spent a long amount of time, fortunate reader, with these fourteen books. In themselves and with regards to each other, they were a confused and complicated collection, but nevertheless noteworthy. The volumes contained several treatises on alchemy, a full list of all the books ever written in the Arabic language, an ancient catalogue from Baghdad entitled 'Al Fihrist,' arguments on the geopolitical importance of precious stones, and the history of bridges, as well as coffee, the locations of wish trees spread over Anatolia, and other articles of interest. We wanted to publish all this incongruous knowledge but had no good reason to, which is why we decided to come up with such a reason.

Our ancestors had travelled from Spain to Konstantina, escaping from that vicious Queen who decided to chop off the heads of every heathen. Muslim or Jew it didn't matter, they were the same kind of non-Christian to her. So our forefathers escaped on donkey-back – not the first such escape our lot had experienced – and took a long ride towards Eastern lands. Sultan Beyazid II welcomed us to this city himself and told my great grandfather David, “What kind of a Queen is this Isabella that she has impoverished her own country and enriched mine?” Meaning we, the Jews, enriched lands and empires, which dear reader, was the first time our people had received such a compliment.

In Konstantina my forefathers found the gate to happiness, both metaphorically and literally. The ‘Bab-ı Saadet’ is a small doorway in the neighbourhood of Phanar, it is rumoured that Sultan Mehmed II passed through it before conquering the Byzantine city. Our great grandfather and great uncle decided to settle right down next to it, and they set up a publishers which they named after themselves – the same way they would later name their offspring. Work picked up quickly, their first title was Rabbi Jacop Ben Asher’s ‘Four Orders of the Code of Law.’ At that time our family had the only printing house in the whole of Konstantina and catered to many languages: Hebrew and Ladino, Greek and Arabic. My forebearers left us a business on the brink of success, and my brother and I, we raised the stakes and made the Nahmias Printers prosper.

When those fourteen books tied with string arrived on our doorstep, we knew it was time to take a risk. We decided to compile and edit the texts in as orderly a fashion as we could. The new publication would be our first in the Ottoman language, and commemorate the 200th year of escape from the Spanish inquisition. A tribute to the city of Konstantina and to Sultan Beyazid II, and also a homage to our gate of happiness.

What else to call this collection but ‘The Encyclopaedia of Istanbul’? Needless to say, benevolent reader, we are of those who believe if an unsigned package arrives at your

doorstep it has been put there by G-D. It matter not whether it contains a cat, a book, a dog, or a babe inside; G-D requires that you adopt it.

This introduction, as important as it may sound, was not the real bullet, my children. The real bullet was a footnote that came just a little bit later. A small and whimsical seeming commentary which was hidden underneath an article on ‘The Order of Babylon.’ But don’t be fooled by appearances, my pistachios, the footnote was anything but small and whimsical.

Grandfather Zümrüt finished the introduction, skimmed through the encyclopaedia, and came first upon the entry, and then upon the footnote while struggling with the last bit of fish bone caught between his teeth. Something in his insides churned once he spotted the writing, churned so much that he became an unpredictable man on the spot. He fell in love with the footnote the way he had fallen in love with your grandmother Elmas: meaning he fell in love and that was that, he was dedicated for life. Never needed a second reading and just as well, because one minute your grandfather held the thick book in his hands, and the next minute he had lost it. A---H works in funny ways too.

**

The encyclopaedia was lost for centuries, sweet children. But, as you have learned by now, while a man can forget his first suck on a nipple, the pain of a growing tooth, even the feel of his earliest step, a djinn never will.

This might be a good time to tell you that humans have the ability to forget, and the luxury to misremember. Their anamnesis has unusual propensities. For instance, each time they recall an event, they do so differently. They also efface information of which they

have no use. And it may be that two people experience the same event, but never agree on what really happened.

Us on the other hand, we remember everything we have ever lived, and do so flawlessly. Also, and you must be prepared for this my pistachios, we live for a very long time. Our memory is so big and so wide it threatens to overwhelm us. At times I think we are like malformed children whose hearts grow larger and larger, and finally overtake all other organs. For it is the heart memories weigh most heavily on, and not the mind.

So, even though the encyclopaedia was lost, your grandfather Zümrüt remembered its prologue, the footnote he had fallen in love with, and the article to which it belonged perfectly. Not only that; he had already grown possessive of his recollection. “The footnote was addressed to me!” he said. Of all the people and the djinns in the world, he was the one who had found the encyclopaedia on that lonesome bench in the Golden Horn. “How is that a coincidence? The bench was my favourite.” It was highly probable, was it not, that the encyclopaedia had purposefully made its way to him: “It must have traversed great obstacles to fall in my lap!”

His discovery of the encyclopaedia made Zümrüt grow a beard, put on a turban and become a believer overnight. But he could not explain why a book that had chosen him, had also chosen to abandon him by getting lost. In later years when anyone pointed out this discrepancy to your grandfather, they were ordered to wash their mouths. “Don’t you know the best of all feelings are blind?” he would ask, and instruct the doubtful to contemplate love, justice and *kismet*.

Your grandmother Elmas was pleased with the sudden change in her husband at first. Pleased, that is, before she knew what had caused it. Your grandmother was a devoted Muslim who had long been attracted to authoritative, bushy beards. In fact, the first evening Zümrüt appeared before her clad in a green turban, she was both rejoiced and aroused. Your grandparents spent that night talking of God, and of how he had blessed

them with companionship, and they thanked him – with lustful sighs and busy hands – for endowing them with long, wet, sweet nights of love making. They knew Allah had not favored everyone in that manner; many loved those they did not want to bed, and many bedded those they did not love. It was after their foreplay that grandfather Zümrüt revealed why he had suddenly become a believer.

“Isn’t it marvellous, love of my life, an encyclopaedia chose me! It has marbled papers and a gilded jacket! Praise be to Allah.”

Clueless of the encyclopaedia her husband had just found and lost, Grandmother Elmas put the Qur’an aside and buttoned up her shirt. “What in heaven’s name are you talking about Zümrüt?” she asked.

Now, let us focus on the footnote your grandfather Zümrüt fell in love with, and the entry to which it belonged, for your grandfather knew his wife would want proof of the lost encyclopaedia, and what better evidence than its very own words? He began reciting:

The Order of Babylon

Thus was the world created, with men and djinn inside of it. And men were fashioned out of earth and were gifted curiosity, and the djinn were made of fire and gifted memory. And for a while men learned everything, and the djinn remembered it for them, but then men fell into evil and the djinn memorized their confusion.

Then came the time of Babylon, when all men united and spoke a single language and in that language there were no arguments or mistakes or shortcomings but only jokes, and compliments, and words of love, and riddles and most importantly, knowledge. The King of Babylon built seven cities equivalent in number to the seven planets, and he built seven palaces into those cities, and crowned them with the seven scholars who in between

them shared the knowledge of all things in the world. For a long time the seven wise men ruled in peace, mimicking the perfect harmony of the planets, and wrote their books.

But soon strife fell upon them once again, and the seven cities divided into sects, and the sects fell into discord and the books were burned and the books travelled and the books they dispersed. Until another ruler came, who turned disagreements into agreements, and who made friends of enemies and who collected the scattered books, and stitched volumes back together.

Thus there are wise men in every age, and there are those jealous of wisdom, and the wise men of every age collect whatever knowledge they can find, in whichever way possible. And the fools of every age lose what they have inherited, forget what they have learned, and ignore the books others have written before them.

Your grandmother Elmas had folded her arms and begun chewing mastic in irritation. She did not look impressed. “Wait till you hear the footnote!” your grandfather begged:

May my prophecy unravel like a long thread!

There are those who remember better than others, and it falls upon them to write down the words of fragrant mouths, the accounts of travellers, and the deeds of nibble fingers that turn copper to gold. Oh ye of the vast memory, know that beautiful stories will be forgotten unless you remember it for them.

And since djinns are fond of prophecies, and of incantations, and of magic spells, and since the footnote sounded like a combination of all of these, both Zümrüt and Elmas prostrated on the ground after this last delivery. It was then that your grandfather edged closer to your grandmother and whispered his blueprint for their lives into her ear:

“Listen to the encyclopaedia, Elmas, we are the ones of the vast memory! And we will create an archive, you and I, an underwater palace! We will collect the sum of our lives and every good story we have ever heard. And then, when we find the encyclopaedia again, we will add our own tales to the marbled pages. Praise be to Allah.”

**

At first your grandmother took Zümrüt in stride, she even went along with the idea of collecting stories, for which djinn doesn't like eavesdropping? But naturally an underwater palace was out of the question. Was Zümrüt thirsty for his own death, why not a palace on solid ground? But your grandfather told Elmas that a djinn must fear other djinns most of all, and then a djinn must fear the destructive force of humans as 'The Order of Babylon' made clear. Water was the only element safe from both djinns and men. "Water is home to sinking trousseau caskets, and purple fish, and the dizzying currents, and the drunken octopus – seasick, shy animal of the deep!" And yet, for all that, underwater construction was only the beginning of Zümrüt's demands.

Grandfather announced that, since the footnote so required, they would no longer be able to set foot outside of Konstantiniye. "Why in Allah's name Zümrüt? Who has ever heard of djinns that don't travel?" But the book was not called the Encyclopaedia of Istanbul for nothing, your grandfather pointed out. It had been discovered on the Golden Horn, so the stories to remember must be the ones created in Konstantiniye, or at least found here.

Also, Zümrüt stated that none of these plans could be accomplished by the two of them alone. "We will make children so that they can collect more stories," he announced. Grandmother Elmas stopped talking to grandfather Zümrüt after that. How dare he change their lives overnight, and without ever asking her opinion when the womb in question was hers. But despite her frustration, Elmas could not stop touching her husband at night. Your

grandfather had grown strangely radiant, and so determined and obstinate and foolish, so *manly*. Their intimacy gained a spicy quality, like they were not themselves, but two creatures uncertain of logic, and your grandmother lost the only leverage she had with Zümrüt.

That is how we came into this world, sweet pistachios. Your grandfather was the one who welcomed us, all by himself, without any midwives or helpers. Drenched in excretions, sweat and tears, he cried out, “A boy like Süleyman the Magnificent!” and went back in there to wrap the tree of life, the placenta, around his hands. That first eyesore was your uncle Yuvarlak. But then Elmas’s womb was filled again and again. Next in line was your aunt Ela, “A girl like Hürrem herself!” Then came Mafiş, of whose sex your grandfather was, and still is, unsure. The last in line was me: “And a little boy to seal our faith!”

Your grandmother’s womb, bless her soul, had become a vessel for scribal activity.

My Childhood was spent in Bookshops that Smelled like Home Made Jam

I remember long winters from my childhood: snow storms with thick puffy flakes, and short days that quickly turned into long nights during which your grandfather transcribed the footnote on a black board, and grandmother Elmas gave us each a *macun* stick as bribe. We cuddled by the fireplace and memorized the footnote the way children learn their own names. Strange at first, and inevitable ever after.

Each morning we read the footnote as prayer, and each evening we sang it as lullaby. They called us “Forgetful Scribes!” if we did something naughty, we were “Memorius,” if we did anything right. It was a difficult childhood, but as all childhoods

difficult only in hindsight. At the time we thought the missing encyclopaedia was what made the planets turn.

We were taught to have two aims in life, and to hold them above all else: the first was to recover the Encyclopaedia of Istanbul, and the second was to collect stories for it. Your grandfather organized excursions to the bookshops in order to find our holy book. We joined him just as soon as we could keep our balance in a caique.

My childhood – and your aunt Ela’s and your uncle Mafiş’s and Yuvarlak’s – came and passed away in the backstreets of the city, in bookshops that swarmed with cats. How delicious those expeditions were, my little ones. We would go down the winding streets of Eminönü till we reached the shimmering strait, and then hop on a caique – rather hop on to the shoulders of some family who had hopped on a caique and hold on for dear life – and make our way to Europe, which is what everyone called Pera. But before the rich neighbourhoods, we would have to climb the stairs of Galata, and on each step a different city appeared to view: from one step we saw a minaret, from another a lush garden, from another rotting pears and begging gypsy children. Then we walked to the bookshops that lined the side streets like afterthoughts. We spent long afternoons crammed amidst the smell of books, sickening sweet, like crumbled leaves or home-made jam. I thought this was what everyone our age did: the going down the winding streets, the hopping on caiques, the searching for lost things up the steps of Galata. I was surprised not to see more of our kind busy with winding, drifting, searching. I kept on checking mirrors, and shadows, and back lanes. I pricked my ears. But there were no other djinns amidst memorabilia, and broken book spines, and the thick glasses of the men who fixed them.

Oh how I loved those poor little souls that spent their lives in the backrooms of Pera bookshops. I coiled round their necks and fell asleep to the words they read. These men tended to disorder the pages as they stitched the books back together. Sometimes out of blindness, and sometimes because they had me on their shoulder.

But it took years and years for us to hear the encyclopaedia mentioned again, my sweet pistachios, let alone glimpse a page from it. Still, your grandfather Zümrüt never gave up. Once djinns see a thing of beauty, they never forget about it.

Apprenticeship

Our second goal in life was to find stories, and to commit them to memory, and then to place them in a room of the underwater palace. But before the memorizing and the situating, grandfather Zümrüt insisted we each hold a period of apprenticeship to learn the art of collecting.

The first to work was Yuvarlak. Your uncle had always been lucky, “My boy was born with a flower in his ass!” your grandfather used to say. His apprenticeship was the smoothest of them all; he began to stalk a storyteller and memorized each story the wrinkled man told. Yuvarlak ate his dinner and munched on his baklava as the storyteller narrated in a coffeehouse. He also fornicated with his girlfriends or boyfriends depending on the mood. Grandfather Zümrüt was very pleased with the quality of the tales Yuvarlak collected, but in time your uncle grew bored. He began to whisper into the storyteller’s ear. Night after night he made the man tell such dirty, blasphemous tales that they put ‘The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight’ to shame.

Auntie Ela chose a different path. She, like me, had a soft spot for the scribes who worked on books, the ones that sat at backrooms of small, elongated book stores and wore thick glasses resembling telescopes. First she memorized the books they copied by hand. Then she made the men stitch incongruous volumes together. Arab philosophers were mistaken for the Greek. Unable to conquer the boredom typical to our family, Auntie Ela began spilling ink. Chinese ink, Indian ink, Cretan ink – it didn’t matter as long as she could soil some pages. But it was when she began stealing manuscripts in progress that

your grandfather called it a day. Her apprenticeship was terminated and Ela was transferred into the kitchen, we all suffered the unappetizing consequences.

This brings me to my brother Mafış. Your sophisticated uncle was a shy and dull creature in those bygone days. He even cared a little for what others thought of him – the neighbours and distant relatives, and the new acquaintances to whom he tried to describe a normal, rational life in vain. All he wanted was what other djinns already had: families with ordinary jobs and lives, and the mundane problems that come with those. The other djinns had valid reasons, of course, for thinking us odd but Mafış felt left out. He grew overwhelmed by our quest for the lost encyclopaedia, the footnote and the stories to come. He loved us and hated us, he felt superior and inferior, he swore under his breath and apologized with tiny kisses. Mafış's heart was in constant turmoil, bound to explode or shrivel, and eventually his mind gave way in a bathroom.

The house we occupied at the time belonged to a poor Armenian family, and Mafış was especially fond of their daughter. When Mafış did not leave the toilet for a while, we assumed he was busy scaring her. When an hour had passed we called out his name, but all we heard from inside was a grumbling sound, like a hungry, greedy animal had finally found food. So we thought that maybe Mafış had come upon some cockroaches, or that maybe a rat had travelled up from the sewages and had poked its head from the *alaturca* hole in the ground. We didn't want to crowd Mafış, he was in puberty and in low spirits. Then your grandfather had to use the bathroom. We knocked and knocked and finally huddled together and used our shoulders to break the door – you had to let grandfather Zümrüt relieve himself whenever he wished, my pistachios, or you would incur his wrath. And what do you think we found when we entered the sacred domain? Mafış, perched on the toilet, facing us with big embarrassed eyes. Stacks of books lay by his side. Their covers had been torn and then chewed up, in all probability already lining his stomach and

giving him gas. We all gasped. What daring, what revolt! And the books had been innocent.

“I can’t help it!” he wailed. “I must have them. I just eat the covers. You can still read the books damn it, don’t look at me like that!”

We tried to feed him blank pages, but he said they did not taste the same. We gave him prayer books hoping they would discipline his appetite, but he just spewed them out; they came back up in ashes. No punishment worked, so your grandfather took it onto himself to go to the shops every week, and to get a pile of books no one wanted in order to sacrifice their covers to little troubled Mafiş. Your auntie Ela protested the unequal treatment profusely. She had gotten cooking punishment for thievery of books, and here was grandfather, doing the same thing himself and with no consequences whatsoever. Grandmother Elmas agreed and released Ela, choosing this opportune moment to return to her kitchen. In celebration she made a new kind of coffee with milk and wild Antep pistachios. It was so good for the digestion, we fell asleep on the spot.

The Underwater Palace

Once the stories were found, and committed to memory, the next step was to place them in the hands of water.

The house of memory was inside the Bosphorus, under the currents that swayed East and West. Its rooms grew like choral, jutting out, sharp and shiny, the way of beautiful things. Your grandfather spent his days listening for tales that would make his heart strings vibrate, and in the evenings, for many years, he dived into the intestines of the city, my sweet children. He dived into underground tunnels that curled and dashed and led him safely into sea, and there he built one room after the other, and he stole doors for that palace from the abandoned houses of Konstantiniye.

There was once a master called Bruno who came up with a theatre that contained the whole world. I guess our family was no different. Discover, remember, record and repeat.

Inside the underwater palace we placed tokens; objects that summarized each story we had collected. I carried a hundred keys in the pockets which Elmas kept on sewing on to my purple dress, and each key opened a door, and each door opened unto a token, and each token opened onto a tale and such was the flow of our lives.

Sailors, Hamams, Hunchbacks, Graveyards

And this brings me to my apprenticeship, sweet offspring. Let me begin my saying it was not easy. I came upon the idea of sailors. They would be strong, I thought, and well travelled. Little did I know that endless sea gives you dizzy spells, and hopelessness. The dirty smelling, tired travellers I chose for the stories were very sad.

They had rented a bachelor's flat in the docks of Karaköy while awaiting the next long trip out at sea. I spent a few nights with them. At the beginning they were not aware of my presence. Then they dismissed me as drunken *vesvese*, as a bad memory resurfacing. On the third night the moonlight in the room gave them an eerie feeling. Their eyes grew dark, like an ink fish had stung them, and they came to a unanimous decision to end their lives, there and then. The shame I felt, and the horror! I apologized over and over, and prayed the '*Al-Ikhlās*', '*Al-Falaq*' and '*An-Nas*' to prevent the calamity but they refused to hear me out. In brotherly fashion they attempted to share a single rope. We struggled a whole night long in the room that smelled of piss and moss. I had to untie the noose over and over, and the men stared at the unwinding rope in their hands and sobbed. I managed to prevent their deaths, but drove them mad in the process. It was the worst apprenticeship of all, but you learn from every mistake, my sweet pistachios.

I decided to choose the simple life and become a copycat. Yuvarlak had chosen the most lucrative path in following a storyteller, I concluded. But it wasn't so easy to find the right one. The man had to be hopeful and healthy, sufficiently entertaining so I wouldn't get bored, preferably handsome, and also zealous enough not to break from all the inspiration I would supply. I did not only want the perfect teller, I wanted the perfect man! And sure enough, I came upon him, because you always get either what you want or something even better. His name was Hayalci. He was very young when I perched on his shoulder, had only told two stories in a coffeehouse, but was already a master with words. At night time I recorded Hayalci's tales, and at day time I took deep puffs from my cigarettes, indulged in the longing I felt for him while watching the sunset from different stilts on the Bosphorus. Life was easy and sweet, until a very ugly, hairy man with a stomach like a rice bag found me on one of those stilts. He pissed on me. As you know, little ones, urine makes us visible to humans. I was infuriated and had just raised my finger to put a curse on him when he dumped me inside a sack, as if I was a kitten. How moist and hot it was in there! Oh how I wish I could have hissed and clawed his face, but I was no clever cat.

The man took me, enslaved me, and dressed me up like a woman. Alas, I set my mind to make the best of the torture, little pistachios. Because as the dervishes say: if your mind is a rose garden the world is a rose garden. If your head is filled with thorns the world becomes a thorny hedge. I tried to remind myself of the Sufis as I got taken to a hamam in a sack that smelled of unwashed balls.

**

Just before dawn is when the masseur with the big belly made us perform in the hamam. There were six of us, all pissed on in the same way, all made visible through the urine. The

sight of a captured djinn is true misery, sweet pistachios. I hope you never have to see it. The masseur put conical hats on our heads from which a long veil came down. With it we covered our innocent mouths, which scare humans because they look like an endless abyss of fire. The masseur then made us wear belly-dancing costumes with women's bath slippers.

I burst into tears at my sorry state. But never lose hope under such circumstances, my children. It must have been my *kismet*, or maybe my good deeds were finally paying off, in either case, the masseur forgot to drink the charmed olive oil which would have rendered me powerless against him. Instead, he quickly went to his register to count how much money he wanted me to make for him. It was an impossible amount. Yes master, I said, quick to accept. Since he had not completed the ritual that would entrap me, escape was just a shoulder away. But that shoulder had to belong to someone who was a little rough around the edges. I needed a man who would not notice my presence and snitch on me.

I took my new surroundings in. This hamam was not the clean kind. Oh no. Dry skin and strands of hair floated in the waters. Many a skull must have cracked open here, after a slip on mucus or sperm. The poor stayed overnight for a *kuruş* or two. Our job, as captured djinns, was to entertain as a dancing troupe. I decided to lie low for a week, so as not to cause any suspicion, and to find the perfect person through whose shoulders I could escape this prison.

On my seventh day in the hamam, I noticed a snoring hunchback on the *göbek taşı*. He woke up to our clonking slippers, and saw us shimmying and undulating our bellies like we had snakes inside. "Hop!" one djinn hit the *darbuka*, and we all swayed to one side. "Hop!" he hit the *darbuka* again and we clonked our wooden spoons. It was my turn to set pride aside and sing the song the masseur had taught me:

Let him be a gypsy Allah,

Please give me a gypsy,

Even if he is made of mud,

Let him be a gypsy,

He too is a gift from Allah,

Even if he is gypsy

Allah! Allah! Hop!

The masseur had his white towel wrapped around his treasures and was clapping away, happy as a clam. One of the older inhabitants of the place looked up, saw us doing the *hagala*, and turned back on his side with a *süphanallah*, having witnessed degraded djinns in other Konstantiniye hamams. The masseur brought us to a halt. “And now bring on the good deed!” he said. I had no idea what was happening so I copied the others; we took our veils off. The masseur brought forth a big Ramadan drum with heavy pestles and we began to stamp our backwards feet chanting:

It is Wednesday Allah, it is Wednesday,

It is Wednesday Allah, it is Wednesday!

What we did next was a surprise to me. We took the unsuspecting hunchback towards the pool and spat on his hunch. He could not help but giggle for our spit is most pleasant, sweet pistachios. Then his eyes popped in disbelief, for all of a sudden his hunch shrivelled under our oozing spit pools, hissing like cigarette ends on skin. His back straightened, and I couldn't help but notice that the ex-hunchback had a pretty good-looking face.

Seven nights of humiliation were plenty for me: I decided to settle on his shoulder. They called him Haydar. He didn't seem like the most interesting man in Konstantiniye,

but what can a poor djinn do? There would be plenty of time to find someone more entertaining once I got free. I had hoped Haydar would leave the hamam immediately, but the man was an unbeliever. He thought his miracle was only a dream, and decided to sleep some more. Meanwhile, the masseur collected *bahşiş* and the djinns snickered. They told me the wonders did not always work. They had tried to fix a blind eye once, but turned the seeing one out. Another time they had tried to generate hair, but the bald man had grown fur, and not just on his head.

I waited till everyone dozed off. Then, when no one was looking, I settled on the newly healed shoulders. The ex-hunchback was so unsettled from the miracle that he didn't budge at my sudden warmth. Once there, I was invisible to everyone else.

We walked out of that hamam in the morning, and straight into freedom. I smelled the *simit* fresh out the ovens. The gulls were shrieking and releasing themselves on trees, and teaspoons jingled in narrow bellied glasses on balconies all over the city. That day felt like the beginning of a new life, sweet offspring.

**

Once we left the hamam, I could have freed myself off Haydar's shoulders. But I grew curious as to what the ex-hunchback would do, and I am grateful I stuck around. Minute by minute, Haydar grew into a more handsome creature. I became aware of his muscular arms, his tight stomach and broad upper legs, I grew conscious of those crazy blue eyes of his, sweet offspring, what eyes! And when he gained the posture of a man who had never had a hunch, when he finally began to walk perfectly upright, I appreciated his gait in full and said *God is Great!*

But despite his confident trot, I could read hesitation in Haydar's mind. One part of him wanted to go back to an old boat in Karaköy, and to start carrying weights up and

down the streets again. He used to be a good porter, someone people could rely on. Another part of him craved a new self. Seeing as his body was as good as new, he decided on the latter. We walked to Kuzguncuk. It was not a neighbourhood I was familiar with. We had a sweaty walk up a muddy hill and on our first night out we slept under the stars, in the Jewish cemetery. It descended from the hill towards the sea and had a fabulous view. Haydar was delighted with the feeling of damp earth under his spine. We lay next to the stray dogs with the soulful eyes, and I watched Haydar hug himself to sleep like a small child. I did not sleep a wink. I wondered what it felt like to have a human body.

In the morning we walked down the graveyard with the dogs at our feet. We saw a most significant house by the shore. It must have started out as an ordinary *yali*, but in time extensions had been built on its sides like wings. Haydar creaked its small rusty gate open and stood still to listen. When no face appeared at the windows we walked into the garden. It was very big, and half of it was occupied by a glass herbarium. Haydar placed himself under some blueberry bushes, making sure the shrub covered him completely. And then, to my utter boredom, he fell asleep. The changes in his life, and the lack of certainty had fatigued the former hunchback.

Haydar had been asleep for an hour when the gate creaked open again. A dark, thin man entered the premises. His white cotton shirt opened like a sail with each step he took. Haydar watched him from the bushes, unsure whether he should get up and introduce himself. He also noticed, with a pleasant stir in his groins, that the stranger moved like a palace woman. The man wiped the sweat off his brow, wrung his wrists, and brought an amber cigarette holder to his mouth. To Haydar, each of these gestures seemed filled with elegance, like they had been practiced in front of a mirror for dramatic affect. The stranger's lips had a bluish tint to them, Haydar noticed, and they were now pouting with the expectation of smoke. He felt his heart beating faster and coughed inadvertently.

The thin, dark man who made Haydar catch his breath was Kibar, sweet pistachios. Yes, that singer whose songs you have all committed to memory. Kibar was taken aback by the creature who seemed to have risen from the ground like the dead. The ex-hunchback was covered in twigs and dirt, staring at him with wild, sea-blue eyes.

“*Selam Aleykum*” Kibar managed, a little unsure. Haydar simply nodded. “You must be here for the singing,” he tried again. When Haydar did not respond, Kibar began to talk. He talked about the forthcoming concert, his repertoire and throaty manner, how his trilling was different from the classical mode, and how he had mastered both, but Haydar didn’t hear any of it. He was looking the singer up and down, weighing him like a slave on the market. His first impressions were surprisingly accurate: Kibar’s shoes were worn indicating he was poor, the Konstantiniye accent he was trying so hard to emulate had not fully sunk in, the open vowels suggested he came from the Eastern provinces. Kibar’s eyes were lined with kohl, making him seem lustrous and shy all at once, and the ex-hunchback concluded that he would not meet a more fascinating man in all his life.

Haydar thought, “This man is my *kismet*.” Kibar blushed, it was almost as if he could read Haydar’s thoughts like I could. “A good omen sent to me by those djinns in the hamam,” Haydar considered, but did not speak, which made Kibar nervous, which then made him fumble in his pockets. “Perhaps I have found my gate to happiness,” Haydar deliberated.

Kibar dropped his white handkerchief to the ground. Haydar would remember the sway of that napkin, how it unfolded slowly with the wind as it fell. Kibar rushed into the house, escaping the scene as quickly as he could. He did not know what had come over him. He should not have been so forward. Haydar continued to stare, this time at Kibar’s back, lusting after his narrow waist and generous hips. Then he picked up the token of love – for that is what a white handkerchief is, my sweet offspring – and smelled the first scent of his Kibar.

Black Love

Haydar walked a hundred meters behind Kibar for the next few weeks. He became his stalker and shadow, his protector and admirer, and in his turn Kibar experienced a variety of feelings; he got scared and excited, was humbled and pleased.

Are you wondering what was going through Haydar's mind during this period of trailing, my sweet children? For a little while, Haydar thought he and Kibar could be friends. He tried to annul his desire with reason. The two of them could live as blood brothers, share a house like many bachelors did. They could cook together in the evenings, and at nights listen to each other's sleepy breath. There was love between friends, and sometimes it was protective, and jealous, and filled with laughter. All of it was wishful thinking, of course, it could only last until Kibar's body parts became manifest.

Kibar kept the curtains of his bachelor's house open. His shoulders were visible from across the street where Haydar stood and watched. Haydar had always loved the contour of shoulders, having lost his own so very young. Kibar's were slumped, like he was tired from sad thoughts. Haydar noticed, when Kibar got up to fill a glass of water, that his shirt was unbuttoned and that his naked torso was even frailer than expected. His chest was bandaged, as if he was nursing a new scar. But it wasn't the back, the shoulders, or the torso that convinced Haydar friendship with this man was impossible. It was the neck. The muscles contracted as his beloved sang from the throat, relaxed when he switched to the classical mode. Haydar wanted to see that neck every day. Also the waist, and the shape Kibar's head would leave on a pillow.

After meeting Kibar, Haydar's only stipulation for work was that it be proximate to his beloved. That is when I learned the garden in which Haydar and Kibar had met belonged to a library, my pistachios. I grew excited about all the rows of books, and quickly checked whether our encyclopaedia was inside, but came up empty handed once

again. The patriarch of the collections was a doctor curious about all sorts of natural remedies. Haydar didn't know the first thing about flowers or healing plants, wouldn't be able to distinguish rocket from lettuce, but he applied for the post of gardener anyway.

It was the housekeeper, a woman called Feride Nine, who would grant him the job. She was a raisin-sized creature with wrinkled skin, and such a filthy mouth on her she could have out-stalked any djinn. When Feride Nine had a headache: "Donkeys are mating in my head!" If you angered her: "I will plant a pine in your mother's pussy then hump all your relatives in its shade!" Left on her own, Feride Nine gossiped with the spirits she couldn't see, but knew were there – her long dead mother, her father, her sisters, her youngest baby brother, her nieces and nephews, all of them killed when the Yezidis had revolted against the Porte. They were a colourful bunch, those spirits, all the women wearing skirts on top of skirts, and in the most ridiculous colour combinations: orange, on purple, on turquoise. The men were scary, supporting long beards and vengeful eyes. They were not entirely certain of their own death. Only an ancient sorceress and Feride had survived the massacre, and only one of them without getting raped. The old woman had told Feride to leave for a house by the sea, had described it so well Feride had found it as if it had been in the palm of her hand. "As far away from here as possible, all the way in Konstantiniye." And no force – human or inhuman – could make her leave it now. But even the steely Feride Nine could not reject those sea blue eyes of Haydar's. She granted him the job, and that is when my life changed, sweet children. As Haydar began cutting bushes into useless shapes, and trimming roses much too short, I caught my first glimpse of inamorata.

Her name was Perihan: the only other person in the world who was as scared of boredom as I.

**

My sweet offspring, I wish I could have come up with a catalogue of Perihan, it would have been my inheritance to you, but I fell short. How to compile all her attributes in one single list? I cannot! How to reduce her into one object and lock her up in the underwater palace? Believe me, I tried, but there is no such token. All I managed was an inventory of what happened to your poor father Kehribar when he encountered the first love of his life.

Regarding my sense of sight, this is what happened, sweet pistachios:

The first thing I saw were bejewelled slippers entering a reading room. I caught a glimpse of them from Haydar's shoulders. I jumped to see more, and her eyes appeared. Almond shaped, and redolent of coal. Her skin was Eastern Mediterranean, like fragrant wood on which sunrays settle. Her thin wrists, then her oddly large fingers.

I made Haydar do consecutive jobs by the window so as to see her better: Haydar and I with shovel in hand plucking weeds that did not exist, us with seeds in palms, planting what we thought were herbs. My twig-like legs wobbled. There was no hope, but all the same; I created a choreography of jumps, and landed on her shoulder.

Two beliefs occupied her: the first was that she was worse than ugly, she was unremarkable, and the second was that she was intelligent above the ordinary. Both beliefs were false.

Regarding my ears, sweet offspring, this is what transpired:

She listened to everyone, exactly like I did. She was all ears to the men who discussed politics in the house; they wanted her to remember every step in their argumentations. All ears to her father who had begun to forget the order of his books. All ears to her friend

Kalliopi, who lived and read with Perihan, but who did not care about her thoughts or words. Perihan's voice tumbled out of her mouth like no other thing I had heard tumble. It was clear and sweet and poised and warm. She sang ordinary songs to ordinary friends on ordinary days, but I felt she sang extraordinary songs on extraordinary days and only for me.

Regarding my sense of touch, these are the queries that were never answered:

Now that I felt what I had once longed to feel, meaning, now that I had fallen blindly in love, I could not describe it at all. Being inside the feeling, I had no theories, only questions. How soft would her skin be? How scaly, how hard? How salty was her body? How moist? And the most deadly: how would it feel if I were inside?

Regarding my sleep, I was filled with confusions:

I rested on her. My little head inside her hair, my little body the size of her neck, my backwards feet firmly planted on her shoulder. I became her anchor, or so I hoped. Or maybe she became my rock, same difference. When she closed her eyes, I felt like lace curtains closed over the sea. I couldn't decide: should I sleep with her, or should I keep watch over her? When I finally nodded off, it was like there were just the two of us in a caique, rocking on gentle waves.

With this black love tugging at my sleeves, I went to your grandfather Zümrüt. What else could I do? He took me to Sirkeci, to the pink train station where travellers depart for Europe. "Let me tell you about black love," he said, blowing on his fingertips. When he dreamt his fingers lit up like wax candles, and to prevent this from happening he blew on

them continuously. Later I would discover that if there was anyone who knew of impossible love, it was he. But I did not know of your grandfather's secret past at the time. What I knew was that Zümrüt hid from the unfeasible in this train station: from the encyclopaedia, from the footnote, and from the sum of his life.

I balanced myself on the rails and readied myself for advice. Wagons passed, smelling of rust, perfume and sweat. Giddy thoughts gurgled in me from trains and love.

"It happened to me once, a long long time ago. You can't bury it deep. She was the bravest person I know! Once she put on a man's clothes, and walked all the way from Istanbul to Diyarbekir. No man would have dared! Don't tell your mother, my Elmas came much later.

It is a curse to feel, I know, but it is a blessing too. Rejoice in your burden, Kehribar! Do what you can against the despair. Steer away from anything shiny. Knives, mirrors, patience stones, marbles. They will reflect a changed face to you."

Perihan would never know, feel, think or taste me. There was no reason whatsoever to celebrate.

"Whatever you do, do not slump!" Grandfather Zümrüt said. Then he pried open my fist palm, and put in it a golden tooth. I was clueless. He patted my back, "One day you will understand, my son."

**

I tried, dutifully, to record stories with the rest of the family but I no longer had any inclination to leave my Perihan. Your grandfather took pity on me; he told them Perihan had proven a better source for tales than the sailors by far, and richer also than storyteller Hayalci, or the ex-hunchback Haydar because she transcribed political discussions, which

meant she linked the tales of several men. He said I had my work cut out for me, so the family left me in peace to dwell in my own misery.

I suffered many ordeals. In the summer of 1875 the whole of Konstantiniye smelled like Perihan, for instance. Every woman in the city used the same perfume based on almond flowers, and each time I took a stroll, I was reminded of my voluntary imprisonment to her. Also, Perihan took very long baths, the steam rising off her like mist from the mountains. She loved the feeling of water, which in itself was torture, and also made me feel ugly and betrayed. It led to nightmares from which I woke up amorous, with images of water sliding down her soft breasts, down from her rounded belly, dripping from her hairless, smooth genitals: meshing my lust and guilt into a single feeling, and poisoning me forever.

Perihan never got pleased, but wanted to. Perihan made her husband Ruhi amorous and content, but felt the insistent call of something else and something more: her own satisfaction. The thought of ending my life occurred to me more than once, sweet offspring. Not out of rancour, but mere desolation. Because it was so very difficult to only be a witness.

On the night Perihan lost her father, she also lost her balance – just the way I had the first time I saw her. The old man died of a heart attack, leaving all his books and the directorship of the library to Perihan. Secretly, with her friend Kalliopi, she entered the deceased's room at night. With the grief of the mad, Perihan believed she could somehow reverse her father's death. The key was to find a set of dusty childhood books. An understandable affliction, especially for a librarian, and her hungry quest could not be stopped for 20 nights. I felt nothing in that room, my little ones, no premonition, or intuition, just a receding of gums. If it were up to me, I would not have entered the chamber at all.

But when Perihan lifted the lid of the divan, my teeth turned so sore I wanted to pull them all out, my body tingled from head to toe, and my hair spiked like it was electrified. Kalliopi picked up the first volume, cleared the dust from its cover with the palm of her hand.

“Matio mou,” she said, as my heart was about to burst, “this is no story book. It is an Encyclopaedia of Istanbul.”

My Father’s Son

Little ones, for long and fruitless centuries, we were convinced that the earth had spread apart its legs and that the encyclopaedia had fallen inside. The friends and neighbours who thought us mad had come to the same conclusion, long before us. But no. We were all wrong. Only grandfather Zümrüt was right, he had always been right not to lose hope. The encyclopaedia had been resting in this crooked house, in this majestic library. It had come to settle right under *my little nose* unbeknownst to me. Of all the houses in Konstantiniye it had chosen the one *I* had occupied. And now, my family’s reputation could be salvaged. There was scientific proof to back our anchoring in one city.

When Perihan and Kalliopi left the room, I took to our house in Eminönü, the one we shared with the Armenians. I galloped like a horse, flew like a hawk, hopped like a rabbit. I pounded on our wooden door. Grandmother Elmas answered, her face was moist and smelled of a spice infusion. Her hands were tied with cloth to secure the henna to her palms. I ran past her and straight to your grandfather. I blurted the discovery out without ceremony, could not postpone our catharsis even a second longer, “I found the footnote, I found the encyclopaedia!” Grandfather Zümrüt placed the mat from Mecca on the floor and we all prayed in the direction of North-East, where that holy stone encircles and is simultaneously encircled.

One thing was clear: now that we had found the footnote – the driver of our destiny – we could not lose it again. The discussions lasted till the morning hours, as if we were fasting on a night of Ramadan. During the Sultan of all months we would be drunk from a lack of food all day, and then drunk from too much food at *iftar*. So was life, always too much, too little, too much, too little and then at miraculous moments like this, suddenly perfectly balanced between presence and longing.

Grandfather Zümrüt put a protection spell on the encyclopaedia so that only loving hands could touch it. The next evening, we went to the church of Aya Pantalemion, right up the street of Icadiye and mere meters away from our destination. An invasion must be preceded by holy fire, reflection and the poetry of Hafez. Remember this, little ones, you read three times ‘*Kuvulallahu Ahad,*’ and two times ‘*Elham,*’ and touch your hand to your heart, and open a page from the grand poet, who time and again, will answer your most pressing questions, worries and wonders. That night your grandfather did the honours and Hafez’s poem said:

O beautiful wine-bearer, bring forth the cup and put it to my lips

Where shall I go, tell me, you command me whence?

O King of goodness, I swear that I’m on fire

Since Beloved is at home,

There is no longer need for a pilgrimage.

We lit all the candles we could find, and when the sand was full we stuck them on to the pews. We sat around the golden goblets and the bejewelled crosses of that musty church, drank our tea, smoked, and adored God. Then the old priest came to ring the bells. We dipped our feet into candle wax, and left backwards prints for him to marvel at, unlocked the big gates he had just locked so as to scare his calcified heart, and ran down Icadiye

street tumbling and screeching like the unfurled parts of a horse carriage. And when we took a final left turn, my family saw for the first time the magnificent library I had grown to love.

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The six of us circled the house. We began praying the ninety-nine prayers at the end of which we said in unison: Allah is great, and only for the good do we move our limbs. The praying took a long, long while so that we were able to witness the moon rise like a plate behind us, and then move on top of us, and then begin to go down in front of us.

Once the moon began to set we entered the library through the chimney and the windows and the doors and the cracks in the walls, promising all the meanwhile that we were invading it only for the well being of the books. We would stay as long as the encyclopaedia needed our protection, and not a minute more. To own a house, you must use it and so we began our feast. We made coffee in the kitchen and plucked the tomatoes from their boughs. We stared longingly at the *helva* in the pot and stirred it a bit more. Auntie Ela got into the rubbish and adorned herself with some potato peel. Uncle Yuvarlak and I began making sexy sounds and moves on the divans with grandmother Elmas running after us, hitting the cupboards and pots and pans on her way.

We were amazed the household did not awaken from our banter as we proceeded up the stairs. Perhaps this was proof Allah was on our side; he had given them all a rock heavy sleep. And finally, reverently, we entered the room where Perihan, Kalliopi and I had discovered the Encyclopaedia of Istanbul.

Grandfather Zümrüt did not want to walk into the room like he was entering any ordinary place, so he went down on his knees and crawled all the way to the bookstand. The six of us followed suit like the tail of a pliable crocodile.

It was almost like the encyclopaedia had longed for your grandfather as much as he had longed for it; it fell from the shelf light as a feather. As though an experienced lover, it opened at the exact page of the footnote. This made grandfather Zümrüt sob, and he kissed the writing several times, with pearl like tears running down his face. I understood why he had been so taken by this book then. The encyclopaedia was different than the other books in the library, even an ignorant eye could see it. Each volume was rich, more than a thousand pages, but also light, not burdened by all the years and travels. Grandfather poked his head in between its chapters and inhaled the fragrant scent, letting out a moan that made us tremble. Then we all started shoving and pushing to smell the smell in between its pages.

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In the commotion no one noticed Mafiş's absence. Delighted by our discovery, tired from the occupation, stunned at our family's sudden legitimacy, we settled in around the candleholders, by the windowsills and curtain folds to rest. After the sun was up, your grandfather had to use the bathroom but the door was locked.

"You God forsaken disgraceful little book worm!" he started, trying to control his bowels by hopping from foot to foot. "If you have eaten any of the books in here, I swear I will eat you myself. I will kick your little butt into that toilet hole, do you hear?"

But it was too late. Mafiş had been at it for hours. He had more than a dozen books by him and all their covers were ravaged. We broke the door and found him crying.

"Kill me!" he begged. "Kill me so I don't have to bear this shame any longer!" He ripped open his shirt and bared his chest to grandfather Zümrüt, tearing all his buttons in the process. They scurried on the floor like beads from a broken necklace. "I sacrifice

myself to you, to our family, for the greater good! I am only a hindrance to you, forsake me!”

I could see your grandfather lose his resolve as he recognized his own features on Mafiş’s face, both their lips trembled, their long noses twitched.

“Allah has cursed you, little Mafiş,” he said. “You cannot help yourself. We must show compassion.”

And so we hung Mafiş up from his feet, the way you do with sheep.

The Morning After

The next morning Perihan entered her late father’s room and saw chaos had raged where Kalliopi, she and I had made our discovery. She saw the cups my family had broken in their excitement. The slippers so patient in the middle of the room had ended up in two different corners. She didn’t say anything to Feride Nine or Kalliopi, swept it all up on her own. Then she set the broom aside and began talking,

“You better stop bothering us... I am telling you to stay in the good hours and in good health and not to bother Kalliopi and me! You can live here, but only if you promise not to break other things. Promise me, will you?”

I jingled an unbroken teacup in affirmation. I must have jingled it cutely for she smiled and melted my heart faster than an ice cone in the summer. So I jangled a bit more, but couldn’t really manage; the cup fell down and broke. She stopped smiling then. I tried to jangle the broken pieces on the floor, but this only made her scared. Her olive skin turned whiter than a Circassian’s. She rushed out of the room with her high-heeled slippers and locked the door, which made me shed the first bitter tears of love.

Grandfather Zümrüt and I Read

I had always known father and I were the most philosophical ones in the family. But I am slightly disappointed to confess it was only he and I who stayed awake night after night with the excitement of our beloved encyclopaedia, sweet offspring.

We made crepes. Crepes with melted chocolate, which grandfather had learned to make from Madame Esther back in Phanar, a curvy widow with whom we had shared a house for a while. The nights in the library had become mellow despite the excitement that had preceded them. The fire was ablaze, and the weather outside was very cold. I could see the tousled hair of my relatives underneath satin mattresses the colour of popsicles.

After the initial surprise, the encyclopaedia looked smaller than I had imagined, but than I had imagined a mountain like *Kaf*, a bird like *Simurg*. “Touch it!” Grandfather Zümrüt said, and I could almost feel a pulse. The pages were so thin with wear, they had become see through.

“There is as much information here as there are drops of water in the sea, as much information here as there are grains of sand in the desert!” And blowing on his fingertips, “You know there is nothing – absolutely nothing – like sleeping in the desert underneath the stars. They are so big they could eat you, and if you are at the edge of land you can hear nightingales too. It feels like the doors of heaven have opened up.”

“How would I know?” I said. “You never let us out of Konstantiniye.”

All smiley, and with his fingertips alight, “At least I have something to show for it now.”

We began from the beginning, sweet pistachios:

In this encyclopaedia the pleasant reader shall find: the mosques, the medreses and the schools, the libraries and the dervish lodges, the mausoleums and churches. Holy waters, wells, fountains and reservoirs, palaces, sea houses, mansions, kiosks, hamams, theatres, coffeehouses, winehouses, and all the politicians, scientists, poets, artists, businessmen, doctors, preachers, teachers, hocas, dervishes, priests and monks, musicians, drummers, singers, drunkards, wretcheds. The broken hearted, the firefighters, the gamblers, the thieves, the tough guys, the vagrants, the beggars, the killers and all the famous people, all its streets, neighbourhoods, and districts, all its fires, infections, earthquakes, revolutions, murders, and tales of love told from mouth to mouth. All the habits of Istanbulites from time immemorial, the Konstantiniye of foul mouths, of pictures and poems, of books, and of novels. And travelogues about the city, and travelogues leading to this city. In short the pleasant reader shall find a whole world here, and then another world within that world, and ad infinitum and ad hominem.

And the first article we read was called:

Here Come the Arabs

Before the scribes, before the storytellers, and before the stories themselves, there were the goats. Goats taken care of by a discarded Sufi. Goat and man wandered around some Arabian bushes in the dead of the night. That is how it all began...The goats ate from the seeds of an odd looking bush and grew awake, then playful. The Sufi boiled these fruits into a dark brew and made the first cup of coffee in the world.

Though the goats found the fruit, and the Arabs made the drink, it was the Turks who built a house of pleasure around it. But that would never have happened had it not been for two young men: Şems and Hakem of Aleppo. So before the scribes and the

storytellers and the stories and the coffeehouses, there were two Arabs. That is how it all started.

They had no money for the ships that left from Alexandria to Konstantiniye. Şems was a lady's man and Hakem was shier than a porcupine. They travelled alone, apart from the kitten in Şems's breast pocket. Şems carried her like an evil eye and she grew fat on his chest while he made love to a variety of women.

The first woman Şems made love to was a Gypsy, the second one was a Copt. Both their behinds were wobbly like jelly. After the two women left the bed, with their huge hips, with their elegant knees and ankles, and as Şems lay tired but still aroused, they stood in the corridor like queens and popped baklava into their mouths, bringing him to yet another climax. They left their fingerprints on the syrup which Şems licked off the plate. Whenever he was to ejaculate after that he would shout "Delicious!" and sometimes even, "Baklava!" and the whores of Konstantiniye would get to know him from those two words – and also from the coffee beans he left behind, the way a mountain goat leaves droppings.

But Şems did not only sleep with the two women, he slept with so many the companions lost all their savings and had to rest by dirt roads under the stars: broke yet hopeful, with kitten, lust and dreams. They would make it to Konstantiniye no matter what. After three months they drank a big glass of water on the shores of Marmara, in a small village called Mudanya, where a Greek agreed to take them over to Konstantiniye, in a boat that nearly capsized during a moonlit storm, but still the Arabs did not lose their beans.

It is said that the djinns of Konstantiniye knew what was about to happen. It is said that when Şems and Hakem entered the city, the djinns began to tingle and get goose bumps and erect penises. And that they sat around fireplaces and pointed at their members and laughed.

Would the Arabs still have opened a coffeehouse had the djinns not bothered them endlessly, had the djinns not tickled them with coffee smelling fingers, and had they not put many houses, and people, and money into their dreams? I don't know. What I do know is that Şems and Hakem wanted to do something crazy and wild, and to never have to be poor again, and to grow fat indoors together with their cat. And the djinns wanted stories and gossip, and men cuddling together during cold winter nights, and with the help of the two Arabs they got exactly that. Şems and Hakem named the house of pleasure Kahve Hane, and baptized their cat Aleppo.

The next entry was very different in tone:

The Island of the Disloyal Will Be Re-named the Island of the Dogs

The Island of the Disloyal is a small rock in the middle of the Marmara Sea. Once upon a time, they threw mad people on to that rock. They threw the sick, the contagious, the plagued, and the lepers. Sometimes monks went to that island on self-inflicted purgatory. On the Rock of the Disloyal silence was paramount. You could only talk in whispers, if you could talk at all.

In the year 1860 the people will send a letter to the Sultan, mark my words. They will complain about one barking street dog after another, and the Sultan will put all 60.000 of the dogs in a flimsy boat headed towards that rock. That is when, and perhaps why, Konstantiniye will be overtaken by fires. Fires will erupt in Pera, and Galata, and Fatih, and Laleli. Istanbulites will start believing in the revenge of the dogs, in the curse of those harmless creatures that carry their souls in their pupils. The people will begin to protest. And after a hundred houses are consumed by the flames, the animals will be taken

back to Konstantiniye. On the very same boat they had departed in. Those protestors will re-name the Sultan the disloyal one.

But there may be a time, say in 1910, when dogs will be sent out to the island once again, this time never to return. There will be more of them, 80,000 large, and on that rock they won't have food or water. They will begin to bark, then howl. The way wolves do. City dogs forget what it is to be an animal. But on that island, with only their own kind around, and in the wild, and in the absence of sound, they will remember. People will hear them from the shores. From bedrooms and breakfast tables all over the city. Those who will hear the cries will tell their children that the one thing they must never do is to live for too long, on an island, and with only their own kind for company. And the sovereign who will send the dogs off in 1910, he too will be cursed.

At the end of the second article I asked your grandfather whether he would want to change the name of this encyclopaedia if he could. It wasn't just about Konstantiniye after all, was it? It had the Arab mountains in it, and all the cities that led from Aleppo to our city, and an island I had never heard of. It had writings in it about a book from Iraq, and Madam Vassiliki who was from Symirni.

"No!" he said, "the encyclopaedia is perfect! I would name it the Encyclopaedia of Istanbul over and over, again! Because Konstantiniye represents water," he said. "Konstantiniye is a metaphor. It has seven hills like the seven levels of transmutation: calcination, dissolution, separation, conjunction, fermentation, distillation, and coagulation! Like the seven planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Moon and the Sun which correspond to the seven metals: quicksilver, copper, iron, tin, lead, silver, and gold, which corresponded to the seven prophets: Jesus, Joseph, Aaron, Moses, Abraham, Adam and Idris. Konstantiniye is water my son, and we are fire!"

I regretted ever having made the suggestion.

On the next page we came upon the writings of a mystic – known simply as ‘The Sheikh,’ resident of Diyarbekir, but descendant from the Kurds in Lebanon. Rumoured to have recited the following poem in an assembly:

*I have been awestruck since the time I beheld your face,
I know not if I am me or if I am you
I may seem poor and powerless,
But I am the Sultan of two worlds,
Men and angels know not my mystery,
Within which I am hidden,
Indeed I am the Sheikh of Diyarbekir,
It is I whom everyone desires!*

Accompanying this interjection, we found a footnote, a sidenote, a small, whimsical, innocent seeming commentary. Though it was anything but:

May my prophecy unravel like a long thread!

Oh ye of Mohammed, have we not told you it is better to forget than it is to remember? Forget you ever wrote down the words of fragrant mouths, the accounts of travellers, the deeds of nibble fingers that turn copper to gold. Correct memory belongs only to God.

**

I heard grandfather draw in his breath. It seemed to me he had shrunk a little.

“Did you see that footnote?” I asked him.

He began stroking his beard. I cleared my throat, he showed me the finger. I waited for another minute and repeated the question. This time I got shown his member, which hung limply and looked depressed.

Your grandfather and I meditated on the footnote for a long time, sweet offspring. We tried to understand what the encyclopaedia was meaning to do by contradicting itself. The footnote we had constructed our lives on, and the footnote we had just read were exact opposites. Was it really more important to forget than it was to remember? Were we to trace our steps backwards and forget all the stories we had ever recorded? Could our lives have been totally different had grandfather Zümrüt read one footnote, rather than the other? Had he done exactly that, your grandparents would not have needed help with collecting stories and then we may never have been born. I felt dejected. Your grandfather Zümrüt looked oddly composed.

He began telling me of the ninety-nine names of Allah. The Manifest and the Hidden, the Abaser and the Exalter, the Giver of Life and the Bringer of Death. There was once a philosopher from Al Andalus, Ibn Arabi, who wrote on the contradictory nature of these attributes, he explained. For example one name of Allah was the Pardoner, another the Avenger. One was the Gatherer, the other the Withholder. The ninety-nine holy attributes too, were based on conundrums: just like remembering and forgetting, they cancelled each other out. At least they seemed to.

But according to grandfather Zümrüt, what at first looked like a contradiction, need not be so. The contradiction could, in fact, be a reaffirmation.

“These footnotes mean different things by remembering and forgetting! Or they may mean the same thing, but refer to different things! Maybe the remembering is meant for us, the forgetting is meant for someone else!”

Ibn Arabi thought opposites did not make God’s ninety-nine names invalid, but merely offered another veil of meaning to cut through in the dense forest of knowledge

where you could only see as far as your lantern allowed. Except, sweet offspring, I didn't know which was the veil to cut through, and which was the blatant truth. I didn't know which footnote had the last word.

I slept to forget our discovery. But I could not. I tried to remember the encyclopaedia's importance, its nobility and all the sacrifices we had offered up for it, but suddenly they all seemed like an ill timed joke. I had one simple question for your grandfather, minimalistic and clean, with no frills or shadows, "if truth is one, and this encyclopaedia is holy, how can it contradict itself?" But he could not give me an answer.

I felt like a cat lost in the rain. I felt like I had fallen into a deep, dark, wet puddle. For the first time in my life, I experienced the death of my father, as you too are wont to experience my own death, sweet children. Your grandfather Zümürüt gave me a further exegesis of Ibn Arabi, with jumps to Farabi and Plotinus, another counter argument, a provocative question, and would have continued in the same vein ad infinitum, had our time not run out. As it turns out, there was not much time to begin with.

Sultan Abdülaziz who had first sent the dogs out and then taken the same dogs back in, had either been killed or committed suicide. The Young Ottomans had fled the house like rats before a flood. Perihan was all alone. She was going through the library. I was too deep in my confusion to pay her movements attention. She came to our room, her father's room, and took the encyclopaedia off the table. By the time we realized what was happening, smoke was trailing off the pile of books in the garden.

We had tied our destiny to the encyclopaedia. I covered your grandfather's eyes with my trembling hands, and waited for us to fizz out like a pair of matchsticks dropped in water. But we did not.

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Fear of extinction, of turning into mere smoke, hung in my throat for a long time. I returned to the house in Eminönü. Grandfather Zümrüt went back to the life he had led before the fateful discovery. He took his habitual walks, had fish and bread around noon, and stared at ships, and at the rich people who came from Europe and the poor people who went to Europe with their little hearts beating like a scared bird's. Caught off balance by how he had lost the encyclopaedia yet again, he told us we could leave Konstantiniye if that's what we wanted. "Go and be free! This is a cursed city, cursed encyclopaedia, cursed family!" He sat by the fire and rocked himself from sleep to sleep, in this way remaining absent from us as much as he could. Even coffee with cardamom, your grandmother Elmas's breasts, and freshly cut garlic under his nose did not wake him. Even my apologies and the stories I read out loud did not.

Your Aunt Ela left Konstantiniye immediately, swearing she would never return, though she did come back once or twice, weighed under with gifts. Your uncle Mafiş stopped eating book covers and grew a goatee. Grandmother Elmas and he travelled to so many places I lost count. They sent postcards. Your uncle Yuvarlak stopped fornicating at every opportunity, rose to the occasion, and took care of your grandfather in his flickering days. God knows which sins he was atoning for... And that brings the story back to me, your father Kehribar.

Yes, this was the first time, my sweet offspring, since the day I had glimpsed her shiny slippers, that I took leave from Perihan. I knew she had her reasons, but no reason was good enough to burn our encyclopaedia. It became more important than ever to find out its history. I grew determined to find out who had written it and why.

Grandfather Zümrüt had never wondered about the penman behind the volumes. Neither, it seemed, had the publishers of the encyclopaedia, the Nahmias brothers. All three of them were old-fashioned readers who thought ideas necessary, and writers

accidental. I, on the other hand, thirsted to find out the writer who had upraised my family with one footnote, and then broken it with another.

It wasn't an easy task, my pistachios. Now that the encyclopaedia had burnt, the undertaking seemed almost impossible. I tried to remember – to the word, to the comma, and to the footnote – all the entries I had read over the shoulders of Perihan, and all the entries we had read together with your grandfather Zümrüt. I rewrote from memory, hoping the mystery of its writer would be revealed in between the lines. But it was possible the answer lay within a third footnote I had overlooked. Curl by pretty curl, my hair fell out, and still I remained devoted to the task at hand. To the encyclopaedia, and to your grandfather, and to Perihan. Obstinate as a goat. My Perihan became sullen and silent, and I stooped even lower, I almost became bitter, and I slouched against your grandfather's advice.

It was your uncle Mafîş, the book-eating brother I had always pitied, who finally put an end to it all. He found me in the caged rooms of Perihan's library.

"Kehribar, sweetheart," he said as he took off his Venetian hat, "You have been asking the wrong question all along."

"Clarify!" I ordered, and Mafîş reclined sideways on the reading table. Full of new-found confidence.

"I do not think you should be wondering about who wrote the encyclopaedia," he pronounced.

As if that was a simple thing to do, as if that was an intelligent thing, I thought to myself.

"Who knows who wrote it?" he continued, "Who cares my brother! Ask yourself this: What is it that is better to forget than to remember?"

My first thought was to unchain myself, get off my chair and smack Mafîş on his shiny head. But then something happened. Like a distant melody from the sea, I started to

overhear whispers. I could see Mafiş smiling through the confusion in my ear, nodding his head in encouragement. Yes, my pistachios, your uncle's suggestion is what put me on the right track. The question he posed made me see an apparition, a handsome young man dipping his quill into an inkpot. He was seated in a basement, a candle burned on the table before him. I heard him speak these words to himself before writing them down:

We began to mourn you, Little Father, long before the ignorant knew your name.

And with that sentence began the journey, my beloved offspring, into the depths of our true history.

4 Hagop

Between this coffee and the next, there is only another.

Arabic proverb

The Forbidden Books of Hayalci and Hagop

You choose your storyteller like you choose a lover. I picked Hayalci as my teacher because he has a face you would cross mountains and seas to find. When he is calm, his brown eyes are flecked with honey, full of gentleness and love. The listeners see a father in him. And yet, I can envisage with certainty, my storyteller is a fierce lover too. Once he becomes curious, his gaze is filled with passion, and violence, and a wish to divine mysteries. I am trying to learn the depths and the heights of his imagination; I want to chart him like a landscape.

The coffeehouse in which I live has been on the same spot since 1555, snug between the church of Aya Pantelemon and the big oak tree. The scribes before me have placed the coffeehouse books in a rose wood chest with three visible locks, and one that is invisible. I sew sachets of lavender against the moths and worms, round my neck I hide the four keys that unfasten the books, and every evening I listen to the storyteller in hopes of a new tale.

The first scribe in this coffeehouse had the initial book and the clear pages. From the records I see he listened to the story of ‘Black Mustafa the Hero.’ I can picture him before my eyes: he sits at the back of the room and notes down every word the storyteller utters. As he writes he smokes a *çubuk*; he inhales deeply and the smoke does not leave him till the story halts. He laughs with the audience, and he cries. Because he has filled our first book centuries ago, his words are the norm and the truth. We only note down derivations and irregularities: how storyteller Yusuf embellished the ending of ‘Keloğlan,’ how Yakup got rid of the prince in ‘The Bird of Sorrow,’ how Kız Ismail narrated ‘The Imp of the Well’ from back to front the night Sultan Abdülaziz died. I have arrived very late; this coffeehouse has a memory of three hundred years and more. The stories in it are tattered.

There are two things I do each night, once all the customers have left. The first is that I unlock the leather book to make side notes, *derkenar*, on a story already written down. I need to be picky with what I choose to write, need to remember all the coffeehouse books prior to mine so that I don't repeat the scribes who came before me. This is hard work and requires discipline, double checking, and submission to the slow torment of my profession. Sometimes I add a word, sometimes only a comma. My fastidiousness is why Ioannis Efendi trusts the keys of the rose wood chest to me.

The second thing I do every night, and which is forbidden, is that I am slowly writing a book no one else knows about. I fill it with the tales that make up my storyteller's life.

The book of Hayalci is made of cardboard and yellow, crisp parchment – that is all I could afford. Its pages fall apart because my hands are not expert at stitching. I made it when Ioannis Efendi lay asleep, and I light a candle to write in it only when he begins to snore. One day the pages under my fingertips will guide me to tell my own tales, in this very coffeehouse, and it is out of the same book that I will make a map of Hayalci's thoughts.

Night One

The days in the coffeehouse start slow but finish late. Customers begin to trickle in around noon and from then on until night time there is constant backgammon, and chess, and money exchanging hands under the table, and the homeless dozing off in the warmth of the braziers, and the rich traders, and the poor porters and in short anyone who can afford a cup of coffee comes in here. But only those who stay until dark enter it to sustain their souls. They come to open their *kismet*. Because Allah is the best storyteller, and Hayalci the second best.

It was the twelfth of Zilhicce – a night of rain, a night of confusion – when a heavy man entered the premises and unsettled our sheltered rhythms. The sash around his fez was red indicating he was Christian, the coat he wore was European but old and missing a few buttons. The stranger had a worn face with deep wrinkles like knife slashes. When he entered the coffeehouse the empty seats filled up. The regulars knew, from the way he walked in to the coffeehouse, that they would not like this man.

The first person he talked to was Hayalci. He took my storyteller by the arm and asked whether he could tell the story this evening. An unusual calm imbued his request; my teller halted for only a second in which the stranger stepped on to the table where the chair was placed – the throne of the storyteller – and took Hayalci's place.

“*Ey ahali*,” he began, “I know you are here to listen to the storyteller but you will listen to me tonight,” his voice was crackling and low. “If you don't like what I tell after the first break, I will not return to your coffeehouse.” The man in the red sash waited for possible opposition, and when none was voiced he adjusted the velvet cushion for comfort. Someone in the back must have known him. The customers whispered from ear to ear, and that is how I learned the new teller's name was Hagop.

“The story is long and might take a couple of nights to tell. If you like it we may be together for a while. I promise not to tell you anything that is not true; reason enough for you to stay and listen, if you ask me. I know for a fact, most tales told on this table are either made up or complete lies.

There are many ways I can tell you of my life. One is through the theatre; I used to own one. Lately I have a habit of sitting alone wherever I go: coffeehouse, hamam, whorehouse, graveyard... but it wasn't always like that. It may not look like it now, but I used to have money – a lot of it – and then there was a time I didn't have any at all.

I can also start with Kasturya. Some of you know the neighbourhood, but none of you can imagine the violence in its cobblestoned streets. The madhouses underneath its churches, the secret night-time burials, the fear of the *khabadayi*.

Or I can start from the middle of a love story. I am 38 years old and handsome, so they used to tell me. I lie in bed, remembering my past as if it had been centuries in the making: my childhood as stalker, my adulthood as rope walker, and everything in between which I have kept secret until now. I know Nora is watching me through the mirror. As I drift off, the heat of her gaze is on my skin, on the tips of my fingers, and I wonder if I can make her love me again.”

Hagop paused. He looked at the men listening to him, took a long minute, stared even into my eyes. I felt uncomfortable, both from his gaze and from his way of telling. Neither was proper. I wanted to inform him it was not tasteful to start from the midst of a story; we are taught not to cut a tale open with a knife.

One must start slow and caressing, like you would start with a woman. A run and a riddle takes the audience away from the real world, it warms them up for the listening, nurtures them curious. Still the biggest mistake Hagop made that first night was not his rush, but his indecision.

The storyteller must know, before he starts the telling, why and where and how the tale will begin and how and why and where it will end. He can only change details during the narration, subtract a day or two, add a minor character, a few side stories. He can hide some small truth, or reveal a random secret, perhaps postpone revelations. But if a teller has many ways to tell a story, he has not understood its meaning. The first thing a scribe learns from his storyteller is that a good tale chooses how it wants to be told. Accordingly, my expectations of the man with the missing buttons were low, and yet I listened.

That first night, the audience and I listened to Hagop for more than three coffee breaks. Even the stingy customers paid him *bahşış* so that he continue. I think he lured us in with that one sentence. Most of the stories told on this table were indeed made up, or a bunch of lies. That was our age-old tradition. And there was something arousing, as well as terrible, about the possibility of a true story. Something arousing and terrible about a man who would only tell the truth.

And so our unwinding began on the night we met Hagop. It was a stormy darkness in the month of Zilhicce – a night of rain, a night of confusion – and the first time I had the clear pages. The first occasion in my life where I got to write down a story that had never been told before.

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“I met Nora in Kasturya,” he said. “I hardly knew uphill Kasturya; the rich Jews and Greeks lived there. Downhill Kasturya was my home. There the poor Jews lived with the poor Armenians. The paint on the walls was always peeling, shoeless children played in the streets. Old men sat by doors all day and eyed the people passing, fishermen tended to their nets in their little boats docked at the Golden Horn

When I was a boy, I played on the street of the theatre. The cypress trees gave shade and there was a fountain for when it got too hot. An Apostolic priest used to walk up the street everyday around noon. There were two joys for me in Kasturya; one was stalking that priest, the other was the music. Are you wondering why I stalked a man of God? I will tell you why, it was because he used to spit at Aznavur.

Aznavur was the owner of the theatre. He had a face filled with cross-stitch wrinkles and a long, white moustache that he curled with his fingers. His one canine tooth was of gold. We used to run after him to see it shine when he smiled. Everyday around noon, the priest would walk up the street slowly, the way sun sick cats do, and cross himself before spitting at Aznavur's feet. Aznavur would get red in the face and swear like an oarsman, but the priest was shrewd; no one apart from me ever caught him in the act. One day Aznavur saw me laughing from a tree branch and called me over. I thought I would get a good beating, but he said, 'Listen, each time you stop the priest from spitting I am going to give you half a *kuruş*. Deal?'

That was my first job and I was very good at it. I pinched the priest, pulled at his skirts, tripped him as he walked, frightened him so he got the hiccups, bothered him in coffeehouses and hamams, I even howled like a rabid dog under his window and stole the lamb legs he reserved from the butcher. Aznavur kept his promise and paid me by the day.

A few weeks later I had the mind to expand my business. I asked Aznavur, whether there were other priests who bothered him. Would he give me more money if I annoyed them? But he said no, had I ever seen any other kind of priest spitting at him? I considered it. Aznavur was right. I had only ever seen the Apostolic priest, so I asked him why the Catholics didn't spit at him. I got a slap for that. 'There was a reason that priest kept on spitting at me,' he said and made me sit down next to him.

‘When I was a young boy we went to the Apostolic Church like you and your dad. At that time it had no copper bell, clearly I am getting old, my boy. The beadle and sexton would set out at dawn. One would hit a stick against a piece of wood, the other would call the faithful to church for Morning Prayer. It used to get pretty noisy in the neighbourhood then. If you didn’t go to the services the Patriarchate would give you trouble, and the Patriarchate was in good relations with the head of the janissaries. I tell you, no one wanted any dealings with those; they butchered Christians in the street just to test their swords. Even the Sultans were scared of them, Hagop. That’s why Mahmud II finally slaughtered all 40.000 of the lot. I am glad you didn’t see that. The Golden Horn flowed red for a week. None of us could walk by it.

But let’s get back to the spitty priest. My mother was sickly when I was growing up, but my father took very good care of her. He used to fry meats because she had a weak constitution. One day the *yasakhdjis* from the Patriarchate knocked on our door. It was Lent, nobody was supposed to eat meat but father had cooked it anyway. The *yasakhdjis* sniffed us out like dogs. They took father to the basement of Sourp Hovhannes. They hid all sorts of people there, my boy, underneath the church. The building functioned as an insane asylum. They shackled them from their ankles and wrists and let them sit in their own filth. Some of them were murderers, or mad, for sure. But others were just innocent men. We tried to go and find my father there, but the Apostolics denied they ever took him.

We went to church again, the Sunday after. I remember it like yesterday. My poor mother dressed us in our best clothes. During prayers all we could hear were men cursing from the basement. They were moaning and crying. I thought I heard my father, but I couldn’t be sure. Mother got out of our pew and kissed the skirts of that spitty priest, but he didn’t care. The *yasakhdjis* dragged her out by the arms. No one helped us in Sourp Hovhannes, not one soul protested.

But don't worry, Hagop, I took my revenge from that priest. That's why he started spitting at me. And now you put a stop to that too. We are a good team, you and I. It would be better if you were Catholic, but you have time to grow yet. Be a man, see the world! Do everything you are not supposed to do, then convert before you marry.'

I asked Aznavur how he took his revenge from the priest, but he never told me. I asked my father, hoping he would know.

'That Aznavur is telling you stories. He is an island lover,' is all he said. 'You keep away from him if you want no trouble.'

But I did not stay away from him; I loved Aznavur. He had the best moustache, and a golden tooth. He had a theatre and gave me a *kuruş* every day. I began hating the Apostolics with a passion, out of loyalty to Aznavur.

My second joy in Kasturya was the music. My mother used to be a singer, so they told me. I never met her. My father said she was a whore, and that she got pregnant from another man when I was a baby. That may, or may not be true. What I know is that I grew up without her, but she gave me her voice. From childhood onwards I sang; it was an impulse like breathing or eating and the only thing that made my father cry.

Father did not always have money for our rent, or to fetch enough wood in winter but even if our house was too cold for sleep, we always listened to music in our best clothes. He had beautiful clothes, my father, and sewed smaller copies for me. A black woollen *şalvar*, a white shirt from Bursa silk with wide sleeves, a short fur coat on cold nights. The clothes would change according to summer or fall, but we would always have a red belt round our belly and tuck a dagger into its folds. Father wore a gold cross round his neck and a red *yazma* round his fez, and off we would go to the music gardens in Phanar. We wouldn't be alone. On Friday nights all of Kasturya would walk with lanterns in hand, some beginning to sing once Phanar came in sight. There you had garden after garden of

singers and tables under grape vines covered with wax cloth. The meze was served slowly and the *raki* glasses raised in honour.

Still the best music I knew was not in the gardens of Phanar but in the synagogue two streets down from us. That was my secret. Slowly but surely, I got addicted to the Cantor's voice drifting out of the stone building. He was a descendant of those Jews who escaped from Spain; they called him Moşe Cordova. The distant melody was soon not enough for me, and I was lured into the synagogue. One Friday morning I jumped over its wall, and climbed straight up the oak in its garden.

In the coffeehouses they called Moşe the thief of songs. He took Turkish tunes and wrote Hebrew lyrics to them. I copied his voice without understanding what he sang. The men from the synagogue never saw me. It didn't occur to them to look up my tree.

It was on the boughs of that oak that I met Nora. One day she jumped across the wall just like I did."

The moment Hagop mentioned Nora's name, an unexpected and shy smile filled his crotchety face. It nearly transformed it from an old man's into a child's. The change was so visible, and the twinkle in his eye so blinding that I gasped, along with everybody else in the audience, and nearly spilled my inkhorn.

Hagop opened his hands in prayer: "*Una coza y coza muy maraviyoza: Cae en la mar y no se moja!*" he sang, with the air of a Byzantine priest. Then, like a lost little boy, he looked into his empty hands. Just as suddenly, his mood lifted and he clapped vigorously to wake us out of our stupor:

"I guess her plan was to climb up my tree because there was nowhere else for a girl to hide. As she was unfolding her sleeves, she looked up the oak and saw me. 'What are you doing there?' she asked, '*Aydosanto!* Make way or they will find me.'

The first time I saw Nora I felt like a gypsy ran her fingernail in the palm of my hand. It itched in warning. She climbed up. We shared a branch. She smelled of girl sweat and sweet mulberries. She put her hand in her apron and gave me some. I had seen her before, many boys were in love with her. We all fell in love with the new girls, until other new girls arrived in Kasturya. We had waited for Nora to give one of us a sign of interest, but she never did, preferring to study the seashells stuck amidst the cobblestones. She even kicked one of the boys right under the knee when he tried to say sugary things to her.

I had the mulberry midway to my mouth when the Cantor reached new heights in the *buselik* makam. I closed my eyes and imagined his bobbling throat during the intervals. When I opened them again, I saw Nora smiling at me through squinted eyes.

She asked me if I knew what I was listening to, and I told her I was listening to Cantor Moşe Cordova. When she asked me if I knew what he was saying, I told her I didn't. Then she told me the Cantor was her father, and that he was the best Moşe Cordova in the whole world, and that he was teaching her to sing in secret.

'Women cannot sing aloud, only under their breath,' she said and whispered into the leaves, '*Kol be-ishah 'erbah.*'

'You are not a woman,' I said, 'you are a girl.'

She lifted her chin to challenge me, 'My father knows all the *piznomim* by heart, and all the *maftirim* repertoire.'

When she realized I had no idea what the *piznomim* and the *maftirim* were, she curled her bottom lip in disdain.

We didn't talk till the men walked out of the synagogue. Before Nora went back down the tree, she told me we could meet at the same spot next Friday. 'We are both forbidden to sing,' she said, 'better to make friends now.'

I didn't know how she had found out about my father's rule, but it didn't occur to me to question her. 'Also,' she continued, 'Don't always call me Nora.'

By that point I would have agreed to anything she asked, whether I understood her meaning or not. I nodded my head ‘yes’, and crossed my fingers too, hoping the combination would incur another smile from her and it did.”

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“Whenever my father got into bad moods, I went on long walks. I had learned how to walk in shadows during childhood, and how to walk quietly. By the time I was twelve, even the lantern man couldn’t guess I was five steps behind him.

A few days after our first meeting, I found myself in front of Nora’s house. Their curtains were open, windows ajar. First I saw the family having dinner round an oak table, and then the cigarette bud of someone smoking in the upstairs balcony. Downstairs there was food and laughter. Nora’s mother talked with her arms, and hands, and eyes, just like Nora did. I almost understood them, though inside the house they spoke a language she did not speak with me. Later I would seek those words out, would go to the islands to hear the melody bounce off the walls like marbles: Jewish Spanish, Ladino. The grandmother was senile and remembered no other tongue. Cantor Moşe Cordova went up the balcony to help her down the stairs, and she kept on repeating *aydosanto*, *adyo*, *adyodyo*! I knew immediately; what I wanted was the life I saw through those uncovered windows.

The peering in helped. On the walks back home, my steps were lighter, sometimes I had a whistle in my mouth. I felt stronger to suffer father’s outbursts. Sometimes he didn’t hear me arrive. Other times he was up and ready. One night he was so drunk he couldn’t stand straight but the need to beat me was strong on his pulse, and he made me steady him against the wall so he could take better aim. The neighbours knew but said nothing. That was the kindest thing they could do, really. Aznavur tried to talk to my father but could

never find him sober enough. Only Aram did not ignore the situation, and that is because he was not able to.

Aram was the fool of Kasturya. He was not right in the head, but everyone loved him still. When he got angry he raised his fists in the air and threatened to beat you, but never did because he lacked the wits. We loved getting him worked up, just to calm him down with hugs. He would keep going for a while, swearing North and South. The Kasturya code was that you never hurt Aram; you protected him from strangers, you never took his money in backgammon.

And Aram had lots of money. His parents had left him many houses as inheritance. He cried easily, forgot all the time. Every two days you would have to tell Aram what month it was, and that his parents were dead. Aram was stuck at a time when his family was whole. Whenever he saw my bruises he asked, ‘What happened to your face Hagop? Vah vah!’ There was no point in telling him about my father over and over again. Soon everyone began calling me ‘Vah Vah Hagop’.

Every so often Aram would follow me, mostly because he had nothing better to do. I would tell him to get lost but he kept coming back like the dogs of Kasturya. So I let him be. There were many nights we watched Nora’s house together. Sometimes Aram fell asleep by my feet, curled on the ground as I stained my fingers yellow from all the cigarettes I smoked. I smoked and imagined myself into Nora’s life.”

Hagop began to cough. Ioannis Efendi handed him a glass of water. He sipped from it noisily and then asked for a cigarette. His hands shook as he lit it and soon he was coughing again. A phlegmy, wet cough, from years of smoking and damp houses. It took him some minutes to collect himself.

“I won’t bore you with the beautiful sides of my story with Nora, there were many of those,” he continued. “A new love doesn’t make for a good story, unless you are the one caught up in it. Suffice it to say we held hands, we sang together on the tree while tracing her father’s voice, I kissed her on the cheeks and she taught me the *piznonim*; all in secret. We discovered with Aram that Wednesday night was the time Nora’s family trained with the Muezzin, we sat across the house and watched the whole family – Nora and her brothers, her mother and father the Cantor, grandparents from the mother’s side and grandparents from the father’s side and the aunt who had never married – sing with a different instrument in hand.

Suffice it to say we became friends with the Muezzin who taught them the intricacies of *makams*. He even agreed to go and ask for Nora’s hand with me. My father laughed so much at the prospect, he choked. ‘It won’t ever happen,’ he said, ‘Muezzin Efendi knows it too.’ Muezzin Efendi might have known it but he still walked me to Nora’s house, dressed up so well you would think he was the groom. He had worn his amber ring, his handsome white turban with the green sash, and bought the baklava and *shakar lokum* for me since I had no money. He even chased the cats in the vicinity so no evil eye would come between Nora and I. When we turned the street up to her house I felt like I had finally become a man.

Even though it would be difficult to marry Nora – with me being too young, poor and Armenian – I had to try. A promise would have kept me happy for years. I would wait till we were old enough and till I had a job and some money. I knew her father would like me; I sang, I would work very hard, I would fit right into their life.

But when we neared the house something about it looked strange. Then I realized there were no curtains in the windows anymore. Then I realized there was no furniture inside the rooms. Then I realized there was no one inside the house. The door had been left ajar. All traces of Nora and her family had disappeared.”

It is when Hagop reveals his shady self, his salacious habit of stalking that I decide to make a new book for him. A secret book which I will keep next to Hayalci's. I know the desire for the thoughts, the imagination and the rituals of another, but I have never heard anyone else speak of it so openly before. I too watch my storyteller in moments he is not aware. Perhaps I even contemplate him in moments he would choose not to be perceptible. Hagop is shameless like copy paper, and I almost feel my own secrets revealed through him as he talks. That is why I begin to write his story down.

I also know how it feels to desire someone who will always be greater than you. You carry a deep sunk knowledge that you are small, and the beloved is grand. You are poor but your beloved is overflowing. I can never catch up to Hayalci's charm or to his memory. He could tell a story without speaking if he chose to, he could narrate even if he were deaf and dumb. Compared to him I will always, and only be, an apprentice.

The book I make for Hagop is smaller than Hayalci's. I steal sheets from the coffeehouse book for it. The coffeehouse book has many empty pages because of Sultan Abdülhamid II's long list of forbidden words. Abdülhamid II has surpassed the two Sultan's who came before him, Murat V and Abdülaziz, neither of whom had such a comprehensive inventory. The storytellers cannot tell anything new these days, but only tales a thousand years old, the ones that pose no threat. But I rather steal pages to write down a strange and new story than wait. Hagop's secret book will be a stolen and sinful one.

Night Two

Hagop arrived at the coffeehouse after the evening prayer, and with a bag of almonds which he thrust in my hands. "Pass it around," Ioannis Efendi told me, "Misery goes well with almonds." Hagop heard him but pretended not to. He sat on his chair as if the coffeehouse were his.

"After Nora's disappearance, I walked through the days like there was a haze between them and me, like I was treading through mist or a heavy smell of rain. For a while I continued as if she hadn't left. I sat in front of her empty house, with the missing curtains and the missing furniture, and the missing grandmother smoking on the balcony. One night, as I sat and watched, a sudden pain shot through me. Then my body got to know what my head already did. I had no clue where Nora was, and I had to find her.

I wrote down all the places she could be. Synagogues in different neighbourhoods of the city, relatives in those neighbourhoods. Perhaps a holiday in Chamledja or in the islands, far enough but still close to the city. The thought of places they could reach with a carriage calmed me down. I made it my job to know all the Jewish neighbourhoods, from their streets to their crumbling houses to their old men playing chess in parks facing the sea. I went to Kuzguncuk a lot during those weeks. It seemed to me there was something in that neighbourhood which was as sad as I. Only when I walked its rainy streets lined with trees, its big graveyard with the barking dogs, only when I glimpsed the old man crying in his woollen underpants through a badly closed curtain, did I feel I did not have to rush anymore. I did not have to keep up with my thoughts, I could rest in walking.

And when I did not find her, or traces of her family for months afterwards, I followed the lead of my body. I sought out every calming woman I could find. And I lay with many whose names I do not remember, but I do remember their eyes like they were

one single thing. Those eyes pitied me no matter how capable and strong I had been. They looked at me with compassion. This both sickened me and led me to tears. As if they had planned it amongst each other the women all put a glass of darkly brewed tea in my hands as I stared out their unfamiliar windows. I left those houses more hopeless than I had been when I entered them. My body tired itself out, it had to. And by the time the days of disbelief, the weeks of search, the months of sadness were complete, I knew I could no longer stay in Kasturya; I would leave when my father was too drunk to know. I told no one. But all I could do was to cross to the other side of the Golden Horn. I wanted to have Kasturya in view, even as I wanted to keep it distant from me.”

The women Hagop mentioned excited many men in the coffeehouse. I saw some regulars hiding their manhood under kaftans and fezzes. Ioannis Efendi smiled a knowing smile perched on his chair by the stove. Once we got ready for sleep he told me that a long time ago, when his father owned the coffeehouse, there was a dirty Arab just like this dirty Armenian, and the elegant seeming men came all the way from Pera to listen to his indecent stories. That is how Ioannis Efendi knew Hagop would not lack listeners. ‘When you are hungry, nothing beats talk of banquets,’ he said.

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“When I reached Karaköy at night, I saw a crumbling fishing vessel on land. It looked dry and old. There was no one around. I found some cardboard nearby and took it to cover myself, entered the little boat from its tilted side. That vessel was my first blessing. I fell asleep on the spot.

I didn't know then that everything abandoned only always appears so. I should have guessed someone more clever would have found this spot long before me. In the middle of the night another man came in."

At that point Hagop arched his back like a cat on attack. The few strands of hair left on his bald head stood on end. He spread out his fingers like claws, tilted his head sideways, bulged out his eyes and hissed. This time I dropped my precious inkhorn filled with Chinese ink. A man who was nodding off smoking his *çubuk* nearly choked.

"A hunchback jumped onto the boat! His face was grimy, and he had scary, big blue eyes. You looked at them and then couldn't look away. He began kicking me. I curled up into a ball, thought of escape only for a fleeting second. It was better to be beaten here than out there in the cold. After he drew blood, the hunchback stopped kicking. My one eye closed over quickly. He started swearing and spitting. That's how he calmed down. I stayed very still, very quiet. When I woke up he was gone. At lunch time he brought me food and some stinky ointment. He even smeared a little around my eye and acted like a guilty animal; awkward and grunting.

Haydar continued to beat me after that first night, even if less frequently. He would give me a slap or a kick, but none was as bad as my father's. My deal with Haydar was that I stayed on the boat only at night, that I cleaned the place for him and gave him money if I had any; a little rent. But sometimes Haydar grew generous. He brought food and let me have some too, and for the sake of those nights I went out to look for insulation. It was a tedious quest. The old boat was filled with holes and it seemed everyday a new one opened. It was hard to tell how much longer it would stand whole, how long into the winter we could sleep without freezing. There was a fish market close to the boat and I found sacks there, and wooden crates, which I sawed to fit the holes. I brought back day old

newspapers and cardboard from the markets; dirty things but they would do the job. In the room where we slept we covered the whole side facing the sea because that is where the wind crept in. We left only the centre of a small window free, a thumb sized space through which you could see a blur of black waves.

Sometimes I would awake with a quick sound, like a repetitive whisper or whisking, and catch Haydar lighting a match in the dark.”

Hagop took out a match from his pocket and lit it. He peered into the back of the coffeehouse as if there was something unexpected there, his eyes turned into slivers. We all turned back to look with him. I had seen other storytellers act out stories before, in fact Hayalci did it often. My storyteller would sometimes become a tree, or make the sounds of an earthquake and shake his whole body, or animate the drawing of a dog when he made animal talk, but I don’t think he had ever managed to turn heads like Hagop just did. When his match burnt out, its flirtatious smoke snaked round his egg-shaped head.

“Haydar was lighting the match over and over but there was nothing to see; the boat was covered in newspaper. I saw his tired blue eyes peering into the paper, burning it, shaming it. Then it dawned on me, the hunchback was trying to read. But being illiterate, he kept on lighting the match on the same sentence, obstinate like a mountain goat.

The insulation got all wet and torn from drizzle and sea foam; we renewed it often. One day I pasted the newspaper on first, the cardboard next and Haydar gave me a kick. ‘You idiot! First the cardboard, then the paper!’

That is how I knew for sure. As he stood peering and lighting matches, when he thought me asleep, I told it to him straight: ‘It won’t matter just how much you stare, you won’t be able to read that writing.’

He pretended not to understand at first, so I repeated: ‘The letters are the least of your problems. The grammar is the coddled donkey.’

I began my work slowly. I spent a whole lot of time collecting newspapers from the rubbish in Armenian quarters. Every discarded page I found, I brought to the boat. Slowly I let Haydar’s eyes get used to the better alphabet. I didn’t teach him. He wouldn’t have taken to that. He couldn’t be my master and my student at the same time. I waited for him to ask for help.

All he said was, ‘These letters of yours, can you read them?’ And, ‘These letters of yours, they are easier to learn than the Arabic?’ I told him Turkish with the Armenian letters was the best, much easier than Turkish in the Arabic or Greek alphabet. I took a wild cat inside my palm then. I watched his savage eyes soften. And in a few days there was no denying it: I had become the teacher and he the student. So after each class Haydar had the need to beat me, to tell me how naïve I was, how I would fail at everything I did unless I listened to his advice and stayed on at the boat.

We read anything and everything from ‘The Golden Headed Fish’ to Bedros Tourian. We came upon Yeraz in the newspapers, a woman from Bolis who had been discovered by a Russian director. She had travelled to all those cities in the cold dark North, acting in plays. Where is she now? Haydar would ask and I would draw a map for him and mark the place. We read a book about the Armenian enlightenment. How it began with a boy called Mikthihar who converted to Catholicism when he was sixteen, how he travelled the monasteries in Anatolia, and how he wrote treatises and prayers. When he came to Konstantinopolis at twenty, he already had loyal followers. But the Apostolics shunned them. At the time, the Ottoman Porte had not yet recognized Catholic Armenians. To the Turks, the Armenians were all Apostolic. Without the Sultan’s protection, Mikthihar and his friends were vulnerable. The Apostolic Patriarch forced them to leave Bolis, and Mikthihar and his followers found refuge in Venice, on an island called San Lazzaro. There

they wrote dictionaries, and histories of the Armenian people. It is only after that book that I understood the tension between the Armenians of Kasturya, between Aznavur and the spitty priest.

Haydar and I created rituals of our own. That is what kept us together in that cold little abandoned vessel by the sea.

I began working for Cuntalı Hasan soon after I moved into Haydar's boat. I could have been a carriage man but for that I needed a horse. I could have been a *lodosçu* but the winds are fickle. So I became a porter, and learned all the streets of Galata by heart. Cuntalı Hasan was head porter at the docks. Everyone who worked for him was young. He loaded us up like donkeys. Sometimes I walked alongside the men who let the rich ride their horses for a *kuruş* or two, they were Armenians too. They ran behind the horses with whip in hand and looked worse than ridiculous. But even those men looked at me with pity.

The days out were all sweat, and begging, and weight and the crushing of feet. I walked so much on the job that a match would have ignited if I touched it to my soles at night. I watched Kasturya from the deck. Haydar snored inside, and I smoked in the snow. Fishermen threw the last scraps of fish guts and eyes and livers to the cats. If it hadn't been for my nights of reading with Haydar, Cuntalı Hasan would have been my end."

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I also write Turkish in another alphabet. Had I not met Hayalci, in all probability I wouldn't have learned the Arabic script, which also means I wouldn't have become a scribe. I met Hayalci in Kapadokya where he was sent on his third exile. He told stories in the caves where the first Christians hid during Roman times. He taught many boys before returning to Konstantinopolis.

The tale he started his lessons with was ‘Hurt Me Not.’ He was very sick when he begun telling it, but he got better during the telling. When his skin was white again and his cheeks rosy, he moved onto other stories. He would repeat tales to enunciate different points we should carve into memory, to emphasize rhythm or the importance of silence. In this way all of us students learned the story of ‘The Crow-Fairy’ by heart, in accompaniment to a Ramadan drum. Though Hayalci repeated many tales, he never returned to ‘Hurt Me Not.’ That is why I suspected it was his story, so I copied what I remembered of it in my forbidden book.

He said only distance, *hasret*, could turn a man into a storyteller. That is why storytellers were itinerant. Distance was the fuel for all sorts of love. Maybe by telling his love story once, to a group of unripe apprentices like us, he had framed what he missed and could then put it aside. I never saw him mention any other woman again than the gazelle eyed woman in that first tale, never caught him meeting with someone in the dark of Konstantinopolis.

Hayalci said he enjoyed living out his punishment in Kapadokya because once upon a time the first Christians were exiles there. He felt he was in good company. My ancestors were one of those Christians. Though I am Greek and my parents were Greek and their parents too, we never spoke Greek fluently, only a word or two. We communicated in Turkish. I learned the Greek tongue in Konstantinopolis, now I speak it so well I can even dream in it.

When I entered our coffeehouse for the first time, Hayalci asked me to tell him my worst memory. He asked all his students the same question. I had no story to tell, of course, apart from our neighbour Eleni whose family had arrived from Symirni. Eleni was Greek and spoke Greek, but I was forbidden to fall in love with her because I was Greek and spoke Turkish. That made us into a whole other sort of people, my mother said, and on top of that Eleni was not modest in the breadth of her dresses.

Nevertheless, Hayalci made me write Eleni down in Konstantinopolis. And then he told me that, if I so wished, this could be the last time I wrote in Karamanlis. I never had to write Turkish with Greek letters again. He told me here, in the big city, I could conjure any past I wanted. It would be our secret and our bond. He told me he had his secrets too, but I already knew that.

I waited for someone to ask me who I was, so that I could tell them of the self I had constructed. But no one wondered where it was that I had come from. When men enter coffeehouses, they do not notice me.

Night Three

The men in the coffeehouse huddled together by the windows to watch the rain. In Konstantinopolis, when it rains like this, the other side disappears from view. It seems the Bosphorus is not a strait but a sea, and that we are on an island that is getting smaller and lonelier by the minute. People rush indoors, the cats and dogs take cover under awnings. Life halts till the mist rises and the land comes into view again. Hagop had a full audience because whoever was in the street had found refuge with us tonight.

“I had seen the Galata tower from Kasturya, but it was on a rainy day like this that it appeared before me unexpectedly. I got lost after a delivery, drenched in sweat and rain. I forgot to expect the tower and all of a sudden there it was: tall and majestic before me. I imagined being a stranger then. It was the first good thought I had in months. How would it feel to see the tower for the first time? To see it by surprise?

I leaned against it, the bricks sucked in my sweat. There was a coffeehouse right across, most of its clients were gambling. I noticed a smiling man amongst them with very thick socks, and suddenly recognized an old sweet face.

‘What are you doing here?’ I shouted as Aram came running into my arms.

‘Vah, Vah Hagop, I missed you!’ he said.

I was dirty and smelly and had tied the soles of my shoes with string, but Aram did not remember how I used to look just a few months ago. ‘What are you doing so far from Kasturya?’ I asked.

‘I play everywhere Hagop *ağabey*,’ he said, ‘I never lose money.’

I had not known Aram’s circle of protection had spread outside of Kasturya. It seemed wherever he went, men had agreed not to take his money.

‘I go to a different teahouse everyday!’ he beamed.

‘I am homeless Aram,’ I said.

‘Vah vah Hagop!’ he responded and began to cry for me.

We crouched by the tower like that, him sniffing and trembling, me all stern on the outside. When Aram forgot what he was crying for, he took me to the coffeehouse. The coat on my shoulders was falling apart. I would never have entered it had Aram not pulled me in.”

The drops came down so thick and relentless that my storyteller Hayalci struggled to make his way in to the coffeehouse. He took off his kaftan at the door and stood dripping by the brazier. I brought him a towel to dry himself, and a coffee so he could warm his hands which were wet and shaking from the sudden cold. Hagop saw his entrance and nodded at Hayalci before continuing with the story. They both tilted their heads backwards with a smile.

“At that coffeehouse by the Galata tower everybody was ordinary but one man. For him I sat tight to hide the smell of my armpits. You could see he was rich from the way he wrung his hands. He wore tailored French trousers, the type my father copied from magazines to please his clients. Except this man wore the originals. So I felt the world was gifted to me when he put some grapes and a book into my wicker basket. He didn’t talk, but from the movement of his eyebrow I knew that it was time for me to start carrying his things. Aram hugged me goodbye.

We walked the streets towards Pera, and as we walked I entered another world. Pera and Beyoğlu belonged to the rich, the Europeans and the Levantines, those who spoke in French and Italian. Men greeted my new employer; the butcher and junkman came out of their shops to kiss his hands. We ended up in front of an apartment.

I had never been inside an apartment before. I didn't know how it divided space into rooms. The man took out a key from his leather bag, an old key, so big I thought it could open a palace. It shone in the light like it was gold. He unlocked the door and we entered a hallway. There was a staircase in it, winding and endless. I shielded my eyes with my hand, to see where the stairs led, and saw a dome like Hagia Sophia's, but out of stained glass. Light streamed down from it. It was not humid inside the apartment like it is in wooden houses. There was no smell of moss.

We walked up the stairs, and the doors opened one by one. People said: Sakizlian Efendi, *Merhaba Efendi*. They said, *Yassou, Kalimera*. They voiced greetings in languages I did not understand, and the man answered back in those languages till we reached the top floor. And there Sakizlian Efendi told me, 'My boy, leave your burden by the door.' So I took the wicker basket with the one book and the grapes off my shoulders and waited.

He was going inside but then turned around and asked if I knew how to read. He asked me in Armenian. I said yes, because Aznavur had taught me in Kasturya. He had taught all the poor Armenian boys and Nora. She was the only girl whose father had allowed her to study. I asked Sakizlian how he knew I was Armenian, he said 'from your bushy brows, sad gaze'. Efendi's house was covered in carpets of deep red hues, I imagined them soft under the feet. He had many mirrors and books, and those books doubled in the mirrors and my torn clothes doubled.

Sakizlian Efendi went to his library, picked out a volume, put it in my basket, and closed the door. For a moment I did not know what to do. Out of curiosity I checked its title. It was called '*Hayeren Lusavorut'yan*,' The Armenian Enlightenment. The same book Haydar and I had been reading on the boat, I had salvaged a copy from the rubbish. Sakizlian Efendi seemed to be its author. But I didn't need another book. A book would not buy me food. And yet I understood this was meant to be a polite gesture. I should

accept it if I was to have any relations with this man. And I knew, even in my uncertainty and absolute poverty by that door, that I would have dealings with him.

I thought of Kasturya, and all that I had left behind. I had nothing to lose, so I knocked on the door, in the perfect pitch, with a half second pause between the knocks. He came back. Already I could see he was thinking of something else, I could see it from the way he bit his lip, already he had forgotten about me but I reasserted myself:

‘Efendi, what is it that you do?’

He raised his eyebrows.

‘Efendi what is your job?’

He had no reason to answer me, but perhaps because he had nothing to lose either, he did. ‘I own a theatre.’

I said, ‘Efendi, I want to work for you. I *will* work for you. I can clean toilets for you, count tickets, welcome guests. I can do whatever it is that you need.’

I had been too daring perhaps, too proud. He closed the door, but not before he took out a *kuruş* from his pocket and placed it within my expectant palm.”

Night Four

There is a special table in our coffeehouse. It is snug by the back corner and there is a purple violet on it. Many people come and go, but the men seated there do not change. Hayalci has reserved table number seven for his friends from exile.

They are elegant looking men with big sad eyes and they call themselves the Young Ottomans. Some of them were thrown out of Konstantinopolis several times. They were banished during Sultan Abdülaziz's rule because they met in secret locations to plan a take over. When Crown Prince Murat V took his place they returned to Konstantinopolis. When Sultan Abdülaziz died and Sultan Murat V went mad with grief, they left the city again. When Sultan Abdülhamid II took the throne, they returned. But this time their passions were subdued and their hair had greyed. My storyteller Hayalci is one of them.

Every sovereign on these lands has had forbidden words; the three Sultans to rule in that cursed year of 1876 were no exception. The first to reign was Sultan Abdülaziz: he travelled to Europe, he liked oil wrestling and cock fights, he decorated the palaces he designed with animal sculptures made of precious jewels. During his reign you could not tell stories with 'Hüseyin Avni Paşa,' 'Young Ottomans,' 'Parliaments,' or 'Constitutional assemblies' in them. When Sultan Abdülaziz was dethroned, his nephew Crown Prince Murat V took his place. His only forbidden word during his 96-day reign was 'Sultan Abdülaziz.' After Murat's madness his brother Abdülhamid II became Sultan. He was the third, and worst of them all, and rules over us still.

Every day a new word is added to his list. Sultan Abdülhamid II dreads another military take over like the one that took his uncle down, and drove his brother mad. His mother, Valide Sultan Tirimüjgan, protects the palace with her magic spells. The fortune tellers swear a green light the colour of vomit shimmers around the Dolmabahçe palace. Mother and son fear everyone, and together they have closed many coffeehouses and

beheaded numerous storytellers. Old and tame tales are repeated over and over nowadays, lengthened like mastic in the mouth and made hollow by mediocre tellers. Hayalci is an exception to the rule, any story he tells is imbued with life.

Hayalci was deported several times: first to Cyprus and that is where the violet comes from, next to Akka, and third to Kapadokya. He told stories in all these places and many of them were against Sultan Abdülaziz.

Ioannis Efendi does not allow such rebellious stories to be told here. Such stories are a cause for spies and trouble, he says. “Once you start opposing a Sultan it moulds into a bad habit; you oppose the next Sultan, and then the one after that.” He says Hayalci has bad habits, but also a good heart. And Ioannis Efendi wants to believe a good man can break bad habits.

The men at table seven have learned to be quiet. Since Hagop begun his tale Hayalci has been sitting with them. I see they pass each other notes as Hagop speaks. Their eyes are on him. Hagop takes off his shoes tonight, and I notice he has holes in each sock. Ioannis Efendi brings him sage tea. Hagop smells it and his thick glasses cloud over. He begins to speak as he stirs the silver spoon.

“Sometimes Sakizlian arrived, sometimes Aram. I always waited, no matter which one of them came my way. I got used to giving my back to the Galata tower, it made me feel like I owned it, it made me feel richer than everyone I knew. I accepted hunger and the absence of running water for the possibility of their appearance. On some days neither of them showed up.

When Aram came he ran to me, pulled me by the arm and dragged me to the coffeehouse. I acted shy like I would never enter it unless invited. But I was hungry and cold, and would take any opportunity to keep warm. Or else he took me to his heirloom house nearby, left to him from his parents, with a new gramophone he didn’t know how to

operate and that I readjusted each time I visited. Aram remembered the Hagop in Kasturya, the one from his childhood, and this suited me well. He hugged me and asked me why I looked so dirty, frequently pushed me into the hamam, and insisted I stay overnight.

When Sakizlian arrived at the Galata tower, he gave me work. Sometimes I walked after him with an empty basket, and slowly filled it with the meze he bought on the way; *muammara*, *baba ganuş*, *derev sarma* with *madzoon*. He weighed the food, smelled it, measured it the way my father smelled, weighed, measured cloth. I don't think he ever knew I was hungry as I followed him, that my mouth watered with every good he bought. I took each day as a sign. I was closer everyday. I knew Sakizlian was a hopeful man from the books in his house, an idealist like Aznavur. It might take time, but it wouldn't take forever. I would work for him too, even if that meant scaring priests all over again. I would be a part of his theatre. He was the first person to appear to me as a way of escape: my boat, my train, my long walk elsewhere.

It took a few years. Much longer than estimated. It wasn't patience that saved me but insistence. One cloudy day Sakizlian left the red door of his theatre ajar, and I entered it without a word.

I was surprised by how neglected the building was, only later did I learn carelessness was a mark of old money. The rich do not think their honour is at stake in the things they own. Sakizlian saw through the exterior, and he loved every inch of that theatre. You entered it through a long, dusty, chilled corridor with pictures and newspaper clippings of all his actors and productions. They were locked behind glass, in case someone would attempt to steal such trifles. At the end of the passageway you came upon the painting of an island, kind of small, with a church on it, and the Ottoman flag. Just like in Aznavur's theatre. That was San Lazarro, the island of the Catholic Armenians who had escaped the Apostolic.

After the passage you had a foyer with green plants in its four corners. The hall opened up to two stages. But Sakizlian did not enter either, he opened another door that led to a small coffeehouse hidden at the back of the theatre. It was filled with smoke. A midget was serving the tea. His troupe was waiting for Sakizlian there, and I finally sat amongst them like I belonged.

First Sakizlian made me a tea boy, and I worked with that midget whose name was Osman. I worked in the coffeehouse from eight in the morning till night. The actors read book after book and smoked cigarette after cigarette and grew melancholy around sunset as if it was a really sad thing that every day had to end. Some looked at me with pity when I served them and I responded in the same way. Those were the ones I disliked and no matter how much they practiced, they still looked awkward on stage. The ones who looked good came later, and seemed generally drunk from one thing or another. And they were nice to me and did not look at me with pity, we talked about this and that. There were even a few amongst them who knew my whole story, and I always did them favours like ask less money for tea or give them free *poğaç*.

First Sakizlian made me a tea boy, and then he made me a rope walker. I think he made me a rope walker because my face said something and my feet said something else. My face was all confidence and anger, and my feet could not keep up with the lie. I was terrified going up that rope but I did it anyway. And slowly, after many months, I wasn't faking it anymore. Sakizlian made me grow my hair long and wear red long velvet pants that hid my feet. Every day I practiced up in the air, and the actors practiced down below. As time passed I memorized their lines; I had nothing else to think of while I walked back and forth. I worked on running on that rope. I was almost running on the night I fell.

On the night I fell, I looked down and saw a familiar face. Aram's face. He was wearing a King's costume. He looked almost handsome in that low light he was steeped in,

almost charismatic. Sakizlian was directing him, giving him advice on how to speak. How to project his voice, how to stand like a sovereign. Something in me snapped.

Aram came running when I landed in the net. Why aren't you in Kasturya any longer, he asked again, and pulled me by the arm to his heirloom house."

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"I cooked for him, brewed tea, and made *helva* in the small kitchen. He was happy; eating, nibbling, and talking of disjointed things. Telling me about a game of backgammon he had watched in Kasturya. 'This guy threw sixes twice, *düſeſ*, another made a wrong move and the game went to *mars*, it was sunny and five past three.' Then he forgot what he was saying and continued mid way with some gossip. Auntie Esther had married a new man, this time Greek. But I knew everything Aram told me was made up. He could never remember a game of backgammon from a week ago, or who Auntie Esther had bed with this time.

In the morning I told him I would take him to a place he would never forget.

'Never?'

'Never. It is so beautiful you will always remember it.'

He was excited. We rented a caique. I told the oarsmen to row us all the way to Anadolu Feneri. I had carried a drunk there once, in the days of Cuntalı Hasan. A poor man from that village had grilled fish for me with olive oil and lemon and rocket, and I had come back to life. I took Aram there. I took him to the village *lokanta*. We ate.

On the quiet hill overlooking the end of the Bosphorus and the beginning of the Black Sea, I put a blindfold over his eyes and said 'Aram, wait for me here. I am going to bring you the thing you will never forget.' He said yes, vah vah Hagop.

I knew of nothing so beautiful that Aram wouldn't forget it. I walked away, erased all thoughts from my head and fell in rhythm with my own steps. I walked by a neighbourhood with many shops where all the talismans and writings sold were for protection against the djinns and I remembered. I remembered how, when I was mourning my beautiful Nora, Aram and I had buried Aznavur in the womb of the night. The *yasakhdjis* did not allow Catholics to be buried in an Armenian graveyard, no one had dared lay his body to rest. Aram, Müezzín and me, we had taken him from his wife Yerganuş – his body barely weighing a thing. We had broken into the graveyard and had dug up a hole for him, had marked it with three stones. There had been no time to place a cross. The Müezzín had buried an amulet instead, for protection from the djinns.

My heart began beating so fast from the memory I had to stop and bend down for air. The sun was setting. In the dark Aram would be totally lost. Maybe he would try to stand up without taking the blindfold off. He did keep the promises he could remember. If he didn't remember, he might take off the blindfold and then wouldn't know where he was. His circle of protection would not extend till Anadolu Feneri. I went back to the cliff, sweat pouring out my pores. He was not there. Maybe he has gone walking by the water, the owner of the restaurant suggested hopefully. I drifted by the sea the whole night.

The next morning I went to the theatre as normal. In the evening I readied the rope. They waited but Aram did not show up for practice. Sakizlian grew agitated.

'Sakizlian,' I said, 'I can do it. I know all the lines by now.'

He hesitated.

'How difficult can it be boss, if Aram can do it?'

'Show me,' he said.

I got down the rope and on to the stage. I put on the King's robe. I did not act the King but I acted Aram being the King and they all laughed. Because drool came out my mouth as I talked, just like Aram's did, the crown fell over my eyebrows the same way, I

looked like a sad child wanting to rule the world. After they were done doubling over from laughter Sakizlian said, ‘You little devil, you must have done this before.’

Then and only then did I tell him everything. I told him about the theatre in Kasturya, about Aznavur and his puppets, about how many plays I had actually seen, how I had always loved the stage. And then I told him ‘I always dreamt I would become an actor.’ But that was not true. I had not dreamt that dream until I saw Aram trespassing it. I told Sakizlian I had a life he wouldn’t believe. And that sentence I spoke was true.

Sakizlian told me I could be King until Aram’s return.”

The customers began to leave one by one as Hagop unravelled what he had done to poor Aram. They slammed the door and made the windows rattle. I was too mortified to look up. The biggest insult they could make to a storyteller was to leave mid-story, and without a word. There was anger and disappointment in the room. Hayalci looked worried, and Ioannis Efendi too, but Hagop didn’t seem startled by the loss of an audience.

After the blindfolding of Aram, only Hayalci and table number seven, a Sufi Dervish, Ioannis Efendi and I remained in the audience. We had been witness since the first night and I imagined us having similar thoughts at this moment. If this shared guilt was the price to pay for a true story, so be it.

Night Five

The next day, I woke up before the morning *ezan*. The sky was still dark and the windows were covered in steam. Hayalci had decided to stay overnight. Whenever there was too much rain or snow, he slept on the divans in the coffeehouse. On one such day, I had caught him staring into a mirror on the wall. He had told me that we never truly saw our own faces. “Only strangers do, and that solely at the moment of the first encounter,” he had said. I tried to remember that moment as I watched him make his first coffee of the day.

“*Sabahı şerifleriniz hayırlı olsun* my teacher,” I mumbled when he felt my gaze, may it be a blessed morning. He came over and planted a kiss on my head.

I folded my bed and placed it within the built in cupboard. Ioannnis Efendi woke to the smell of freshly brewed coffee, Hayalci was preparing him a cup too. He took a seat without a word and waited to be served. It was best not to engage with Ioannnis Efendi in the mornings.

‘I think you should let Hagop wrap it up,’ my storyteller said as he brought over bread, *kaymak* and honey, ‘even if only a few come to listen. The old listeners will return once I begin telling again.’

Ioannis Efendi mixed the *kaymak* and honey with a piece of bread and popped it into his mouth. He did not talk until he had swallowed the best of the mixture. ‘*Sabahı şerifleriniz hayırlı olsun* uncle!’ I said and joined them at the table. I pulled out a handful from the loaf to collect the leftovers. After his second cup of coffee Ioannis Efendi yawned, as if he had only just woken up.

‘The man has given me enough profit to go on for a week,’ he said, ‘You tell him that. I give him seven more days to finish the story.’

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“I thought I saw Aram at street corners, at the hamam, in the theatre, and on my way home. I had nightmares and regrets. But the truth is that life got better for me after I lost him. I went from rope walker to actor. I played the King. Then I played Brother Balthazar, and Abisoghom Agha. It didn’t occur to anyone to send me back to the rope once they saw my talents. I began to earn enough money to rent a place of my own.

After Aram’s disappearance, Sakizlian made two important announcements to his troupe. The first was that the Porte had given him exclusive rights to stage plays in Turkish, the second was that a woman would be joining us. Both news were short of miracles.

The troupe had acted mostly in Armenian until then. We had put on some Turkish plays but they were few and far in between. Our most loyal clientele were Armenians, and though both they and we could speak in Turkish, Armenian came easier, and was more lucrative for business. But the game of profit had changed now that the Imperial Porte had gotten involved. The monopoly meant we would be the sole company to cater to Turks, but first we would have to find a way to bring them in. The Turks weren’t as involved in theatre as the Armenians or Greeks were.

Sakizlian’s second news was even better. Women actors were even harder to find than a Turkish audience. Turkish and Jewish women were impossible; their men did not let them work outside the house. Greek women were difficult, they only worked with other Greeks. Most actresses in Bolis were Armenians who came from actors’ families, but they too were hard to come by. So we were very pleased when Sakizlian said he had found a local actress who was already famous abroad. She had just returned to Bolis, and Sakizlian had offered her lots of money to come to Pera and perform in our theatre.

Sakizlian introduced her to us as Yeraz, but the woman who walked in was no other than my Nora. My thoughts went off in all directions like an old dizzy lighthouse. I

had to force myself to stand still. I waited for her to narrow my features down; for her to see through to the little boy. Her cheekbones were more pronounced now than before, her eyes larger on her face, the only thing that had not changed was her smile. Slightly shy, slightly arrogant. And her dark brunette curls. It did not take her long to recognize me. I saw excitement in her eyes, and then something else. Sadness, even a little fear.

‘Nora...’ I said, and took a step forward with outstretched hand.

‘It is Yeraz,’ she said, taking a step back.

‘Nora?’ I asked again, hoping she would correct her mistake. Sakizlian and the actors looked puzzled. ‘Are you not Nora from Kasturya?’

‘Not from Kasturya,’ she smiled and sounded so certain I doubted myself, ‘It is nice to meet you.’

We talked as actors: we praised her, welcomed her, said we had heard about her. It was true. I had read all about Yeraz, I just hadn’t known she was Nora. Haydar and I had followed her through dirty newspapers. I knew every city she had performed at, knew the world map through her movements. We made small talk and laughed. Tea glasses, sweets, stage directions passed hands. We discussed the play in which she would take the lead role.

Nora was talking Armenian with all of us, she no longer spoke the childhood Turkish we had shared, sprinkled with her Ladino, and the neighbours’ Greek. Could it be that I was mistaken, that Yeraz merely had an uncanny resemblance to Nora? I studied her face.

I remembered the day they discovered Nora and me on the oak tree in the garden of the synagogue. A congregant was late, he came panting through the iron gate and caught us singing. The man ordered us to come down, and threatened to throw stones at us. Nora had begun her descent when the man threw a pebble up the tree. I doubt he had meant to hurt her, it was all just bad timing. The stone hit Nora on the cheekbone. She cried out in pain. The man was more scared than we at the end of it, and he promised he wouldn’t tell

anyone if we didn't announce he had just stoned the daughter of the Cantor. We shook hands on it. From that day on Nora had a scar shaped like the wings of a seagull, just below her eyes.

I looked at that spot as Yeraz talked, and knew that she was lying. Her fluency in Armenian was not all that strange. She was native in Ladino, and Cantor Moşe had taught her Hebrew. A private tutor visited their home for Turkish lessons. The family did not think another language would do any harm, so they had sent Nora to Aznavur's class. He taught the children of Kasturya Armenian. Not the classical Armenian of the Apostolic priests, but the language we spoke in the streets. Nora's Armenian was good enough even when we were children, and she must have practiced since then.

Night fell amidst the conversations in the foyer. We said our goodbyes by the red wooden door. It was raining outside. Nora began to walk towards Taksim. I couldn't help but follow her, like in the old days. She was slow and delicate. On a deserted side street I pulled her by the arm.

'Nora,' I said, 'Why are you lying?'

She avoided my eyes, looked down at her shoes. Fancy, brown and polished; they were not locally made. 'I have become someone else Hagop,' she said, 'Many things have changed.'

For a moment I was satisfied to hear her say my name, happy that my instincts had been correct. We walked quietly, side by side. I thought of all the neighbourhoods in which I had sought her traces. My hand stretched in my coat pocket, I wanted to glue our palms together.

'You are shivering,' I said. 'Let's get something warm to drink.'

We walked back to the theatre. I had a key. I stopped a sweet vendor and bought some *lokma*. We went back inside the musty building, paint crumbling off its walls. I tore the paper wrap off the sweets and placed them between us on the table.

During our winter childhoods we used to eat sweets all the time. Aznavur's wife baked *lokma* for the Karagöz nights. Our hands would be sticky as we watched the shadows on the wall. 'It is just like Yerganuş's isn't it?' Nora asked.

Aznavur used to invite all the children to his house on Sunday nights for shadow theatre. His wife Yerganuş made pots and pots of *lokma* because Aznavur never knew how many children would turn up. She was as fat as Aznavur was thin. Their house was filled to the brim with photographs, maps, drawings, hand woven kilims. The one empty wall stood out like a naked thigh. Aznavur kept it free for Karagöz and Hacivat. There he would set up his stage.

Yerganuş put cushions on the floor and the two of them blew out the candles. That was the beginning of magic, suddenly Karagöz would appear on the wall. Aznavur made Karagöz and Hacivat talk, and Yerganuş provided the music with a *bendir* in hand. She sat next to her husband, but half her body bulged out the side of the screen.

We would laugh as Karagöz did the silly things he did to earn money fast. And we all ate dessert after dessert and filled our tummies full. I always sat next to Nora.

'I couldn't find you after you left,' I said, 'but I read the newspapers. I didn't know Yeraz was you, of course. The papers say you have seen beautiful places.'

Nora blushed a little. 'I did,' she said. 'And there was one place where I wish we could have gone together. The island Aznavur kept telling us about.'

'San Lazarro?' I asked.

She nodded and pointed at the *lokma*, vulnerable and sticky between us. 'Eat,' she said. 'Eat sweet things so we can talk sweetly.'

'Tell me about Venice,' I pleaded after the first bite, but Nora looked tired.

‘Maybe another time?’ she asked, and I accepted, both her wish and the hope that she would stay. Then she asked me to tell her about myself.

‘I didn’t go anywhere exciting, only changed neighbourhoods.’ I halted, perhaps even calculated. ‘After Kasturya, I came to Pera, to this theatre. I began to earn my living, Sakizlian helped me.’ I drew my chair close to hers. ‘But I searched for you for a long time Nora. With Aram. We did everything together, looked for you together, we lived in his house till I got my own; he was a good friend.’

The words came rushing out. I felt I had to say what I felt at once and immediately, I felt she might disappear again if I did not. Also, if I didn’t talk about my love for her, I might talk about Aram. She tried to stop me but I didn’t let her. I reached out and held her hands in mine.

‘Nobody else can treasure you as much as I did, as much as I do. I can take good care of you Nora. I will give you a home, with a balcony like the one your grandmother smoked from, and a big dining table. You will not be unhappy anymore, not with me in your life. I will protect you. You can bring them all here; your father, mother, grandmother.’

‘There is no one to take care of anymore,’ she said.

And I understood why she had travelled so far without anyone stopping her. Had Cantor Moşe Cordova been alive, he would not have let her go.

Nora kept stirring her tea even though the sugar in it had dissolved. The spoon’s jingle echoed in the empty hall. We became part of the old building as we sat in silence, humidity spread through our bones.

I heard her swallow. ‘Hagop,’ she said, ‘do you remember Kibar?’

‘How could I forget?’

‘Do you remember any of his songs?’

‘I do.’

‘Did you listen to him again?’

‘Every Friday night.’

She was happy to hear that. ‘I forgot all his songs. I have a terrible memory. Can you sing one for me?’

And I knew with that question that Nora was still mine, despite all this time. As I sang I promised myself not to ask her too many questions. They might hurt her, or me. When I was done she clapped like a little girl.

‘You have improved so much,’ she said, ‘Vah Vah Hagop.’

Night Six

Ioannis Efendi had not expected to see new listeners walk into the coffeehouse. “These customers look like any other listener,” he said, “but their insides must be dark if they want more of Hagop’s story.” They took the seats the righteous ones had left empty, and the smoky room began to resemble a boat adrift at sea, a place where men shared their shortcomings without being judged.

“I kept on singing Kibar’s song over and over again, as I walked home. As if it was an incantation that would let Nora stay. The first time we had heard it was on the night of our escape. Eavesdropping by the window where Nora’s family made music, I had heard the Muezzin and the Cantor mention a performer called Kibar.

They did not compliment the singer due to his range or his disciplined transitions, but because he had a voice like only the most enchanting women possess. The expedition was not my idea, it was Nora’s. I nodded meekly while my heart raced. My part in the deal was to convince the Muezzin to take us to the famed singer.

The Muezzin divided his time between the call to prayers, and making music. He frequented the gardens in Phanar, he went to *meşk* nights all over the city, and as I learned whilst eavesdropping, he also sought out Kibar’s performances. Cantor Moşe trusted the Muezzin. The Muezzin loved me; he had caught me outside Nora’s house a few times, and I think he understood my depravity was due to love. Still, he did not agree to our wish easily. He made us promise we would obey his instructions, and that I would teach him some Armenian songs in return. He told us Nora would have to dress in boy’s clothes and stay quiet all night. He said it was a favour to our beautiful voices that he would do this almost illegal thing.

We took a caique ride on the Golden Horn after sunset. I was scared all the while that someone ashore would recognize Nora in her disguise. We could see the lanterns of Kasturya light up one by one. Then we heard laughter, and the tinkling of glasses. I saw the pier rocking on the waves. Vassilis Efendi, the owner, was waiting for us. He helped the Müezzín and Nora out. I felt nauseous as I walked behind them.

We sat down by the chestnut tree. Vassilis Efendi brought the meze tray that looked like the easel of a painter. *Tarama* had an off pink colour, the *fava* yellow, the *patlıcan ezmesi* green.

A man who had been sitting alone began going from table to table and greeting everybody like a groom. ‘That is Kibar,’ Müezzín Efendi said. ‘Best singer in Bolis, after Cantor Moşe Cordova.’

Kibar went up a makeshift stage where a single oud player was seated. The old man opened the session with a *taksim*, and then Kibar began to sing. The song that came out of him was soft and gentle like a night breeze. Nora’s eyes grew big in shock; you could never hear a woman sing in public, yet Kibar’s voice was just like a woman’s. Everyone had stopped eating and drinking in order to listen, but they were not looking at Kibar.

‘He is too ugly on the eyes,’ the Müezzín whispered. ‘They look over at the Golden Horn, and imagine someone else in his place.’

At the end of the night, when we rented a caique to cross back to Kasturya, Nora began to talk. It had not been easy for her to keep silent the whole evening. She said she would memorize all the songs Kibar ever sang. She said one day she would cross the Bosphorus again, except this time she would be the singer going to the pier to perform. Müezzín Efendi laughed as she talked, though he should have scolded her. I didn’t hold her hand anymore because I felt betrayed. After we got out of the caique, as we were nearing Kasturya with Müezzín Efendi behind us, Nora told me she could not wait for the future.

We could both be as good as Kibar if we continued to practice. And then she took my hand back in hers.”

Hagop’s love story had given me a slight fever and an extreme headache. The moment he stopped I thanked God because as Hagop was talking about songs I began hearing them. I knew good tellers could cause unexpected side effects but this was the first time I had ever experienced one. The melodies ravished my ears, breathy and warm, they undulated from high to low pitches and then began buzzing like mosquitoes as new songs began their discharge. I felt like I was cheating on Hayalci. Surely he was the more experienced, the more handsome, the sweeter teacher. I looked over at his side with trepidation and was caught off guard: my storyteller was gazing up at Hagop, with chin in palm and teary eyes, just like a forlorn lover.

Night Seven

Tonight Hagop looked stern. The sweet sadness and the shy smiles that occupied his face when he talked of Nora had vanished. He took his place on the table like he had something pre-determined and important to say.

“We did not spend a whole lot of time preparing the Turkish play, but we were very excited about it. The best way to attract the Turks to the theatre was through music, and to this end we hired Kibar. He would give a short concert before each performance. We had advertised both events with announcements on trees and shop windows. If we were successful, the poor Turks would start frequenting the theatre. They would step out of their smoke covered coffeehouses and shadow plays.

Days before the play Sakizlian called me over to his house and I re-entered that palace-like apartment for the second time. We had an early dinner on a table filled with books, pushing some aside to make place for glasses and plates. Sakizlian told me he would be leaving for San Lazarro the day after the play, he would be consulting the Catholic priests about establishing a special school in Bolis, one that catered to girls. He entrusted the theatre to me in his absence and placed a wedding gift in my hand; a gold chain for Nora.

‘How did you know?’ I asked him.

‘It is not difficult to read you,’ he said.

He told me Nora and I could live above the theatre once we were married. From porter, to tea boy, to rope boy, to actor and suddenly director in Sakizlian’s absence, yet I still felt like a homeless boy walking down the cool, marble stairs.

There was a long queue by the ticket counter that evening. Many women and children came. We had added chairs to their wooden chalice balcony from which they

could see the stage but not be seen. I walked the queue up and down, introduced myself, and welcomed everybody. Sakizlian watched from a corner, encouraging yet silent. A lot of the Turks were poor, when I welcomed them they kissed my hands. They asked me whether they had to do something special before entering the theatre, like take off their shoes, or bring their own cushions.

Those from the translation bureau of the Porte had arrived as well. They seemed used to queues and theatres and smoked and laughed as midget Osman cut one ticket after another. We had a full house.

Kibar began to sing in the late evening, and as he did I noticed a smell in the theatre, something akin to cucumbers and moss. An aroma I knew from a long time ago. It aroused helpless feelings in me; a hint of freedom just out of reach. My stomach tightened involuntarily. I looked around to find its source and saw a very handsome man. I had a distinct feeling I had seen him before. He lingered in the background, listened to Kibar with intent sea coloured eyes, sighed along with everyone else. He put one leg over the other, held his face in one palm.

Kibar sang two songs in the *rast makam*. He sang ‘*Rast Kâr-ı Nâtik*,’ and ‘*Âmed Nesîm-i Sûbh-u Dem*,’ then he went down the stage, and walked straight out the door. And many of the poor Turks walked after him. I tried to stop them, the play was about to start, but they had lost interest in all European inventions. ‘Where Kibar Baba goes, there we follow,’ they said.

I saw the handsome man leave after Kibar, but before he left the building he turned around and gave me a nod. Only then was I able to place his face. He still had the unwieldy feet, but the rest of him was as proportionate as any other man. His sea blue eyes looked love sick. The man was no other than Haydar. Except now all handsome and without a hunch.

After Sakizlian welcomed me to his troupe, the sensible thing to do would have been to leave Haydar peacefully. Instead I had grown angry at him. I remembered how he had beaten me up the first night I came to his boat for refuge. His words about my incapability, even when I had become his teacher, rang in my ears. He did not stop asking for rent even though the boat was not his; he was trespassing as much as I was. I forgot about our nights of reading together, I forgot about the deep-seated fear in his big blue eyes, I forgot about his handicap. Perhaps I would have found a friend in him had I come clean about Aram. If anyone would have understood my frustration at Aram's luck, it would have been Haydar. But I didn't tell him a thing. The night I became an actor, I went to the boat for revenge.

I told him I was leaving. I had gone from porter to tea boy and from tea boy to rope boy and now an actor, and he was still toiling under Cuntalı Hasan. He told me not to go. He said I would be no good at anything, so I stooped by his bed. I hunched my back like his, my eyes came level with my feet. He didn't know what was happening at first, then he realized I was copying him. I was a better hunchback than he had ever been. We were eye to eye for the first time. Looking into those blue eyes was scarier than seeing them look at me sideways. Still, I didn't budge. When he roared, I roared. When he spat, I spat. He said, "*Hayde bre domuz!*" I replied in kind. He put his bulky hand round my neck and I laughed, but his grip got stronger and stronger. I hurt him so as not to die.

Maybe, after I left him lying in his own blood and spit, he had never come to. I must have killed the man. There was no other explanation to seeing a hunchback turn up at your theatre without a hunch. Haydar was a ghost. I nodded back. And for the very first time, I became afraid of him."

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“Our first Turkish play had been a success. Sakizlian stopped by the theatre before leaving for San Lazzaro, and said I was to direct all theatre affairs until his return. Once I saw him off, waving a white napkin along with everyone else on the pier, I counted the proceeds of the night. We had collected triple the money we usually earned from the Armenian plays.

I sat before the theatre and waited. Turkish boys and little girls with gazelle eyes came to buy tickets for their families. Anyone would think I was enjoying our success, my new credentials, but I was watching the streets for Haydar, and plotting what I would do if he appeared to me again.

Instead, a man I remembered from the other day, one of the rich Turkish men who spoke French, came walking up the little hill. While the poor Turks had gazed at the stage as if they were watching a true story, the rich Turks had laughed at the most heart breaking moments; the man walking towards me was one of them. He had told Sakizlian it was a pity the drama was lost through the heavy Armenian accents. From my side, I was offended. It was precisely because the Turks did not have the know-how that we were staging plays in their place. The Porte had found us worthy, had given us a monopoly, and yet the intellectuals had nothing better to do then insult the way we spoke. But Sakizlian did not see it that way. He stroked his white flowing beard and spoke politely, though in a somewhat strained poise, with exaggerated sombreness like a Turk. He told the man that this, indeed, would not do, would he consider establishing a linguistic committee at the theatre? I went to the gates to greet this Turk and ordered Osman to make two coffees for us. A part of me was glad for the distraction he would provide.

Arif Efendi was a strange, soft-spoken man. He did not do any pleasantries but dived right into the topic by telling me he was a journalist, a poet, a playwright and that he knew Sakizlian from many years back.

‘I met Sakizlian during one of his visits to Venice,’ he began. ‘I saw him as I was waiting for the gondola to San Lazzaro. I was very homesick you see; Italians think they make coffee well, but they don’t. And I was telling the history of coffee to everyone I met in the streets. I assumed Sakizlian was Italian too; he was so elegantly dressed. So I began talking about goats and Sufis and prohibitions. He listened politely, I finished the tale in the middle of the sea, in between island and land. When I was done he asked me which part of Istanbul I came from. I was so surprised. I asked him how he knew not only that I was Turkish, but also that I was from Istanbul. He said he knew from my bushy brows, coal eyes, sad gaze. He said my homesickness was written all over me. We became friends immediately. Sakizlian is such an intelligent, gentle man.

I was going to the island to study, to interview the priests about their enlightenment project. A similar one is needed for the Turks. They were kind enough to host me, I stayed in the cloisters with the brothers. I studied at their library. I charted how they had managed to appeal to the masses by discarding the classic Armenian and utilizing instead the Armenian spoken in the streets, how they had written encyclopaedias in that every day Armenian, enabling all the poor masses to read. They had penned many plays in that language, published many books, opened schools here in Istanbul; theirs was a model I wanted to study and utilize.’

Arif’s speech was eloquent like a newspaper article. Each word he chose was weighty. He did not use one unnecessary syllable. But his face was as impulsive as his words were calculated. His eyes darted in different directions when he spoke, and re-focused on you if he wanted to emphasize a point.

He told me that he admired the Catholic priests in San Lazzaro, but that he did not understand why they wanted a solely Armenian enlightenment. Armenians were Eastern people and so were the Turks, so would it not be better if they got enlightened together

rather than separately? Especially seeing that we had the same complaints about Sultan Abdülaziz? Especially when both peoples needed a different kind of Sultan, a liberal Sultan who would allow for an Ottoman assembly where all ethnicities would be represented equally.

Then he recited Beshiktasliyan's poetry to me: 'Let us unite in harmony as brothers; So shall our efforts fruitful be.' Aznavur had made Nora and me memorize Beshiktashliyan back in Kasturya. The poet had not wanted conflict between Apostolic and Catholic Armenians; it was not religion but blood that was important to him. Armenians were one people. I had never heard him mention the Turks in his poetry though. Maybe he considered them one with us, or maybe they weren't even worth the consideration since they were Muslims. In either case, I was not one to oppose brotherhood.

'How wonderful to hear your agreement Hagop Beyefendi,' he said, 'You are a man to my heart. Now, the reason I came to you today is the following...'

Arif had brought me a play he had written. He said it was patriotic, about love of land and sovereignty, and could attract a bigger Turkish audience to Sakizlian's theatre. Surely, as a good businessman, I would see the potential in this, especially after the success of last night's drama: 'a mediocre yet charming piece.' Our profits would be doubled. The Turks were a loyal, easy to please crowd, and Arif was sure our troupe would have no difficulties in entertaining them.

'Sakizlian told me it was up to you to make decisions in his absence, Hagop. He thought delivering my play personally would be a good way of initiating our friendship, which I hope will be fruitful and long lasting.' Arif bid me farewell after these words.

I watched him walk away, and only then did I notice his clothes. They were too old and too small for him. The thought occurred to me that Arif had not shopped since his thoughts on the enlightenment had begun."

Night Eight

It didn't take long for the imperial palace to learn the telling of inappropriate stories in the coffeehouse. It is the first night of the new week, and word amongst coffee drinkers is that a spy is on the way. Sultan Abdülhamid II is not only suspicious of storytellers but also of reporters, poets and playwrights. Both Beshiktasliyan and Arif are writers quoted by renegades, their names appear on the list of forbidden words.

One year ago, just before Sultan Abdülaziz's death, his spies were haunted by premonitions in coffeehouses all over the city. Storytellers could not talk about dangerous playwrights then either. When Sultan Murat V rose to the throne, the spies grew liberal but timid, like Sultan Murat V himself. Now that Sultan Abdülhamid II rules, he has his own type of informants.

In this coffeehouse where every face plays on the mirrors and where men fall in love with each other through their reflections, the murmur of spies is stimulating. We wait for them to come and excite us, just as much as we wait for the stories. At least I do, and I know Hayalci does as well.

Tonight the spy came wearing a red, silk shirt. Everyone knows that no real Muslim, and no real man, should ever be caught wearing silk. He sat next to me because I look inoffensive; no one ever remembers my face or name. The spy questioned me about the storyteller of this coffeehouse, so I told him about my Hayalci, and about how his charm carried each story to an unexpected purging. Then he asked me about the man who had stolen his place, this man called Hagop, the man who was reportedly talking about Apostolics and the island of San Lazzaro and dangerous Turkish plays. So I told him about Hagop and because he asked, I also showed him the coffeehouse books under my protection. His eyes shone with envy when he saw my necklace made up of the four keys. He scanned the pages of the old book for dangerous words, but did not find any.

The spy waited till Hagop took his seat on the table, looking slightly *çakır keyif*. Someone from the back who was more drunk than Hagop, asked to hear more of Nora. “I will tell you whatever I want,” he responded. The drunkard was about to say more but the listeners shushed him so the telling could begin. The spy listened to Hagop talk of intervallic structures and Kibar, but left soon enough through the creaking backdoor. Looking bored and empty handed.

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“I sat in Sakizlian’s office and began to read Arif’s play. His language was impassioned, which was also clear from our conversation, but the patriotism in the play did not include the Armenians, just as Beshiktashliyan’s brotherhood had not included the Turks. All the characters in Arif’s play were honourable Turks who fought against the Russians. No mention was made of any honourable Armenian, or Greek, or Jew for that matter. Again, maybe this was because Arif considered us one with the Turks, or maybe it was because we weren’t even worth the consideration since we were not Muslims. I wondered what Sakizlian would think of it.

As I grew more and more confused, an old ghost entered the theatre. I heard the doors creak, followed by footsteps in the dusty corridor. There was no one inside apart from me, and midget Osman. In came Haydar, burly and proud, like it wasn’t my theatre he was in but our crumbling fishing boat.

‘Where did you drop that hunch of yours?’ I stammered.

‘I left it in a hamam,’ he said, looking genuinely happy to see me.

‘That must be a very special hamam.’

‘You wash yourself clean of all sins there. I think you have a need for that too, Hagop.’

Osman brought my coffee, and asked Haydar if he wanted something to drink. He wished for some sherbet. 'Sherbet coming to handsome *ağabey*,' Osman the dwarf said. Those words made me see Haydar anew. What would I think of him if I were meeting him for the first time? He did not look his age, he must be at least 10 years older than me but his face was devoid of worry. I stared at my well-frothed coffee in fear. What kind of a man was Haydar without his hunch? Would I have to fight him again?

'How have you been?' I asked.

'Good,' he said, 'Where is Kibar?'

'He isn't in yet, comes later in the afternoon.'

Haydar did not seem aware of the strangeness in our mutation. He had become a lean, young man, and I was director of a big theatre. As if we were still in our old vessel, as if it was a stormy night rather than a hot summer afternoon, Haydar began telling me a good long story.

He had no reason to tell it, but he did nevertheless. It seemed he trusted me. Maybe because I was the only one that believed he was still the same Haydar. Or maybe he had trusted me all along, unbeknownst to me. Everyone else took him for a liar, he said. They took him for another person. Acquaintances saw him and asked, 'Who are you?' They didn't recognize him. Haydar understood then that they had never looked at his face. They hadn't known his eyes were blue. They had looked at his hunched back only, at his callused feet, at the things he had carried. His face was somewhere down next to his feet and nobody had bothered to lean down. So whatever the past was, it was only I who had shared it with him.

'I went to the hamam because you were gone,' Haydar said. 'The boat got lonely after you. I had gotten used to company, you know. I missed the feeling that someone was breathing

in the same air as me. So I went to the cheapest hamam I could find. When I woke up the next morning, my hunch was gone.

I walked a lot that day. I walked by the shore. I could not believe my luck. I followed the sun, wanted to be under it, wanted it to burn my face constantly. I had never felt that before. It was proof I was standing up straight. Then I got so tired. I couldn't walk any longer and I entered the first garden I saw. It was a crooked looking house, tall, very old, out of shape, kind of like how I used to be. I hid under some bushes there. The whole house was asleep, it was midday and the curtains were drawn. I woke up to someone whistling. But not any kind of whistling, something very pretty, you know. Like a nightingale. When I looked up I saw this ridiculously small man. Ugly, dark and thin. No hair on his face. He wore a white shirt. It opened like a sail with the wind. He leaned against the wall, lit a cigarette. He inhaled it so loud I thought he was short of breath. He hung on to his *cigara* for dear life. Then he giggled. I thought to myself, this man knows how to take pleasure from things. Then he saw me. I took him by surprise. He assumed I was a guest, even though I was lying shirtless underneath the bushes. He is gullible like that. Mistook me for a fancy person, said he was really glad I would be listening to him. That is how it started.'

Haydar had met Kibar in the garden of a seaward house, which was also a library. People all over Istanbul were in love with his voice, and the patron of this *yalı* was no different. Kibar went to sing for him once in a while, accompanied his drinking like the meze. Haydar stalked Kibar. He followed him as he left that seaward house and took a caique to Karaköy. He followed him to the bazaar where he changed the strings of his oud. He followed him to the house in which he did not draw the curtains, where he gave his neck and back to Haydar to watch.

Haydar said a woman began following him too, just the way he was following Haydar. Her name was Deli Ayten. I knew her well enough; all of Bolis knew. She was a poor gypsy, had married a clarinet player who died of drink. She had lost her mind from grief, and begun throwing potatoes to whomever she pleased. Men liked her enough. She was docile to them. Everybody had taken a sweet piece of her, under bridges and in alleyways. She forgot things, just like Aram did. They were like long lost siblings those two, Aram had been lucky only because he was rich. Deli Ayten was poor.

Deli Ayten loved Haydar, and Haydar loved Kibar, and so they followed each other from dawn to sleep, and from Pera to Beşiktaş to Üsküdar. Haydar told me he wasn't ashamed. He said he knew it was wrong. He told me the story a whole afternoon long and then sat quietly with his hands in his lap. His eyes were begging that I say something.

'*Vay be* Haydar,' I said, '*kara sevda*'.

'Very black,' he said. 'My heart is poison.'

'Don't tell this to anyone else,' I said. 'If you love another man, you keep it to yourself. And God forbid you ever mention your hunchback, who would believe you?'

I told him he could wait for Kibar here if he wanted.

He thanked me. 'I go where Kibar goes,' he said, 'wherever his holy foot touches, I kiss that soil.'

Nora came in at that moment. I introduced them to each other, told Haydar she was my wife.

'You have done well,' he said, and I saw in his eyes that he meant it, and also that he didn't care for it. 'Kibar and I lived together on the boat,' he said to Nora, 'until he became an actor. Those were the best days of my life.'

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“That was the night my Nora began leading a different life. I assumed it was because she caught my lie; I had told her I had lived with Aram, and yet Haydar had told her different. I had never mentioned a boat.

She began to talk under her breath, began to keep her hands over her eyes for longer than necessary during the Sabbath prayers, kept her veil on inside the house. I stopped caressing her long wavy hair, she deprived me of her shapes and curves. We argued. She stopped sleeping at night, and began sleeping when I awoke. I would watch her as I drifted off, smiling before the mirror, memorizing her lines for the plays we were rehearsing. I was a slave to sleep, and she used her knowledge of me to draw herself apart.

We never mentioned the white lie that started it off. After Haydar left, I explained who he was to Nora; I told her we had lived in the same district, not in the same house, that I had lived with Aram, and that I had taught Haydar how to read and write. He was a student, I said, which wasn't exactly false. But she did not believe me, even if she had every reason to.”

Night Nine

Many men stayed at the coffeehouse last night. They could not get out, it thundered and stormed throughout all five prayers; that is a full circle. I kept on seeing dreams of waterfalls and woke up to heavy, luscious drops suspended in treetops. Little pools had formed amidst the cobblestones. In Kapadokya those pools would be considered a miracle. There are only dry winds, sand coloured mountains, and cloudless skies where I come from.

Ioannis Efendi is not awake yet. He has his rules as to how the mornings must unfold, and will not like to wake up to this crowd. A customer comments he is glad to find out there is no second story to the coffeehouse where Ioannis Efendi throws himself next to an olive coloured, plump wife. 'Efendi is much too irritable for a good woman,' he says and the others chuckle.

I go behind the counter to make the coffees. Another man announces he will not leave the coffeehouse at all today. He is one of those who became a regular after Hagop narrated Aram's disappearance. His companion mutters under his breath, "Let's just see how low Hagop will stoop tonight."

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"Before Nora drew away from me, we were as happy as street cats in heat, and as loud, and as protective of each other," Hagop began his telling, "You can pretend to disapprove, but I know you will be imagining her as you drip sweat onto your beloved tonight. I don't know how to make something pretty of this truth. You probably think I am a bad man, without rules, and obscene. But I will always be more and better than you because I have something few of you have ever managed. I desired Nora only, and for all my life. Even

when she was gone, and I was with other women, I only thought of her. When I conjured up a soul to fit the body I played with, it was hers that I conjured. And after I married Nora I never looked at another; ask anyone in Galata and they will confirm. Whenever a waft of perfume came my way I stared at the ground, whenever a female face appeared I withdrew my eyes. My neck became the heaviest, achiest part of me. I only wanted her face in my mind, only the warmth of her hips pressed against me in sleep.

But as she began a life of her own, as she covered her hair with a veil and her eyes with a coldness hard to penetrate, as I grew lonelier than I ever thought possible, I wondered whether I had known Nora at all. She had always been the one woman I thought of, but what did I know of the life she had led when we were apart? How could I assume the Nora I knew in the past, and the Nora now were the same person?

But I soon realized my ignorance didn't matter. What was important was that I continue to love her, that eventually, and through this love, I become the man I had always wanted to be. What was important was that I retain the hope of that possibility. Everything I hated about myself disappeared when I thought of Nora.

I didn't care that she drew away now. Loving her when she was not there had always been my strong suit."

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"The first few nights of our marriage, there was always something new. First I thought this was due to my excitement to be with Nora, the real her and not the dream of her. But I soon realized excitement was not the reason behind this feeling of novelty; Nora turned into a different person every night.

She turned into women she had known and grown fond of, and sometimes into characters she had played out on the stage. I was her testing ground. She experimented with me to see what kind of an effect she would leave on others, and I willingly indulged.

She wanted to be other than herself, my Nora. She did not want to be the little girl I had fallen in love with, but Yeraz: someone who came from elsewhere. A woman who could be from Thrace, or from the Crimean mountains up North, and I did not understand her reasoning. She had told me once that she liked different names, and that I should not always call her by her own. So as I passed my tongue over her lips, I called her Anush, Katina, Saadet, Roza. And I saw rapture in her eyes, and she made love to me violently. Like no women ever does. So much so that she was like a man.

I began telling her stories. I am not ashamed of it. First I told her true ones, and then I told her the continuation of those true stories that never were. Those adventures had never continued because I had been looking for Nora. All women had only served me to remember her.

The true tales were easy enough to tell. I told her of the women I found as I went from one street to another in Kuzguncuk, as I probed Jewish neighbourhoods. I told her how brothels did not even look like brothels there. They were easy enough to find once you asked the right people. Those right people looked like every other men, sad and longing. I became day long friends with them and they drew maps for me, or walked with me and showed me, or told me to meet them somewhere later so they could take me, and introduce me to the women themselves but they never raised fingers to point at the building. They shared secrets only with men to their heart.

I told her about the woman in the alleyway. Behind Dimitri's winehouse. She was the first. I told her I followed her and the blue shawl she wore everyday, but this wasn't because I loved her.

I told her about Alexandra. She was the one who took the best care of me. I don't remember the love making, but I remember everything she did afterwards. She made rice, not in a bowl but in a flat pan, just enough for her and me. She had no children but knew she would be a mother one day. She had her dowry on one side of the apartment, and she asked me to bring her a gift to add to it every time. Her hair was in a bun during love making, but after her bath it was curly like an Arab's and reached till below her hips.

I told her about the one with the green eyes, who had nothing worthy of mention apart from those eyes. Her hips were too large, her breasts were too small but she glided around the house like she was the most beautiful creature on earth and that made her so. She made coffee for me with milk and chocolate to the side. Foreign men visited her too, and I was not welcome every time.

After this point I lied to Nora and told her I extended these one time visits, and made habits of them, and divided my week into seven women for many years and I told her I loved them every and each. I saw many emotions in her eyes as I told these stories. First there was curiosity, and then jealousy and the rest I could not read.

After one such tale I asked her if she would sing for me. She got up from the cushion, her beautiful buttocks having made it hollow. She walked barefoot on the carpet, and from where I lay on my side, I watched her rosy heels touch the ground and then rise again. She picked up the old leather bound book, told me this was all she had taken from the house in Kasturya. The only thing she never lost had belonged to her father. It was Cantor Moşe Cordova's book of songs, the *piznonim*. She skimmed through the pages. I could smell them from afar. They were filled with different colours of ink, and those Jewish letters, more rectangular than the Arabic, but equally undecipherable.

'You know my father composed a beautiful song in Ladino, about the believer feeling jealous of God. But the original was in Portuguese, and I will sing that for you,' and sing it she did.

*'The first one approached me
As those coming from the florist:
He brought a stuffed animal,
He brought an amethyst brooch.
He told me of his travels
And of the privileges he had had.
He showed me his watch;
And called me queen.
I was so disarmed
He touched my heart
He wouldn't deny me a thing
And scared, I said no.*

*The second approached me
Like those coming from the wine house
He brought a bottle of raki
So bitter to swallow.
He asked me about my past
And sniffed my food.
He rummaged through my drawer;
And called me lost.
I was so disarmed
That he scratched my heart,
But he wouldn't give me anything
And scared, I said no.*

*The third approached me
Like those coming from nowhere:
I hardly remembered what he was called,
But I understood what he wanted,
He lay in my bed
And called me woman.
He came in sneakily
And before I could say no,
He settled like a squatter
In my heart.'*

Nora opened her eyes and closed the book. I quaffed the half full rakı glass. It was bitter to swallow. I looked into her eyes to see which woman she was tonight. But I only saw the little Nora, my Nora; this was her love song to me. A love song filled with other men. I was the last one, the one who lay in her bed and named her woman. The one she hardly remembered. Even though it was the hardest thing I ever did, harder on me than her vanishing, I stroked her cheek and kissed it. It was a soft, small touch, and all I could manage.

I could not kiss her on the mouth.”

The coffeehouse was quiet alongside Hagop, till butcher Ahmet Efendi stood up with a vengeance:

‘Nora is shameless to have told you those things. To give you numbers in a song, what a whore!’

From another side of the room, two men spat in agreement. Then a Greek got up.

‘You don’t know what you are talking about,’ he said. ‘Do you think your woman is faithful to you?’

The two of them got into a fist fight and Hagop smiled on in his little chair, as if the woman they were fighting about was not his Nora.

Night Ten

“Sakizlian returned from San Lazarro on a sunny day in March, with his face beaming from all the conversations and travel, more determined than ever to focus on his educational projects. He was going to build not one, but two schools for girls. ‘That is what is missing from San Lazarro,’ he said, ‘Women are missing from our enlightenment.’ There was no point in arguing; just as he did not care about riches, Sakizlian did not care about his reputation.

Meanwhile, Arif established a literary committee in the theatre. If we were to be the sole company to stage plays in Turkish, the actors had to enunciate properly. Now that we would have a Turkish audience, we had to lose the Armenian accents. We were staging a drama afterall, and not a comedy. It was one thing to talk improperly at home, and another thing to talk improperly on stage. It made the Turks laugh. Turks were fighters. He didn’t mean any offence, of course. Different nations had different qualities.

He had drawn diagrams overnight, about what it was exactly that we didn’t do right. He had a fixation with the letter ‘u,’ and how we turned it into ‘oo.’ The actors had to hold a grape in between their lips to correct this error. And if they were going to ask a question, they had to do it with the proper syllables, and not by turning sentences sing songy. ‘But I wouldn’t want to change anything around here,’ he said. ‘Sakizlian is the boss, Hagop is the right hand. I am nobody. These are mere suggestions so that you can attract a bigger audience. For your benefit only, so that you increase profits.’

**

“We had decided on all the actors for our next Turkish play. All but one. The role of Leyla lacked its actress. Arif and I were seeking a woman.

‘She should resemble Istanbul,’ Arif said, looking misty eyed.

‘How could a woman look like a city?’ Little Osman snorted as he passed by, level with our knees. ‘You mean a woman with seven tits like the seven hills?’ We all laughed, except for Arif.

The women were called in one by one. The play Arif had written was about the war and as if to prove his point, one by one refugees from the border arrived. Not just from the frontier with Russia, but also from the Balkans. The Turks were being thrown out of Europe just as quickly as they had occupied it hundreds of years ago.

The refugees had nothing, they had had to leave breakfast tables to flee the Serbs and Bulgarians. The wounded had dropped to the ground as they walked away, leaving behind fields of corpses. With their husbands, brothers, and sons lost to the war, the women were now looking for ways to sustain themselves. Any job would do. There were long queues to audition.

I did not expect Nora to walk in through that door. She came in, and Arif stopped his pacing and blinking. I had never thought of her like a city, now I wondered why not. She looked beautiful on the dusty stage. High cheek bones and a kissable mouth. Big watery eyes. Wavy hair up to her shoulders. Long skirt. Reliable in grey. She made herself inconspicuous. At least she tried. But however she covered herself up, you looked at her twice. In her right mind she would not have married me.

Sometimes I let her act in the plays, sometimes I didn’t. It depended on how she asked. It depended on whether my friends came to see the play. Sometimes I was proud of her. Everybody could see her talent. At other times her flair made me despondent. It was difficult not to desire Nora. I didn’t know any men who didn’t. Being on stage was a further invitation. It made me angry too that she was happiest when she acted. Not when we made love, or were lying next to each other, but when she was with other people and

pretending to be someone else. All this led to my occasional refusal, but this time she hadn't even asked for permission.

I knew and Arif knew. Even the cleaning lady and Osman knew. Her Turkish was not perfect. Not up to Arif's standards. But he forgot his wishes once he saw her. Arif asked Nora who she was. I am from Rumeli, is all she said. I didn't mention she was my wife, didn't want to observe Arif composing himself out of his desire.

Arif made his decision. Nora would take the lead role. She would be Leyla. Out of courtesy we auditioned all the other women, and gifted them cigarettes so they wouldn't leave empty handed. And then Deli Ayten came on stage with all her bags and instruments. She came in with a yashmak of silk. Someone must have given it to her. The top part of her looked respectable. Not that she would care about looking any certain way. Her legs and feet were bare. Arif asked her name.

She said, 'Crazy Ayten, Deli Ayten.' Osman laughed, I slapped his head.

'What are you going to play for us today, Deli Ayten?'

'I will play crazy love,' she said and began hitting her potato against the cymbals. It beat thick like a Ramadan drum. She sang an incomprehensible song and threw her potato at me, then left the stage shouting: 'Haydar Haydar my Haydar.' "

Hagop looked more tired than usual, his eyes were blood shot. Once everybody left the coffeehouse for the night, Hayalci touched Hagop's forehead. He was burning with fever. Ioannis Efendi was not happy as Hayalci and I unfolded an extra bed, but Hagop was in no condition to walk back home.

Towards dawn I heard him get up. The floors creaked but no one apart from me awoke. Hagop drank from the pitcher of water like he was in drought. Then he put on his torn coat and left the coffeehouse.

The Last Night

We waited for Hagop's return for three days and three nights. He had sent word that the night of his reappearance would be his last night of storytelling.

There were no places inside the coffeehouse anymore. The chairs were taken, the divans were full, young tellers sat on the floor and on each other's laps; no one had space to move. We had opened the windows for hopes of fresh air, even though it was very cold outside. Strangers rested their elbows on the bannisters and looked inside.

Hagop entered the premises, appearing healthy and well rested. He thanked Hayalci for giving up his telling for a little bit, for having faith in his tale. He hugged my storyteller who had not been expecting the gesture, or the gratitude. '*Estağfurullah*,' is all he could manage before Hagop took his place on top of the table, one last time.

"*Ey Ahali*," he began, "the story was long and took a couple of nights to tell. You liked it, and so we were together for a while. I kept my promise; I did not tell you a single lie. We have arrived at the tail of it. You will have your Hayalci back after tonight. We will not see each other anymore; I think that will make us all happier. If you ever think of me again, remember me as a sore in Ioannis's side." Ioannis Efendi laughed at this, no doubt thinking of Hagop as an asset by now, rather than a sore. He had brought many new clients to his old coffeehouse.

"The theatre shook on the evening we staged Arif's play in proper Turkish, the evening I allowed my Nora to act the part of Leyla. So much clapping, so much stamping like I had never heard before. Even Sakizlian was taken by surprise. The audience wanted to see their playwright on stage.

But Arif was suddenly shy. His pants were too short, his sleeves too long, his beard tangled. The viewers didn't stop applauding. I saw him attempt to go up the stage, but there were too many people in his way. They were in standing ovation now. Everyone was talking at once, and no one was looking at him. Arif reddened from chest to face. He wet his lips and tried to speak above the noise in the theatre, but to no avail.

I thought there was something disproportionate in the response of the spectators, almost violent. They looked like bandits rather than an audience. Then they began repeating the last words of the play: 'We want our Murat, we want our promise!' It took me a while to realize they were calling for the Crown Prince Murat V, and not merely repeating lines. Suddenly I understood why Arif had been so particular with the actors; he had wanted to incite protest. Unbeknownst to myself, I had staged a play against Sultan Abdülaziz.

The women were the first to sense the tension, they began going down the stairs quietly and in orderly fashion. I escorted them out and then locked Nora in our bedroom upstairs. Next, I took Sakizlian by the arm. He couldn't find his cane, I picked it up from underneath his seat. As he walked out of the theatre I stared at his back, and realized suddenly that he had grown fragile.

The audience was shouting in unison now. I could hear them from the garden. The bandits were saying they wanted their parliament. They were shouting slogans against Sultan Abdülaziz, they wanted a constitution. It felt like someone had thrown a cold bucket of water over my head. I didn't want slogans in the theatre; I didn't want revolutions, I hadn't realized what this play meant to the Turks. If the Porte found out, they would take away our monopoly. They would surely close us down.

The crowd stormed out of the building. More people joined them in the streets. Grannies with hanging breasts leaned out from windows. Did they know who they were shouting for? Maybe it didn't matter. Feeling had overtaken them. The men carried torches

and set fire to a shop or two. I could hear glass shattering. They headed towards the rich quarters of Pera.

I went back in and locked the theatre. Kibar and Haydar were inside. Deli Ayten wanted to run after the crowd and throw her potatoes, but I held her back. She shouted after them ‘They will force you from the throne Sultan, on a caique with four rowers!’ Then she bit my hand and escaped as I backed away in pain. Blood was streaming down my wrists. Kibar looked about to find bandages, Haydar fetched some water. They lit two wax candles; it would be better to keep the lights dim. The police should know we were not planning to take down Sultan Abdülaziz. Kibar and Haydar tended to my hand. Before I walked up the stairs to Nora, Haydar squeezed my neck like I were a kitten. ‘You will be all right,’ he said. It started to rain, we heard it patter on the rose bushes by the windows. There was thunder, and a strong wind. The storm had finally come down.

I was in a nervous stupor. Nora was still. She didn’t go walking in the house like she normally would. Perhaps she sensed I was not well. It was clear Arif had meant for all this to happen, he had written the play to agitate.

I heard a loud noise around midnight. My first thought was that a branch had fallen on the roof. But the banging wouldn’t stop, there was someone at the door. I got out of bed and went down the stairs. I cleared my throat and flattened my hair because it could be no other than the police. I opened the door and there on the ground, I saw Sakizlian laid down in blood. His clothes were dishevelled. He had been beaten badly and looked up at me with uncertain eyes. I held his hand and asked him what had happened. Then I heard a crackle by the bushes and saw a man run out of the gates. Someone who had gotten Sakizlian in this state, or someone who had saved him from worse.

I shouted for Haydar and Kibar to help. We carried him up the stairs. Sakizlian’s face became more and more swollen. His lip was cut open. Haydar and Kibar looked like children caught in a misdeed, caressing at every opportunity. This was all a game to them.

The night was an excuse to grow closer. Sakizlian burned with fewer. Nora and I stayed by him. It was towards morning when he asked for some water, and then began to talk.

‘That Arif Bey is a nice man. I met him in Venice, on the gondola to San Lazzaro. He wore those funny short trousers then too. He cleared his throat each time he spoke. He talked to me in Italian. He said, Signor, if I may disturb you, may I tell you the story of coffee? The poor lad was so homesick all he could talk about was coffee. I asked him if he was from Bolis. His eyes watered. I asked the priests if they could let him stay at the monastery. Arif was a member of the Young Ottomans, the ones against Sultan Abdülaziz. He was writing articles for one of their publications, had come to Venice to research San Lazzaro’s role in the Armenian enlightenment. We talked for many nights.’

As Sakizlian shared his memories, the smell of cinnamon spread across the house. Nora had begun baking to calm everyone down. She would serve us as soon as the deserts were cool to the touch.

‘When Arif came to visit me in San Lazzaro, just after the night of our first Turkish performance in Bolis, I gave him the play I was working on,’ Sakizlian continued, ‘I asked him to pass it onto you. I thought it would be good if the two of you met in person. It is opportune you staged his play instead.’

I listened quietly to how I had been a fool. Arif had never told me of Sakizlian’s play, and I had never thought to ask. Sakizlian had shared Arif’s homesickness because they had the same bushy brows, the same coal-black gaze. I had helped Arif for nothing at all. Worse. ‘Your profit will be doubled,’ he had said. I had helped him for the sake of money.

Nora joined us in the bedroom. We sat with bitter tea and sweet pastries, next to the bed where Sakizlian lay. A fleeting wish seized me, made me break in to a cold sweat. I regretted, only for a minute, that I had not been dedicated to one enlightenment or the other. That I was not a man, like Sakizlian or Arif, who devoted his life to ideas bigger than himself. I wished Nora had not been my only desire. And then, as suddenly as it had arrived, the wish passed.

Sakizlian was smiling, gesturing, talking about boats. I watched as he got confused half way through. Details disoriented him now. He didn't see the forest for the trees. Nora and I held on to his hands. We wanted to anchor him. I felt we, Nora and I, were in this room together, on this floor, in this theatre, in this house, on this hill, for the first time in a very long while. She had not started to live a different life tonight, she was only herself.

I opened the bedside drawer. I took out the book Sakizlian had gifted me on the first day I had met him. The same one Haydar had loved reading from in the boat. Our copy had been dirty, thrown out of an Apostolic house in the Armenian quarters, judged fit for the garbage. Taken from a long time ago when I knew nothing, and could get away with knowing nothing. I had cherished the copy Sakizlian had given me as my first salary, had kept it wrapped in velvet. Now I took it back to Sakizlian. Lovingly he held it in his hands.

'How beautiful Hagop,' he said, 'I always thought you were more of a playwright than an actor.'

I told Nora to make Turkish coffee with sugar, so that I could read sweetly, and Sakizlian could listen in sweetness. He would grow enchanted, I was sure. Nora cried a little when she saw Sakizlian listening to his own words like a proud father. I kept on reading, a favour I had only granted a hunchback on a crumbling boat. I told Nora to bring Haydar upstairs, so he could finally meet the writer.

I read with everyone I loved around me. I made a silent promise not to hurt Nora again, at least not intentionally. Morning was near, the sky was ripening. The police would soon arrive. They would not keep a theatre like ours open. Arif would be exiled, but the Porte would be clever about it. They would send him to a place that was revolting against the Ottomans. They would push him away from Bolis but make use of his politics. He would be sent to one Greek island or another, maybe to the Russian border. Or it could be worse. They might dump him into the sea when the boat to exile reached seraglio point.

I would send word to the actors that they lay low for a while. Nora was already packing a suitcase. I did not dare look whether it was for one or two. I would not force her any longer. She could be Yeraz or Leyla or Anush, if that was what she wanted. I would not stop her but I would be close, like a shadow. Because the ground she walked on was holy to me. Because I loved her as never before.”

**

I knew what my storyteller was thinking. His honey-flecked eyes were full of gentleness, passion and violence all at once. I knew I had finally charted the depths and heights of his imagination; I had made a map of his mind. I had memorized him like the palm of my hand and not from the way he told a story, but from the way he listened to it.

Hagop left the coffeehouse after his final words. My storyteller put on his fur-collared caftan, lit his long necked cigarette and went after him. I would like to think Hagop knew my storyteller was following him, and that my storyteller had no idea I was behind them both. Hagop’s coat swung in the wind as he walked. He was finally a free man. A man who no longer had the need to shelter secrets. He walked long and slow to Karaköy.

Sunk into the sand at the shore, looking deserted and ramshackle, I saw the fishing vessel Hagop had told us about, the one in which he had lived together with Haydar. Hagop entered it. He was the only good teller I knew who had no coffeehouse sponsoring him. My storyteller lit another cigarette in the night, and gazed at the lanterns on the other side in Kasturya. Filled with an aching desire, he followed Hagop into the boat.

One day they will ask me how I became such a good storyteller myself. Then I will show them the books I have written. The forbidden books I kept of Hayalci and Hagop, and the coffeehouse books I slowly filled throughout the years. I will bare my chest with the chain of four keys, a keepsake from my days as scribe. But the coffeehouse in between Aya Pantalemion and the big oak will long have acquired a new transcriber, and the rose wood cupboard will be under his protection.

I will also tell them of the lessons I learned; I will convey to my students the teachings of Hayalci. I will describe the socks Hagop wore, and how the holes in them multiplied with the telling. I will say his face went from old to young as he unburdened his soul. I will state that it helps to tell a true story, and sometimes it helps to make elaborate lies. Every storyteller has a different tactic.

Still, I am convinced what makes for a good tale is not the story at all but its audience. Only if you listen well, can the teller enthrall. And I had the best of audiences. First the man they all desired but came to regret, the mad Sultan Murat V, then the man they had all overlooked, Sultan Abdülhamid II.

5

Kibar

But there will be a time when the vision will be continuous.

Plotinus

My Testimony, or the Memories I Recollect and Those I Have Forgotten

I came to Istanbul twice, Your Honour. The first time I descended from the snowy mountains of Kurdistan. My family and I had walked over the peaks like tired animals, like drunken horses in the freezing cold; we brought over winter wrinkles and misty mouths. I don't remember why we left. Each time I asked the family, they had a different answer. First they said there was a fight between the tribes, then they said one of us had committed dishonour, but the time also coincides with the uprisings; I come from a mountain people proud of their rebellions. In either case, we arrived in Istanbul, though some of us perished on the way. I was young and the homesickness did not sink in me, but I know my mother was never the same afterwards.

We settled in a broken church in the Golden Horn. It had been shaken by one earthquake after another, and then a fire had taken off half its walls. We had brought Yezidi tokens over the mountains with us – rings, and holy books, and the stuffed peacock – but out of respect for the church, for the sad look of Virgin Mary, we did not lay them out. Nor did we dare fix up a wall to harbour us. It wasn't as icy as in the mountains, but it was still winter, and the air was damp, and the cold penetrated our bones.

My mother sat beside the falling rain, day after day. She opened her legs wide apart, knit her brows and smoked like a man. I felt, and I think the uncles did too, that bad luck had not left us despite the migration. One of them silently freed the stuffed peacock out of its cotton sack. It was blue in body and had feathers like the shine you see on puddles of petrol under the sun. They sat before it and prayed our old prayers: the sunrise prayer, *Nivêja rojhilatinê* and the sunset prayer, *Nivêja rojavabûnê*.

That small act, which I had seen a hundred times before, became our forking path. Here, beneath the gaze of the Virgin Mary, framed with the golden shimmer of her headscarf, with the paint peeling off of her skin like tree bark, I knew it was unacceptable

to do what we had done over in Kurdistan. I wanted to follow the kind face. The rain veiled my departure. At the beginning of the Golden Horn, by the murky ancient waters, I cut the long hair I was never supposed to cut. Then I bound the chest that had been my burden. I arrived in Istanbul a Yezidi and a girl. I entered its meandering streets, travelled to its fevered and impassable core, a man and a Christian.

I became a beggar, Your Honour. I had to sing as I begged because I could not yet talk Turkish. The language was like pebbles in my mouth. I sat on a carpet and watched people's shoes. I listened to sounds; the trembling strings of the oud that old men played inside their homes, the murmurs of besotted lovers, whistles of bored shop owners. I was inclined to hear music everywhere.

A place to sleep was not a big concern. I was like an owl, always awake and able to see 360 degrees around me. I learned to squat by a restaurant close to the bazaar; the owner with the white moustache threw his left overs out towards dawn. I was hungrier than the whining cats I had to fight off. And the food was really quite good, even if it wasn't presentable.

The singing saved me. The way we sing is different from how they do it in Istanbul. It is from the throat, with our Adam's apples wobbling. I used to sit on the beggar's carpet, hold one hand to my ear like I was reciting the call to prayer, and trill about how high and steep the mountains were, and about the crooked fig trees. Some blind men heard me, and I was elevated to a street *aşık* overnight. Blind men have been kind to me; they helped me unlock the gate to my throat. The real *aşıks* knew I was a fake but said nothing – I received many blessings on the way, Your Honour. And I reared a dream, that one day I would live off my voice.

I admitted all this – my shameful, poverty-stricken history – first to Kalliopi, and then to Perihan. I understand you want to learn all that you can about these two women. Perihan owned the Biggest Library of Istanbul, and Kalliopi was her friend, but I guarantee

they had nothing to do with the crimes you accuse us of, Your Honour. They did not plan to dethrone Sultan Abdülaziz. It is even less likely that they had a hand in his murder. They are only fragile women, concerned with old books and fortune telling, and never a grain of the political.

**

Let me begin by telling you about the library. You have questioned everyone who has ever stepped foot in it, Your Honour. I admire your dedication. You are correct in assuming the library wasn't just a library. It was also where Kalliopi, Perihan, Ruhi Bey and Feride Nine lived: a shelter. But most importantly, it was a centre for the arts in which I was to take central stage. I would also like to state that it was by no means a partisan salon.

Everyone in Kuzguncuk knew the Biggest Library of Istanbul; on its entrance there was an arabesque that said, 'Step inside for books.' And in the hallway there was another: 'This is the house blessed by your curious heels.' It made me look at my feet every time, and check if they were as rosy as could be.

I stepped into that shelter because of my voice, Your Honour. Perihan's father invited me to sing for him. The seaward house had become a library under his directorship; he was the one who had collected manuscripts from all over the Empire. Resourceful he may have been, but he was also a tired traveller, and a gentle soul in need of soothing rhythms. Once or twice, I sang to him at the dining table in the *nihavend makam*, but I was poor and shy then, and did not dare venture further than the *selamlık*.

The opportunity to peruse the books came a few years later, and through a letter sent to me by Kalliopi. In that letter she solicited my help regarding a musical matter. Except the matter at hand was not musical, Your Honour, it was literary. I was not aware of that yet when Kalliopi guided me into the house with her swooshing skirts. I was

blinded by the majesty of the wooden building, by the amount of books a room could contain, and the number of rooms a house could carry. The light from the windows in those endless corridors was hushed, but warm. Kalliopi took out an old rusty key from her pocket and opened a door for me. There was a pinned map on the centre of a mahogany desk, and a fireplace, and row after row of tender looking books. Upon seeing the room a strange quiet fell upon me, like the prayer veil. Kalliopi had to wait for me to return to my senses. This was the room of the coffeehouse books. It contained handwritten manuscripts of tales told all over the Empire, and at times even beyond. There was enough precious material here to tempt a storyteller into burglary.

She had called me over, Kalliopi said, not just to share this treasure of a room with me, marvellous as it was, but because she had discovered a mystery in one of its collections. She wanted me to solve it. Nothing less than a murder, she whispered, and quickly added, “do not worry, it was centuries ago and the murdered was only a dwarf.”

Kalliopi handed the coffeehouse book to me. As I read, I fell in love with the elegance of the tale written on its pages, for a moment forgetting the event it was recounting. The voice, the tone, the taste of the words lingered in the mouth so profusely, I dare not copy them here. But I will re-tell the tale for you, if you will allow me. Do not get impatient, Your Honour, and do not deem the tale irrelevant. You ordered me to prove my innocence and the only way I can do it is by telling you of all that which occupied my time prior to the political turmoil of 1876. In this spirit I present the entry on the dwarf, in coffeehouse book number twelve, which sits before you in its glass container, both witness and proof.

**

The story Kalliopi handed over to me was about a man the scribe referred to as 'Little Father,' whom, I reckon, must have been very short. The penman wrote that a boy, who called himself 'The Orphan,' had met Little Father on a stormy night in the neighbourhood of Galata. A thunderstorm was setting the other side alight; raindrops were big and hot and scalded the Orphan's skin. The boy saw Little Father staring into a blind alley named Hagalapoulos. His first impression was one of pity: Little Father was not only small, he was also bald with a perfectly round head that shone like a fortune stone in the dark. Perhaps to compensate for his waxen crown, the dwarf supported a thick moustache curled at the tips, the bristles of which were in three different colours like a tobycat's. The Orphan would have continued staring at this unusual creature had it not been for the pained look on his face. The boy spotted tears in those unblinking, hazel eyes of Little Father's and moved towards him. Then he saw that a man, another dwarf, had been hung from a lantern hook at the end of the alley. The dwarf's neck was broken but not only that; the killers had carved out his shoulders and stuck candles in them that continued to burn despite the storm.

They freed the dwarf off the rope. Little Father took the corpse in his arms and stroked its matted hair. He attempted to dislodge the candles that had stuck to the raw skin, but failed. The Orphan and Little Father carried the dwarf away; Little Father held him from the armpits, and the Orphan from his feet. They plunged into puddles of water, and dropped their charge more than once. When they finally arrived at Little Father's home, the Orphan had to shield his eyes. Little Father's abode was filled with precious stones and amber tables, divans of the softest velvet and bright coloured liquids bubbling in twisted vessels. They washed the dead. The Orphan felt his hands were useful, strong and worthy. He felt privileged to be in such a rich house even if it was because of a murder. Little Father found a pouch in the dwarf's convulsed mouth. When he untied it, red coloured dust sprinkled on to the floor, and on to his pinkie. It must have burned for he quivered with

pain, but still dashed to collect whatever had spilled on the ground. By morning the tip of his finger gave a metallic little tap when he rapped it on the table. It shone too, like something precious. Little Father asked the Orphan, then, whether he would want to journey across the hilly, golden steppes of Anatolia with him to see someone he had heard stories about, someone they called ‘the Sheikh,’ a man who would know what to do with this powder. If so, they would have to leave immediately.

Now, Your Honour, what Kalliopi wanted me to do with this tale was not simple. She wanted me to find out who wrote it. And once I found out its scribe, she hoped I could discover the identity of the murderer who had haunted the blind alley called Hagalapoulos. Finding out the identity of a scribe was something I could do since I was an *aşık*, she assumed. I also knew some of the booksellers that wind down the grand bazaar because I had begged there, although Kalliopi did not know this. I had places from where to begin, which on accounts of being a woman, Kalliopi did not.

As a way to reward my further research, Kalliopi invited me to sing at the library. I would not be accompanying the Director’s dinners as I had done before, but giving proper concerts on a make shift stage. “A small token of my gratitude,” she said. “The library receives many important visitors, Kibar. If they like your singing, you may be elevated to a whole other level. Plus, I am writing a book on *makams*, and not everyone can traverse them as easily as you do.”

I accepted the offer to sing immediately, but going on a quest for a murderer who must have died a century ago? Despite the good beginning to a strange story, I halted, Your Honour. My curiosity did not get the better of me, no. I had had my share of adventures in the streets of Istanbul, and was not interested in more trouble. It wasn’t curiosity, but the money Kalliopi handed over that made me say yes.

As I left the room of the coffeehouse books – the bills snug in my undershirt, the offer to sing making my mouth water – I saw Perihan for the first time. She was reading in

a room down the corridor, with a magnificent yellow bird sitting on her shoulders. She was so focused on her book she didn't notice Kalliopi and me walking past. And then I was going down the stairs led by Kalliopi's swooshing skirts, with my scared little heart on which the image of a murdered dwarf had been planted.

**

With all good intentions, Your Honour, I tried to find out the truth about that poor little dwarf. But I couldn't even be sure of the year in which the story was written; the entry in question was not dated. The other writings in the coffeehouse book did not provide a clue either as there were centuries between them. Naturally, the tale was not signed. As you will certainly know, Your Honjour, humble scribes do not use names when they write. So I returned some of the money Kalliopi had given me and told her that the trail had gone cold. I had not been able to satisfy her murder quest, but I certainly satisfied her other wish.

Kalliopi put me on a stool placed in a long corridor. She ordered me to sing with passion. As I sang, serious looking, dark, handsome men passed us by. At times they applauded, at times they took a break from whatever it was they were doing and smoked a cigarette while sighing to my voice. Kalliopi wrote down feverishly. She interviewed me, asking me about my health, wondering whether I felt certain sentiments during certain *makams*, scrutinizing how I prepared myself for the high and low notes. I felt trampled on; that stool in the long corridor was her idea of a make shift stage, and the dusky men that passed by was her idea of an audience. After some months of this, as I grew embarrassed and penniless and was about to give up, fate intervened and I finally met Perihan. "I am dizzy with your beautiful voice, Kibar Efendi," she said. "And so are all the men. Let us see if you cannot entertain us with concerts in a more appropriate room."

Perihan Hatun had a big nose and sad eyes. I understand she had no idea Kalliopi had called me to the house to solve a murder. She told me she was glad I had been able to help Kalliopi with her *makam* book. “Additionally,” she said, “I have another issue I need help with,” and then took me, with great ceremony, to the very same room Kalliopi had taken me: the one that stored the coffeehouse books. She explained how this collection was unique as it covered a wide range of coffeehouses from Aleppo to Sarajevo, and from all the *vilayet* the Ottomans had ruled. I did not have the heart to tell her Kalliopi had already informed me of all this.

“I am going to share a secret with you which only three people in the world know,” she said and I grew scared. These three people were Perihan’s deceased father, Kalliopi, and Perihan herself. She was sharing it with me because I was a vessel for Eastern Stories. “I heard you know the fairy tales of the Yezidis, the Kurds, the Arabs, and the Druze,” she said. To please me she served a cup of coffee so filled with cardamom I screwed up my face.

A book lay open on the mahogany table between us. It was unusually large and tall, and I noticed its first and final leaves were from marbled paper. Inside it an article of only a few sentences which Perihan ordered me to read:

The Granddaughter of Ma’an:

Born in the imperial palace of Istanbul sometime in the 1600’s. Granddaughter of a prince executed by Sultan Murād IV for his revolts against the Empire. Daughter of Ma’anoğlu who was his only unkilld son. The granddaughter of Ma’an travelled far and wide, became a man, and turned copper to gold.

Perihan asked me if I knew any tales about the granddaughter of Ma'an. If I knew perhaps traces of the real person that had trickled down from mouth to mouth. Kalliopi had asked me to search for a murder, Your Honour, Perihan asked me to search for a woman. How could I have known that these two requests would eventually complete each other?

Perihan copied the article on Ma'an on a clean sheet for me, and set the book aside. I noticed it was a precious edition, of quality goatskin and gold ornamentations. "I have become lonely," she said, "I had hoped she would keep me company."

I didn't know whether Perihan Hatun was referring to the woman mentioned in that old book, or to Kalliopi who did not raise her head to greet us when we walked by.

**

I collected whatever crumb I could find on this granddaughter of Ma'an. For the sake of Perihan I went and found Hayalci. You may already know him, Your Honour, he is now sitting at the second row, the one with the crimson kaftan. Even in cities far from here, in the land of Greeks and in the land of Arabs, his stories prevail. He is, despite this fact, the most humble man I know, and like me, Hayalci comes from the East.

Hayalci used to work in a coffeehouse in between Aya Pantelemion and the big oak at the time. I knocked and a Greek called Ioannis opened its chestnut door. The moment I saw Hayalci napping at the back of the room, I knew, Your Honour, not only would he know of the girl Ma'an, he would also tell her story better than any piece of writing ever could. When I asked him about her, he began to perform on a whim as the best of tellers do, very much aware of his own talents and of the fact that I hung on the charm of his lengthy eyelashes, and the tip of his tongue.

It seems that once upon a time, a long long time ago, when the Crusaders had begun storming our lands for gold, there appeared a people around Mount Lebanon whose

destiny it was to repel these infidels. The girl Ma'an came from such a fine family. They were peasants on ordinary days, but once the wars began, they turned into fighters, better than the Turks, better than the Persians, incomparably better than the Arabs. They were a secretive people whose women wore long hats and who took the surahs of the Qur'an and twisted them into riddles like fairy tales. They were a people rumoured to have alchemy on their side. Their leader was a man called Ma'anoğlu; an olive skinned prince who built his castle on a hill overlooking the harbour of Jubayl. After fighting the Crusaders so bravely, there was no reason to excuse the Ottomans who had occupied their lands for years and the prince began his revolts against the ruling Turks in Istanbul.

For a while Ma'anoğlu seemed to ride the waves. Ottoman soldiers lost their path under an unknown sky, they got stranded in steep narrow valleys then died of heat and thirst, many were seduced by women so doe-eyed they could not be abandoned in the midst of deserts. But eventually Ma'anoğlu's luck ran out, and he was captured together with his three sons and brought to Istanbul. He thought of answers on the long journey to the imperial city. Had the Sultan asked him a question or two, he would have known how to elongate his time on this earth, the way Scheherazade had, but the Sultan did not ask him anything. Instead, with one nod Ma'anoğlu, and with another his first-born son were beheaded. A third nod, and Ma'anoğlu's second born died. One, two, three and the clan of Ma'an were all slaughtered in the garden of Topkapı, by an executioner whose axe struck with a base baritone *bismillah*. All of them, but one. This is where, Your Honour, fate interferes. For unknown reasons, Ma'an's last-born son was spared his life. Did the headsman have pity on the boy? Or did the Sultan change his mind at the last minute? All we know is that Ma'anoğlu's youngest heir survived. He grew up in the palace, and in time, became the right hand of the Sultan who had killed his father and two brothers.

The son of Ma'an had a daughter who was red of cheek, plump of lip, and cheerful of spirit. She grew up in the imperial harems, and was taught everything she knew by her

father, who in his turn had learned everything he knew from his. Father and daughter discussed the effects of the planets on metals, and the processes of distillation, calcination, solution, evaporation, crystallization and sublimation. They scrutinized how to prepare the great elixir. 4, 9, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 1, 6 made the magic square. Sulphur and Mercury produced gold, but only when the five observable planets were in the right order, and only when the sun itself was the perfect distance from the earth. The scholars of the palace enjoyed stopping by and having their last coffee together with that studious pair, before retiring to their poor households for the night, very confused yet inspired.

The powers of the girl Ma'an were clear to anyone who cared to look: her hands with the long nibble fingers, and her head with the unprecedented memory, the patience of a Sufi, the obstinacy of a goat. She gave all the indications that she would become the best alchemist of them all. When the son of Ma'an understood he could teach his daughter nothing further, he told her about the Sheikh. The girl Ma'an learned of how he had managed to unite the Greek masters, with the Egyptians and the Muslims, and she made up her mind to become his apprentice.

Storyteller Hayalci told me that the granddaughter of Ma'an escaped from the palaces the night she turned sixteen. The time had come to accomplish what her father had been teaching her, and what his poor decapitated father had taught him before that: the time had come for the daughter of Ma'anoğlu to turn copper to gold. And to do that; the girl Ma'an shaved her hair, put on a turban, and left the harems dressed as a man. She walked straight and proud out of those jagged city walls, determined to find her Sheikh.

**

Each week I would update Perihan about the daughter of Ma'anoğlu, Your Honour. On Wednesdays I gave concerts at the library. On Thursdays, after the evening prayer of *isha*,

Feride Nine served us milk with honey – the way children like it, with *lokum* to the side. Perihan would eagerly await me. Neither Kalliopi, nor Perihan's husband Ruhi would join our conversations. I doubt they ever knew about them.

Perihan always wore beautiful dresses that I had such an urge to touch: Bursa silk, Persian satin. She must have known all the Jewish sales women, I was certain of it. It did not take much to rouse her imagination. I would tell her long, slow and melodious tales that I embellished so as to spend more time with her. Perihan, in her turn, urged me to go ahead and discover more of the girl Ma'an, and rewarded me with gifts – candleholders, rose tinted balm for the lips, ancient musical notes from her many manuscripts.

The problem was that Hayalci could tell me nothing further, ask him yourself, Your Honour. No storyteller knew the whole tale of the Ma'an family. He said I must have dreamt that article I saw in the library, it was categorically impossible that anything be written about these people. I did not ask any further for fear of upsetting him; he is a big man, Your Honour, and I did not convey any of his words to Perihan for fear of rejection.

Thursday evenings with Perihan were pleasant, but the Wednesday nights, were the most titillating of my life. I gradually gained a large following in the library. It began with Kalliopi and the serious looking men, the intellectuals. Then, seduced by the oud streaming out of the windows, the neighbours began to visit too. Then those neighbours brought their friends and my fame spread out in concentric circles from Kuzguncuk. Soon I was known in the whole of Istanbul. I would finish the singing and retire to Perihan's room, which slowly turned into a powder room and rehearsal space as well. I would find her lounging on the divan, lying sideways, holding a cigarette in its amber holder. The language of her face would change like the skies as she read and read. She was the only one in the library who never bothered to come out and listen to me. On Thursday nights she was warm, on Wednesday nights she was cold. This hurt and puzzled me. When I asked her why she

didn't join the audience, she told me my voice was more melancholy through the thin walls, and that she was the best listener I would ever find.

**

I must confess, Your Honour, before we get too heavily embedded in my testimony, that I am not a jealous man, but I am quite jealous of you. Day after day you sit on a throne and listen to the darkest parts of the human soul and pronounce judgement with a tilt of your turban, like an ancient and wonderful God. How I wish I were educated and possessed a station like yours. But if there is anything I learned in that library, it was that scholarship does not guarantee happiness the way singing is wont to do. I also learned this: to hear a dark tale you don't need to be a judge, though you do need strength in your legs.

When he could not complete the story Hayalci sent me off to another teller who told me a bit more, then he too stopped in the middle and directed me to another. In this way, hopeful and uncertain as a dog, I walked from coffeehouse to coffeehouse. Always and only searching for the tellers who had a smell of the East at the back of their ears, and around their necks. Something earthy and spicy; a smell I too carried like a protective talisman.

It seems, Your Honour, the granddaughter of Ma'an travelled far and wide to meet her Sheikh, but her determination did not annihilate self-doubt. There had been no good reason to escape the imperial harems where she would have grown old in rose smelling shadows. No man would have been allowed to touch her as she was an *emanet* rather than property, and upon old age she would have been married off to a man in a position to take care of her, one of the many palace teachers perhaps, the ones who were already, secretly, besotted with her. But the girl Ma'an did not like predictability. She would not have it, the way some people will not touch okra. This quality made her beloved by storytellers, which

may be why they refused to write her story down for centuries. But the unpredictability also made her susceptible to the onslaught of djinns.

A woman must not travel such long distances alone, Your Honour. The Bible says as much, and so does the Qur'an. The djinn's eventual intervention was inevitable and occurred on a rainy night prone to such slips, a night on which the granddaughter of Ma'an forewent the male bathroom of the caravanserai for the female. She lifted up her skirts to scoot, and before her, by the bucket she would soon fill with water to clean up after herself, she saw the child. The man-child.

Zümrüt was smaller than a midget. His hands, arms, and legs belonged to a four year old yet his face was covered with the thickest, blackest beard you could imagine. Half his face was taken up by piercing, blue-green eyes – which is why, Your Honour, he was named after an emerald.

First, the man-child was as surprised, and as scared, as the girl Ma'an. But soon he knew his luck. For you see, he could see a bit of the future but not all of it. He could steal gossip like breadcrumbs from the heavens, but not the whole story. He was a conduit between this world and the next, Your Honour, though not a stable one. So Zümrüt saw that the Sultan Murād IV and the girl Ma'an would meet, and he saw that she would be gifted many treasures by that Sultan. But Zümrüt did not see the rest of their tale. Zümrüt chose the granddaughter of Ma'an based on the partial information he had. He promised to be her companion through it all, obedient and sweet. When the fear on her face did not subside, he added, "I will be yours whether you like it or not."

Sensing his iron will, the girl Ma'an looked at the man-child's feet and saw that they were pointed backwards and knew then: she had indeed met a djinn. Creatures of fire so powerful they had managed to spill from the Qur'an on to her Druze books.

**

Your Honour, Perihan was never in the audience as I sang, Kalliopi came and went, Ruhi slithered in and out, on some nights all the women were gone, and sometimes all the men were gone, and during the full moon both the men and women were gone as if they had disappeared into some secret rooms in the library. When that happened only the neighbours listened to me, Feride Nine kept on bringing more chairs or putting them away. The apertures were always open, and the sea breeze smelled of basil because of the plants by the window.

I had only one constant follower through it all, Your Honour. No matter what kind of night it was, Hüseyin Avni Paşa stopped by for a song or two. But I sensed there was something off about him; he was like a fully ripe pear about to putrefy. And three or four months into my singing at the library, I was proven right in my instincts.

It was a snowy night in November. I walked to the coffeehouse both for purposes of entertainment and research. By now a regular, I proceeded to the upper divan that was covered in smoke. The men up there were unusually quiet and I soon realized they were at a game of cards. Only two players remained: an olive skinned man with thin lips, and another who sat so upright he could only be an officer. I knew him at once, the stern-gazed and hawk-nosed Hüseyin Avni Paşa. He acted as if he had never seen me in his life. Beads of sweat had collected on the other player's forehead.

"I have all your money now, Ali Efendi, what else are you willing to lose?" The officer asked.

His opponent's eyes filled up. He fumbled in his pockets and took out a set of keys, attached to glass beads of many colours. "For the house and the one in it," is all he said.

The officer laughed when he heard that, but no one joined in. He shuffled the cards one last time. And once the game was done, Hüseyin Avni Paşa grabbed the keys off the table and left the coffeehouse.

The incident remained with me for a long while, Your Honour. How could it not? I was both disgusted by, and pitied the man who had lost. I pictured his unsuspecting wife, a woman I was soon to meet in the library, Ayşe Hatun. Perhaps right now she was preparing to greet her man, perhaps she was now embellishing her night time beauty.

It was disarming, to say the least, to see Hüseyin Avni Paşa enter the library the next day, as polite as on any other. It shames me to confess that I sang the song he ordered me to sing, as if I had witnessed nothing unseemly on the previous night.

I mention this story here, Your Honour, because Hüseyin Avni Paşa is the one you should have blamed for the murder of Sultan Abdülaziz, a long long time ago.

**

You may not have prosecuted Huseyin Avni Paşa but others did. The Paşa had passionate enemies, equal in strength only to his unruly groins. It is best not to slight a man's dignity, and we all know a man's dignity is his woman. Unfortunately the Paşa interfered plenty with that sort of dignity and it was just a matter of time until an honest man plotted revenge. But let us not dwell on the end of the Paşa, for the purposes of my testimony it is still 1876, Your Honour, and in that eventful year he is still cunning and well. Let me set the Paşa aside for a little while and return to the story that has you wanting more. The world of djinns is much more entertaining than that of soldiers, wouldn't you say?

For a while, the girl Ma'an tried to get rid of the child-man-djinn, Your Honour. She called it "creature" so as to degrade it, hoping against hope that the dishonouring would make Zümrüt resign. When he did not give in, she turned on her side and slept. When she slept, he slept. When she ate, he ate, and soon the granddaughter of Ma'an stopped being scared and bothered. True to his promise, Zümrüt was a sweet and obedient companion. She got used to him the way you get used to your shadow.

The granddaughter of Ma'an and Zümrüt continued on her journey to the Sheikh. A few times, thanks to the ingenuity of the djinn, she dodged thugs and dubious men. Tired, but safe, she reached the hill of Diyarbekir and knew which house to go to: the one with Fatima's hand on the knob and the ivy climbing up its chapped blue paint. The door with the two different numbers – 1:3 and 5:8 – contending for acknowledgement, just the way her father had described it to her.

She told the old man who opened the door that the alchemist Ma'anoğlu had sent her. Upon hearing the name the Sheikh welcomed the guest like she bore the imperial stamp. Everyone who dwelled in the secret art knew of the Ma'an family, and those in Syria and the Lebanon were nostalgic for their just rule. The mysterious guest asked to use the bathroom and returned from it a full-fledged girl. The Sheikh was not surprised by the change in appearance; appearances are ephemeral to believers.

Even though the Sheikh could not see Zümrüt, one of the things he most liked in the granddaughter of Ma'an was the space she left about her. It was as if she felt the air was filled with spirits and wanted to pay them courtesy, or as if she wanted others to expand and loiter. The politeness implicit in her behaviour, made the Sheikh trust the girl.

The granddaughter of Ma'an and her adopted uncle the Sheikh began to conduct their experiments. If father and daughter had been studying the matter of alchemy back in the palaces of Istanbul, the Sheikh taught his apprentice of its spirit. They read the mystics, the prophets, and the philosophers in order to understand how they transmuted base feeling into superior ones. The kernel of alchemy was to morph delusions into virtue.

The Sheikh taught the girl how Allah created Adam as the most perfect receptacle of his ninety-nine names, which were also his ninety-nine attributes. God had spoken through his prophet to say "My heavens and My earth cannot contain Me but the heart of My believing servant contains Me." The two alchemists discussed how to become the perfect person, *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, the being that reflects God's ninety-nine attributes like a

mirror, even if those attributes at times seem to contradict each other. For without *Al-Batin*, there is no *Az-zahir*, without *Al-Muntaqim*, no *Al-Ghāfir*. Man is divine and animal; he is a slave of God as he learns the attributes, and God Almighty himself once he embodies them. Sometimes opposite enable, rather than challenge each other.

The Sheikh and the girl Ma'an studied and taught one another until one evening – and again a stormy one at that – they heard a feeble knock on the door, like that of a tired traveller.

**

Since you insist on hearing more of Hüseyin Avni Paşa, this is what I will tell you, Your Honour: it was around February that I witnessed a secret conversation in the library. It took place in one of the caged reading rooms. Sometimes I went down there to loosen my mouth muscles, to jiggle my body, to jump up and down, and to stretch, all of which help with the singing. At that time of the evening, and under normal circumstances, no one would be left reading in those rooms. But I guess for one reason or another, it wasn't an ordinary day.

In the cage, I saw Ruhi and Hüseyin Avni Paşa, they spoke in whispers and looked like lovers imprisoned for their sins. When they heard me approach, they made to leave but were not quick enough. Hüseyin Avni Paşa's steely eyes were both seeing and unseeing, and directed towards me. This was warning enough, Your Honour. I never told anyone what I saw, but this doesn't mean I was not surprised. They had told me Ruhi never left his shed in the garden on those days. From what I heard, he was going mad in his own fashion. But that day he seemed as lucid as the full-blown moon, and Hüseyin Avni Paşa looked guilty despite his regal stare. If you were to ask my opinion, Your Honour, I would have to say the two men looked like they were planning a take over, perhaps even murder.

**

When the Sheikh opened his door on that rainy night, he saw two men before him: one with a moustache newly forming, the other not yet old and very small. They greeted the Sheikh with a *hadith qudsi*:

“And God spoke through Prophet Mohammed when he said, 'I was a treasure that was not known, so I loved to be known. Hence I created the creatures and I made Myself known to them, and thus they came to know Me.'”

Words to which the Sheikh had to bow down in reverence, as a result of which he came level with a golden finger. The dwarf's transmuted hand could indicate only one interest.

The guests introduced themselves as travelling historians who experimented with the elixir. The young one said he was an Orphan, and that's how they began referring to him, and the older one said, “He calls me Little Father and I quite like it.”

As is custom, the Sheikh and the girl Ma'an offered the travelling historians ruby red tea. The four of them waited till the night was veiled in drowsiness; that relaxed time ripe for secrets. Little Father and the Orphan began telling them wild stories then. Some were wonderful. Like the story of the man who flew from the Galata tower to the other side, with the fishermen cheering him on from their caiques, how he descended and then was uplifted and turned sideward by a current of playful air and finally landed, like an experienced seagull, just on the edge of Asia, facing the maiden's tower.

“Wonder of wonders!” the Sheikh exclaimed.

“I should never have left!” said the girl.

Soon after, when they had grown accustomed to each other, after they had passed the civilities of being guests and began working together as true partners and collaborators in alchemy, or in other words in the first month of their visit, Little Father and his companion began telling them the violent stories. News of not one, not two, not three, but six murders, Your Honour. Six they were certain of, that is. It is likely more had been committed in alleyways in the quiet of the night, in graveyards, and in broken churches.

The killers were moral in their own way, Little Father explained. These men wanted to rid the world of evil. The problem was that they considered alchemy diabolical. They did not think it chiselled the soul, like the Sheikh did. The killers believed *al kimya* interfered with God's creation: "Had Allah wanted copper to be gold, he would have made it so," they preached.

"They are not only against us," Little Father said, "they are also against the sovereign."

Everybody knew Sultan Murād IV was keen on the art of alchemy, having invited experts from around the globe to the palaces in Istanbul. Everybody also knew he had thrown the less successful amongst them into the Bosphorus in sacks. The Sultan had no patience for failure. But if there was anyone who could support them in their experiments, it was him. If the four collaborators wanted to progress, if they wanted shelter from murderers, they had to seek the Sultan's help and patronage.

But Murād IV, Your Honour, had more important things to worry about than the secret art at that moment in time. Baghdad had once again fallen under Safavid rule. Baghdad could not fall to anyone Shia; that was a point of honour for the Ottoman dynasty. And Murād IV knew that the time to prove himself, the time to fight as one from the line of Osman, had finally arrived.

**

But you ask me to get back to the point, to return to the crimes you accuse me of, Your Honour. Very well, I shall do as you please. And to make matters perfectly clear, you accuse not only me but also Perihan and Kalliopi, whom you have not been able to locate. And you blame even Hayalci and Feride Nine, who are here, and since I am honest to a fault, Your Honour, I must say that I find this rather preposterous, just look at that wrinkled woman's face! How could Feride Nine do anything other than gossip and complain? But out of my infinite respect for you, and out of my camaraderie with the other defendants who are patiently waiting to absolve themselves, I shall get on with the lawful side of affairs.

First of all: the theatre play.

It is true, I was in the theatre the night of the play, I may even have sung a little, but I was much too happy to pay attention to the turmoil that ensued. And in fact I was much too happy in general, Your Honour, to have gone about forcing enunciation upon the Armenians month after month, the way Arif the playwright did. The night Arif's play was staged was indeed special for me, but not on the accounts you are thinking of.

It was the night my beloved saw me as I truly am. As others in this courthouse have confessed, the stars had aligned around the month of March and enabled me to meet the love of my life: Haydar. Yes, I know I will be accused of this love too. A love that must – by its nature – remain forbidden and if not that, at least secret. But, Your Honour, you must surely be aware that there is at least one man like me in every neighbourhood of Istanbul.

Since the end of this account is probably a beheading anyway, I will let you in on that little secret too. On the night of the play, I did indeed notice the growing, palpable excitement within the audience and I did see the men leaving the theatre chanting first for the playwright Arif Kemal, and second for the Crown Prince Murat V – but those events were in the periphery of my vision because the foreground was occupied by my Haydar

whose incessant stalking had finally worn away my resolve. Eventually I bowed down to his mesmerizing sea blue eyes like I should have done on the first day we met. What a lot of time I lost pretending to be tame and proud. This is my one advice to the lovers in the courtroom: do not be docile.

I do not know of what happened in the theatre apart from our adventures on the stage once Nora had turned it into a play chamber for my beloved and me. We were merry, let me reduce it to that. We were happy till Hagop told Haydar that their beloved author, the one they used to read together on the boat, was right up the stairs. I did not know who they were talking about but there was a dying man in Nora and Hagop's bed, and the three of them read and cried, read and cried.

That man, Your Honour, might have caused the turmoil in the theatre. Men who take good care of themselves are never good news, are they? Even in his dying hours cologne exuded off the man they called Sakizlian, something expensive and likely Italian, with a hint of citrus and bergamot, I think. Maybe he is the one you should blame, Your Honour, the necessary culprit, the starting point of it all, but he is dead by now, was already cold when Hagop and Haydar finished reading from that worn book.

The next accusation against me is about the anonymous writings deriding Sultan Abdülaziz.

As you understand from my story, Your Honour, I was more interested in murdered dwarves, more concerned with women masquerading as men than I was in pamphlets against the state. Moreover my patience is scarce and surfaces only in matters regarding my voice. These political affairs taste truly dull to my palette. What kind of politics could beat the facts that I uncovered?

Thirdly: You accuse me of the murder of the revered Sultan.

I choose to take this as a compliment, Your Honour, rather than an insult, that you think me – please consider my slender body, and my narrow waist, notice my small hands

– capable of destabilizing such a powerful, such a towering man as our Sultan Abdülaziz, may he rest in peace.

Fourthly, you claim I attempted to kidnap Crown Prince Murat V after his imprisonment in the Çırağan Palace.

On this issue I can help you, Your Honour. I know the culprit; he is Alexandros Cleanthi who seems to have escaped to Greece after the failed occasion. Not only that, he took a little Turkish boy with him by the name of Mutlu. Arrest him on both accounts.

I plead, in short, innocent of all these accusations. Nevertheless I am honoured you are allowing me to explain the truly important discoveries of 1293 which now oblige me to return to the Anatolia of 1048.

**

The travellers each thought different things as they left on their galloping horses to see Sultan Murād IV, as they caused a terrible rattle in the dark forests they traversed with their alchemical instruments. The girl Ma'an was delighted by the summer rain, and by how it hit her face so rapidly, and by how the tiny drops numbed her skin. She decided water was the most misunderstood of elements.

The Sheikh wondered at the uncertainty in his chest. Was it a good decision to go, or was it a bad decision to go and reveal the mechanics of alchemy at the foot of Sultan Murād IV whom many labelled a tyrant. To be fair, all the people he had killed thus far had been corrupt officers, or pretend alchemists. And to be honest, the latest discoveries the four of them had made in the house on the hill could save the Empire from ruin, and bring happiness to the poor and the abused, which was the dream of any good Muslim. Plus, if they did not share the secret with their rightful sovereign, who were they to share it with?

The Orphan – and you will have understood by now Your Honour, have you not, that he was the one who narrated the murder of the dwarf which you can find right before you in its glass container, in coffeehouse book number twelve, both witness and proof – hoped Little Father would not get sick, and wondered how long it would take to make him lentil soup from scratch once they arrived at their destination.

Little Father himself did not think of the present or the future. He didn't even notice the rain because historians are oblivious to weather conditions. Little Father daydreamt of another historian who happened to be his grand nemesis, the 10th century Baghdadi, Ibn Al Nadim, who had written '*al fihrist*' or the catalogue, which included all books, lecture notes, and papers available in Arabic since the beginning of time. The Catalogue had a sense of the future too; it was filled with purposeful blank spaces for later additions. Little Father speculated how he could turn all his research into an encyclopaedia that could surpass his and felt nauseous from the effort.

It was only Zümrüt, Your Honour, yes, that beautiful eyed, sweet and obedient djinn, who knew the group was galloping to their death, so he held tight to his beloved granddaughter of Ma'an, and made a little wish: that his descendants be as blessed as he, that they each find a way to accompany someone as precious as the alchemist.

The alchemists reached the encampment in mist, beautiful with nightingale songs after the rain, with skin sticky from the humid air. They passed several officers. With each bribe they gained confidence and when they reached the royal tent they saw its entrance was covered with the heaviest velvet, like a mosque.

Inside sat the last of the warrior Sultans on a throne. His favourite weapon was the mace which weighed 60 kilograms, he could wrestle several men at once, and he had no neck to speak of. A man too weary to smile or sulk; he had a steady gaze which would have unhinged anyone. He expected an explanation for their presence, and so the Sheikh

told Sultan Murād IV that they could change the course of the Empire. A haughty move, perhaps.

The Sheikh rushed to elucidate: they were alchemists who experimented with the cucurbit everyday, and they had finally succeeded in turning base materials into precious ones. At that the Orphan opened his fist and revealed a golden tooth that had been rotting in a smelly mouth only two days ago. Sultan Murād IV cleared his throat to pronounce an execution, for what else was a Sultan to do with the offer of a tooth? But the Sheikh asked for a laboratory to conduct further experiments in. He promised the Sultan that he would soon see large amounts of the shiny metal, in quantities that could redeem the financial difficulties of the Empire. Everyone knew counterfeit European coins were on the rise in the Levant, fake money was used to buy Ottoman goods. And then there was the discovery of the Americas which had led to new trade routes, devaluing Ottoman merchandise even further. Alchemy could solve this economic conundrum forever and more. The elixir could raise the royal treasury to its former glory without any significant labour. They would offer all of this to the Sultan, sealed with their undying devotion, if he gave them protection from murderers who considered the secret art evil.

The wars had turned Sultan Murād IV into a sensible man. He had no reason to believe this unusual troupe, no one in history had ever produced large amounts of gold. But if I may interject my own opinion, Your Honour, Sultan Murād IV, at least a side of him, wanted to believe. He continued to hope that alchemy was not a trick but sturdy science. And he clung to hope despite his many dissapointments in the alchemists and scholars he had met throughout the years. In other words, Sultan Murād IV wanted to believe despite his better judgement. He continued to employ a librarian to collect alchemy books scattered around the world because he wanted to be proven right in his childhood dreams. Dreams that had emanated from the books he had been fed to keep quiet. As he had read those books on *al kimya*, and as he had kept quiet, his viziers had gone about plundering

the Empire. A part of him wanted to believe in destiny too, for if he had not been locked up in his own palaces for years, locked up by the very viziers whose purpose it had been to serve him, he would never have recognized what he now saw with his very own eyes. He would not have found the right questions to ask as the alchemists who repeated the experiment of the tooth for him:

“Is this a trick from Jabir, or is this a trick from Zosimos?”

“Tell me the opportune positions of Jupiter and Saturn.”

“Have you read al-Razi’s refutation of al-Kindi?”

And he would never have heard the excited voice of the girl Ma’an, who answered the Sultan in her husky female voice, despite the turban and shaved brows. The blaze between them could have spread across Anatolian fields like campfire. Had the Sultan obeyed his gut, he might have never gone on to fight, Baghdad might have stayed Shia but he was still a reasonable enough sovereign.

“I will endow you four with a fully equipped laboratory, with all the copper, and books that you may need. You will do what you claim to do, but not in small amounts, not a finger or tooth. I want it in kilos fit for ships and caravanserais. You have till my return from Baghdad.”

**

Sultan Abdülaziz died on the 4th of Cemaziyelahir and his death changed everything for us, Your Honour. Suddenly, there was mourning in the library. I had never known Perihan to be so sullen. Before Sultan Abdülaziz’s death, I would knock on her door and a cheerful, excited Perihan would answer. But now I looked in to her eyes and saw shame, and doubt, and a darkness that had never been there before. My concerts were cancelled till further notice, and I stopped telling her more of the girl Ma’an’s tale.

There was a little boy who used to frequent the library, with shy hazel eyes, and a limping leg. Mutlu, his name was. The same boy Alexandros Cleanthi took away with him to Athens. Mutlu told some strange stories about Sultan Abdülaziz. He said that before the sovereign's death the Sultan and his women had walked to their imprisonment in the rain. Said all the jewellery had been taken off of them by Hüseyin Avni Paşa's men. Said the Sultan had not been able to drink lentil soup in the Topkapı Palace – there were no amenities – and that he had not even had a warm hamam to wash in. The boy talked about Sultan Abdülaziz like it was his job to protect him. What hubris, I thought, what delusion. But once Sultan Abdülaziz was dead, he too grew pale. Then, like all the other serious looking men, he stopped coming to the library.

I became worried about Perihan, Your Honour. With Kalliopi gone she had no friend, and no faith in her husband. She was all alone in this big old house. The bird on her shoulder stopped chirping. Then that terrible fire ravaged the garden. An accident, Ruhi told me, his demeanour as cold as a tombstone, and for some reason Perihan stopped leaving her room.

**

The alchemists began the work that would please Sultan Murād IV. They united their powers. The Sheikh kept on praying, kept on talking about how holy the task at hand was. After all the Qur'an talked about turning the soul to gold. They were scientists and mystics in one, they were dedicating themselves to the poor and the needy of the Empire. He quoted from Ibn Arabi, Ibn Haldun, and Ibn Heldak recurrently – those Muslim philosophers who allowed for the possibilities of alchemy. Meanwhile Little Father told them of history, of the lives of all the famous and dead scientists: the Greeks, the Egyptians and now the Ottomans who had managed to combine their theories.

As you have guessed by now, Your Honour, the girl Ma'an shone brighter than them all. The men kept on talking just so that she could feel safe, and it helped. On the first day Ma'an turned 10 cups from copper to gold. On the second day, 20 water jugs. On the third there was an accident and she spilled the red dust on to her finger. "It burns like the judgement day," she said. They put it under water, they smeared it with egg white and then yoghurt, but the pain did not dim. Ma'an cried silent, uncomplaining tears. When she woke up the next morning her finger was of gold, matching Little Father's.

Slowly but surely word spread and with the word spreading young boys from neighbouring villages began to visit the alchemists. Then the young girls; the leader of this group was female after all. Then their mothers and fathers, until more houses had to be built alongside the one with Fatima's hand on its door. White washed dwellings dotted the hillside, and the sun lingered longer than it used to on that abode where the girl Ma'an was at work.

Meanwhile the war in Mesopotamia was waging. The Shiites were killing the Sunni, and the Sunni were killing the Shiites and eventually, as was expected and foretold by the alchemists, Sultan Murād IV triumphed over adversity and he squashed that uprising and crowned the shrine of the saints in green velvet once more. Once he did that, the journey back to Istanbul commenced, but the Sultan's true destination was a village in the midst of Anatolia. He was hungry for the riches that must be awaiting him.

Murād IV's thoughts were pure as he rode his horse: abundance, going down in history as the greatest Ottoman Sultan, the one that solved all economic problems now and forever more, patron of the sciences, patron of the mystics, and he would be sure to extend his benevolence into the arts too once he returned to his throne. The future looked like it could be subdued; there might even be romance with an alchemist in its fold. But once on the hill, he saw three small gestures that broke his heart, and with it his will.

A little girl was peering into the Sheikh's house from its open window and joking with the girl Ma'an. She bent down to plant a kiss on the alchemist's cheek; that was the first. An old man with a hunch fetched water from the fountain, and with the slowest of steps, filled a tin cup for his Sheikh; that was the second. Three boys kept changing positions according to Little Father's directions, in imitation of constellations. That game of hopscotch was the third and final gesture.

And Sultan Murād IV knew that no matter how he presented it, everyone would know he had not been the one who turned copper to gold, that he had not been the one who saved the Empire. His benevolence would only exalt the fame of these alchemists. The girl, the Sheikh and the historian would prosper, but the people would continue fearing him. No one would dare plant a kiss on his cheek or fetch him water without an order. The meek would try and avoid him, the brave would plot ways to be rid of him.

**

After Sultan Abdülaziz's death, Sultan Murat V went mad, Your Honour, that is the long and the short of it. We all heard it. Everyone in Istanbul told a different story, most of them made up, I am sure. Who doesn't enjoy a sovereign losing his mind? Some swore they saw him feed the fish with palace gold. Others said he tried walking through doors. Some said he did not recognize himself in the mirror, acting like a kitten, hitting it over and over again, half scared, half in love. The only thing I can say is: at least he didn't grow cruel. He was still the poetry-loving, piano playing man the intellectuals had grown to love.

They took him to the Çırağan, Your Honour, and locked him up on accounts of his melancholy. Dare I say he might have recovered if they had given him a bit more time. It can't be easy being a Sultan, it is hard enough being a singer; you have too many people to please, you are never right.

Upon hearing of Murat V's madness and his imprisonment, I knew something clearly and surely, Your Honour, like a flash of genius. The past is not for naught; names do have destinies hidden inside them. The Jews, the Chinese, they all believe letters have numerical value, and when combined they add up to your fate. Alchemy thinks the same. Sultan Murād IV and Murat V did not have much in common as far as rulers go. But when I found out our Murat had gone mad, I understood what his namesake had suffered in the past.

Both Sultans lost reason because they feared someone would be loved more than they. Simple, the way of children. That cavernous desire never dies. Sultan Murat V feared the people would never forget his dead uncle Abdülaziz, and Sultan Murād IV got scared of the girl Ma'an, of the Sheikh, and of Little Father: he had a group of three to compete with. The odds were against him. Plus his station was such that he would never know who truly respected him and who was full of pretence.

Both Murats fiddled with magic too, Your Honour: the old Murād with alchemy, the new one with the freemasons. One wanted to rule over the Shia, the other over the Byzantines. They shared grandiose dreams and both suffered. It is the most dangerous thing to have grandiose dreams, Your Honour, and then to fail at accomplishing them. That turns your hair white overnight.

**

You ask for the finale of this story, Your Honour. We have finally reached it. The Orphan came out of the cupboard where he'd been hiding only when the horses had left, after their hooves on the dusty road stopped echoing, after the screams of the little boys dimmed. You can say he was a coward, Your Honour, but at least he had sense. He came out of that closet a different man, covered in shame and sadness. Not a cupboard of books or vessels

but clothes filled with the smell of the three who lay dead. And he prayed without stop on the following days. As he cleaned, swept, and re-ordered the house, he asked to be forgiven for this cowardice, that he be granted the chance to atone.

In the lonely white-washed house on this silent hill, in front of his eyes, over and over again, the three of them had made gold out of copper. Their brilliance should not be stifled by death and so the Orphan decided to dig a basement to hold all that they knew, all that they'd been. He collected the books hidden inside wall alcoves – concealed from those enemies of alchemy who never turned up. He dug out the equations from under the fig tree in the garden; the calculations of a Sheikh who had taught many rulers. He took the encyclopaedia that Little Father had been working on: articles on coffeehouses that hung from bridges, entries on the nature of amber, portraits of the mad men and women of Istanbul neighbourhoods. He had noted down locations of wish trees spanning all of Anatolia, burnt schools, caique journeys, the currents of the Bosphorus, its underwater choral palace, Greek converts, poetries of jealousy, door knobs of all shapes and sizes, the women greeted in house visits, a Crimean recipe with walnuts and chicken he had eavesdropped on, memory loss, fish seasons, famous eunuchs, rooms that repeated themselves. The Orphan added to these Little Father's favourite book, the *al fihrist* and its empty lines, and together they made up the first book.

The Orphan carried the wooden table down to the basement. He spread the study notes the Sheikh had prepared for the granddaughter of Ma'an on to it: initiations, dhikrs, the history of the *sümbüliye* tariqa, the twelve stations, the miracles of its saints. He added to those the girl Ma'an's notes for the Sheikh: Druze daily code, the history of Mount Lebanon, how there is no resurrection but reincarnation, the blue eyes the Crusaders left to their Arab offspring. Alchemical discussions, descriptions of vessels, the mistakes of the Neo-Platonists and then the mistakes of Jabir: the correct path. Dates and Records. Date on which a rotten tooth was turned to gold. Date when the curtains caught fire. Date on which

new supplies arrived covered in red pepper. Records of new students, apprentices, fireside conversations. Records of Murād IV's approach to Baghdad. Dates of his winning battles. Dates leading up to his arrival on to the little hill. The Orphan assembled them all in a second volume. Knit each page to the next.

And when the Orphan had bound everything he could find together, he appealed to the followers. It was they who would write what they recalled of the masters: the words of the Sheikh's fragrant mouth, the travel accounts of Little Father, and the deeds of Ma'an's nibble fingers that had turned copper to gold. Beautiful stories would be forgotten, unless they remembered it for them. So the followers arrived despite their fear. They put pen to paper in the little basement where the candlelights flickered.

And there, day after day, night after night, in the house where murders had been discussed, in the house where the elixir had been brewed, in the house where three souls had slowly been turning precious, the followers made the three masters up. Both as they had been and as they had never been. They each wrote of their words, and with their words. And they were guided to write words that the three alchemists had not spoken, but wished that they had. And even though they had all known the same three people, the followers never once used the same names to describe them.

The Orphan made them swear on their honour to forget their creation the moment they completed it. They would remain anonymous till the end of days, and take this secret to the grave. The followers accepted, for they all knew that they paled in comparison to the three alchemists. And also because they knew of what the Qur'an says, that correct memory belongs only to God.

**

In time, Perihan lost everything Your Honour. She lost Kalliopi, she lost the Young Ottomans and she lost control over her library. She lost – we lost – our beloved Murat V. Ruhi refused visitors, and Perihan could not exit her room, so I began climbing the precarious ivy up to her window. I gather she had lost her resolve; first by choice and then by necessity. I pleaded with her to come with me, to start anew. I described my old snowy mountains to her, my mother and the broken church, and reassured her that all manners of escape were possible, but she refused. She said she belonged to this house, to this writing table, to this view of the garden. Feride Nine told me she heard howls and strange gasps emerging from her room. Whatever is unused rots, and so Perihan lost her voice.

Nevertheless we corresponded. She would order me with nods, and gestures, or sometimes she kicked her legs “gossip for me”, “how was your day”, “leave me now.” I would never say she was a powerless host. I definitely did not do or say anything she wouldn’t have wanted. And yes, I must admit, Your Honour, I did not climb up the ivy and flirt with death from the hands of Ruhi only to tell Perihan stories. Though I did like her very much, and each time I went up there I did either start the night with an anecdote or end with a muffled song, but either after my mini performance or before it, I unlocked her door with a pin from my hair and made my way to the chamber of the coffeehouse books. An urge I could not stop.

The library was empty then, nothing like in its old heyday. No fires burned, it was silent and damp, a smell of mold spreading. I had been invited into the room of the coffeehouse books twice before, so I did not think I was trespassing. It took me months to read the suspicious books in it, Your Honour.

I looked for the book supposedly written by the Orphan and the followers in the basement of a whitewashed house on an Anatolian hill. This rumoured encyclopaedia of alchemy, history and faith. But I could not find it. There was enough to keep me occupied, for other books would hold clues, they must. There were Persian words and Arabic words,

and even a little Greek in between the Ottoman in every single book in that room, Your Honour, and for hours I got lost looking for pointers. Hints, that would only lead to more hints. I brooded, talked and dreamt the little stories that I have been telling you all day long, or has it been two days by now?

I have my theories. I think Murād IV might have killed them before the Orphan and his accomplices ever finished compiling the books, or he may have stopped them from copying the pages once they had. Even if they finished and copied the work, who would have dared publish such an encyclopaedia? Only someone who had bigger fears than a Sultan, only someone who had seen much worse. Even so, would the volumes have survived all these hundreds of years? Perhaps the encyclopaedia is still in a village on a hillside, Your Honour. That might be a good thing. Maybe the Orphan found a hiding place for it, perhaps a deserted coffeehouse. Imagine a book that holds the secret for transmutation; it would be enough reason for anyone to kill.

The bright yellow bird was pale by the time it died. It faded from bright to dim, the way Perihan did, and one day I took it off her shoulder, now as thin as a shrub branch, and began burying it under the violet on the windowsill but something strange happened. Just as I was going to cover it with earth, it flew back to Perihan. Sat on her shoulder as if it hadn't just died in my hands.

It is at that moment that I thought the ending of this story would not kill her, Your Honour. Despite my better judgement, I told her what I knew of the encyclopaedia that had trickled from mouth to mouth.

“So they say the Orphan and his friends wrote a book about the granddaughter of Ma'an,” I said, “and then they wilfully forgot they ever wrote it in the first place. True humility, yes, but as a result I think Murād IV must have killed them too. In all likelihood the Orphan and his friends never got to finish their project. I asked everyone and no one knows. Not one bookseller in Istanbul has seen such a book. That is all I could find out for

you, *canım* Perihan. I am so sorry. But there is always hope. Every winter turns to spring, every night into dawn.”

Her cherry lips parted then, and a timid smile spread across her face like on the first day she had introduced me to the girl Ma'an. “It is so much better to forget, than it is to remember,” she said.

And to this day I don't know what she meant by those words, Your Honour.

6

Anna

Manuscripts don't burn.

Mikhail Bulgakov

Anna Davies
Purtelas Sokak
D'Aranko Apartmanı
Numara 6, Pera,
Constantinopolis, Ottoman Empire

Rebecca Beale
London Society for Women's Suffrage
Hornton Street 108
The Royal Borough of Kensington
London, United Kingdom

20 February 1877

Dear Rebecca,

When I left Mr Cleanthi's flat in Athens, he gave me two gifts. I had mentioned the cigarette holder before, the one with inlaid turquoise, but I am not sure I told you about the house keys. He said they opened a wooden door in Constantinopolis, that I should unlock that door and make myself at home.

Constantinopolis is built on seven hills, just like Athens and Rome. I remember my excitement as I climbed up the uneven steps leading to the mound of Pera, just five days ago. At each landing, stray cats and dogs came out to greet me. They are not dangerous at all, but docile creatures with soulful eyes. If you pat them, they may even escort you to your destination. This is how I arrived at Mr Cleanthi's apartment, with a wrinkled map in hand, and two dogs by my side.

I walked inside Mr Cleanthi's accomodations like the blind, hitting tables and unknown objects, until I found the velvet curtains that reached to the floor. I opened them, and discovered a view of the Bosphorus through jagged rooftops and naked trees. Smoke came out of the chimneys, frost had covered the reclining city like a blanket. The flat itself had gathered dust, and the water ran an earthy colour when I turned on the tab. But even in this forsaken state, the apartment reminded me of Mr Cleanthi's stories. Its floors are of marble, with hand woven carpets strewn across it. There are five different seating

arrangements in which Mr Cleanthi must have entertained his Young Ottoman friends. It seems he also had a reading corner overlooking the sea; some of his books are still in a pile on the floor. The kitchen is equipped for pleasure, with antique sets of cutlery and plates, a dozen different coffee sets, and a spice rack with neatly labelled glass containers. I feel like I have stolen into someone else's life, that at any moment an official may come and arrest me for trespassing.

You must be wondering what I think of Istanbul. One thing I can say with certainty is that the city resembles a maze. Or perhaps a better analogy is of filo pastry, and baklava. What I mean is this; Constantinopolis builds riddle over riddle in thin, elegant layers. Yesterday, for example, I walked down a street and came upon a church. I entered it, only to discover the Byzantine building was now a mosque. On another street, I came upon an old woman dressed in black. She guarded a stack of candles and a basement every nook of which was filled with holy relics. Then I saw a crumbling theatre that refugees had occupied. There were children on every floor, with snotty noses and winter pale skin, playing games I did not know of. I saw two teenage boys at the side of an Ottoman dome, lifting bricks so as to peak into an old hamam. Then I walked by burnt houses from which fresh laundry hang. In short, nothing is wholly what it seems.

I promise to write more about the city, but let me return to the purpose of my visit for a little while. Please tell the Society that after a day of rest, I ventured to visit Perihan Hatun as we had planned. My tale gets a little strange after this point; I did not quite find what I expected in the Biggest Library of Istanbul.

Kuzguncuk, where the library is situated, runs adjacent to the Bosphorus but on the Asian side of Constantinopolis. At every opening by the waterside, the poor had placed chairs to watch the sea, which I found curious because the weather is very cold. It was not hard to discover the building Perihan Hatun had described in her letters; it rose four stories

high, unlike the two storied Turkish houses around it. I entered the premises through an iron gate that creaked and opened on to a big garden. The library stood in its midst.

I noticed most of its windows were covered with linen. I knocked on the door, and when no one answered I wandered deeper into the yard. A lonesome caique was tied to a small buoy by its edge. I saw a herbarium and entered it, but everything inside had dried up. The garden looked positively abandoned. I was about to give up, and return to Mr Cleanthi's apartment when the door of the library creaked. A very small woman in a red skirt, thick green socks and a yellow woollen sweater peaked out. I had only known children to dress in such colours, but the woman who appeared from inside the library was ancient. I recognized her at once. She was the one scowling by a row of books in the watercolour Perihan had sent me. The painting that had convinced the Society this place might actually exist.

I did not have to know Turkish to understand the woman was shooing me away. I tried to explain, clumsily and in English, that I was a friend. When she saw I could not speak her tongue, she halted. I told her I had come for Perihan Hatun. It had been naïve to think I would not need a translator. Perihan Hatun had written to me in English, and I had assumed someone in the library would speak it even if she wouldn't be there. The old woman asked me a question, over and over. Her voice got louder with each attempt. Finally I had the mind to show her the painting, and the letters Perihan Hatun had sent me. Upon seeing them her eyes watered, and she pulled me to her bosom, nearly suffocating me in the process. She motioned that I follow her, "*gel, gel!*" and that is how I entered the majestic building.

It seemed to me that I was in a dream place, for one corridor led to another. We moved down one wing of the library, and it felt as long as a train station. The old woman first took me to a chamber where the painting must have been made. It was an enormous room, with calligraphy on the walls and elaborate, framed tiles, also vases and knick-

knacks in cupboards of glass. It was exactly like in the watercolour, except that the shelves in it were empty. There were at most six books in the library, and they looked like rotten teeth in a gaping mouth.

The old woman then took me to another, smaller room. At every corner there were hoards of things covered in linen. She uncovered a divan and seated me on it, then she uncovered a window, and the gray blue sea appeared before a writing table. She lit the fire. The sky had darkened outside, and soon a storm began raging over the Bosphorus. In the dimming light I wondered about the face this woman must have carried as a child.

She swayed from side to side, with a little “ah” in her mouth. I could not translate her movements to something familiar. She cupped her breasts and sighed as if to indicate she was barren, or had no life left inside her, or perhaps to gesture she had had enough. Then she lit two cigarettes, and passed one to me. We sat and smoked in silence, with the storm outside and the sea splashing against the house. After a while she opened my palm, and placed in it a three-leafed jade clover. The broche was elegant and looked expensive, maybe it was all that the old woman owned, and I tried to refuse but she closed my fist. I don't know how much time passed in that room, only that I understood Perihan Hatun would not be coming here anytime soon. The house was deserted. My trip to Istanbul had been in vain.

The old woman let me embrace her, and put her little head on my chest in the process. I began walking back through those long corridors. She shuffled after me in worn house slippers. And as I was leaving the library, she placed a large envelope in my hands.

**

A part of me was expecting a note from Perihan within that envelope. Perhaps an explanation as to why the library was empty, of both books and people. Had she

exaggerated its collection and its exuberant salons, or had there been a change as of late? Did this have anything to do with the death of Sultan Abdülaziz, with the madness of Murat V, and all the things Mr Cleanthi had told me in Athens? Where was Perihan Hatun? But the envelope gave me no answers. I found page after page of Ottoman inside, a beautiful yet indecipherable script. I returned to Mr Cleanthi's apartment in Pera and slept an uneasy sleep. In the morning I decided to contact Handan. Do you remember the young Turkish student I had met on the train to Italy? I hoped she could help me.

**

I spent the next day waiting for her in Mr Cleanthi's reading corner. Handan arrived towards evening. One side of the Bosphorus was falling into night, the other held on to day. One by one, the lanterns turned on in Pera. She came with bags of sweets and an embroidered towel. "A gift for the English guest," from her mother. She informed me that I would be staying with them from now on. Her sisters were already cooking for me. To be honest, I have missed the comfort of female company, and as beautiful as this flat is, I am feeling a little lonely.

I handed the envelope over to Handan. She sifted through the papers. "It is a very long document," she said, and smiled up at me, "If we read everything in here, you might have to stay in Istanbul longer than you plan."

I asked her what the pages might be about. "A set of letters, from one friend to another," she said. "From your friend Perihan, to another woman named Kalliopi. But the first letter is addressed to someone else."

Because the letters were so long, and because Handan was in no hurry, we lit our cigarettes. Handan noticed the clover I had pinned on my dress. "It must be antique, from the previous century, very beautiful. Tell me who gave it to you." People here do not shy

away from private questions, that's one thing I learned about Istanbul. I told her that someone had put it in my palm, and this explanation seemed to satisfy her. She returned to the papers.

“The first letter in the bundle is addressed to the Brothers David and Samuel Nahmias. I think they used to be publishers,” Handan said.

That is how we began our reading. We paused after each epistle, and tried to deconstruct a friendship, whilst building one of our own. Sweets followed cigarettes, coffee was followed by pastry and tea. Until, it seems, we fell asleep on different chairs. I woke to the cries of seagulls. It is hard to distinguish them from the cries of infants or cats, in that state between dreams and awakening.

I am writing to you from Mr Cleanthi's desk. From the side of my eye, I can see the *müezzin* going up the winding stairs of the minaret, with his turban bobbing up and down, readying himself for the morning prayers. Behind him extends the sheer blue of the Bosphorus. Lanterns go off one by one. I think I will make the first coffee of the day now. There is a lot I must explain to you. I will brew a cup with mastic, and will take it off the burner thrice. Just the way a Greek thought me in a city similar to this.

Ottoman Crossroads:
Coffeehouses, Politics, Theatres and Storytelling
Critical Essays

1. Long Nights in Coffeehouses: Ottoman Storytelling in its Urban Locales

Istanbulite storytelling culture and the history of coffee consumption in the Ottoman Empire were intricately linked, so much so that it is impossible to tell the narrative of one without the other. Coffeehouses united different segments of Ottoman society under the same roof and destroyed hierarchical hospitality rituals. Their eclectic clientele lured storytellers who entertained once darkness fell upon the city, whilst coffee guaranteed both the pleasure and the length of these evenings due to its stimulant effects.

In what follows, I would like to highlight the necessary connections between Ottoman coffeehouse and storytelling cultures through a historical survey of each, and suggest that their simultaneous end was not a coincidence but rather the natural consequence of a particular, Turkish dissatisfaction with the Ottoman past.

The History of Coffee and Coffeehouses

Ebu Tayyib El-Gazi, an Arabic chronicler from the 16th century, identified the first brewer of coffee as the great King and Prophet Solomon. According to El-Gazi, Angel Gabriel instructed King Solomon to brew coffee beans so as to create a healing drink, which the

king then distributed amongst the sick.¹ Another story ties coffee to a Sufi sheikh named Al-Dhabbani:

Once upon a time, a sheikh from the order of Shazili (founded by Ebu'l-Hasan Ali bin Abdullah Abdulcebbar el-serif el-Zarcilli) discovered coffee in Moka, Arabia. This particular sheikh was cast out of his religious order and travelled without food for many days until he discovered the coffee plant and decided to boil its beans into a drink. He lived off this dark liquid for three days and did not die. Two of his friends from the order worried about their expelled friend and came to his rescue in the wilderness. These friends suffered from scabies. Curious about the drink that kept their friend alive, they tried a sip. They liked its smell and bitter aroma. The friends drank from this brew during the eight days they spent in the wild, and at the end of the 8th day, they were cured of their disease. The news of their healing reached Moka and the locals began collecting coffee beans to cure the sick.²

Both accounts contain fantastical elements, and link the beginnings of coffee to religious figures. While they provide entertaining stories in themselves, it is impossible to check their accuracy as they are based on oral traditions that evolve and change with each telling.

What can be ascertained through historical documentation is that coffee beans originated in Ethiopia, and that they were eaten long before they were drunk. The local tribes of the area ground coffee beans into a powder that they added to their daily bread.³ After Ethiopia, coffee spread through East Africa quickly. It is likely that the Ottomans came across coffee when they defeated the Mamluk Empire in 1517; they might have taken samples of this drink with them upon their return to Asia Minor. More than a century

¹ Ekrem Işın, "A Social History of Coffee and Coffeehouses," in *Coffee, Pleasures Hidden in a Bean*, ed. Selahattin Özpalabıyıklar (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001), 12.

² Salah Birsell, *Kahveler Kitabı* (Istanbul: Nisan Yayınları, 1991), 11. All translations in this PhD thesis, from the Turkish or French original, are my own. One exception is the long quote from Edmondo de Amicis in the introduction, which was translated from the Italian by Stephen Parkin.

³ Işın, "A Social History of Coffee and Coffeehouses," 12.

later, in 1683, Europeans would discover coffee in the same way when the Ottomans lost the siege of Vienna and left their coffee beans behind upon their retreat. Legend has it that the Viennese learned how to brew coffee from a captive Ottoman soldier.⁴

Despite the popularity of the drink over a wide geography, there was no specific location dedicated to the enjoyment of coffee until the 15th century. Venders in Cairo supplied stools for their clientele but these seating arrangements were not deemed necessary. As with turning coffee into a beverage, turning coffee consumption into a hobby with its own designated space required a certain amount of entrepreneurial thinking. Two Syrian merchants came up with the idea of housing coffee enthusiasts under one roof, travelled to Istanbul to realize their dream and established the first coffeehouse in the world in 1555.⁵ Hakem of Haleppo and Shems of Damascus inaugurated their business in the commercial district of Tahtakale, and by 1600 we have records of no less than 600 registered coffeeshops dotting the imperial city.⁶

Enterprising individuals set up their coffeehouses in close proximity to mosques. But even if the story of coffee began with Sufi dervishes, not all religious officials were happy with the lure of this exotic stimulant. Some *ulema*, scholars of Islamic law and theology, suggested that coffeehouses were worse than the taverns that served alcohol, since the former seemed harmless whereas the latter had no such pretensions.⁷ Şeyhulissam Ebusuut Efendi issued a fatwa that pronounced all brewing to the degree of carbonization evil, and the drinking of coffee a sin. Sultan Murat IV had both coffeeshops and private coffee consumption banned. When the public and some pious addicts began complaining,

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Cemal Kafadar, "Turkish Coffeehouse Culture," Turkish Cultural Foundation Lecture Series, Istanbul, January 5, 2010, accessed 20 January 2011, <http://www.turkishculturalfoundation.org/pages.php?ID=95>

⁷ Ibid.

this led to a new fatwa that pronounced coffee benign. Since its beans were taken off the fire before carbonization, the beverage could be drunk without transgressing.⁸

The characteristics and functions of Ottoman coffeehouses attracted a clientele keen for company and coffee, a concoction that would soon be accompanied by storytelling. One of the attributes that rendered coffeehouses suitable for communal entertainment was their transmission of the private sphere into the social. Ottomans considered coffeehouses as extensions of the *selamlık*, the male guest quarters of private houses, into the public domain.⁹ Whether rich or poor, most households in Istanbul had a special room dedicated to welcoming visitors. The hosts served dinners and refreshments in this room where they discussed politics, made acquaintances and formed intellectual opinions. The first frequenters of coffeehouses began their outings by inviting their houseguests to coffeehouses and entertaining them there, hence placing the hitherto private hospitality rituals within a public setting.¹⁰ The unfurling of conviviality into the exterior world did not involve the presence of women or children however. From their early beginnings, until their transformation in the 20th century, coffeehouses catered to a male clientele exclusively.

The public and private spheres have come to be understood as Habermasian terms highlighting the strict distinction between the interior and exterior realms. While helpful, the concepts must be used with care, since such clear boundaries between the outside and the domestic do not always fit snugly within the Ottoman world. As Alan Mikhail has pointed out, Ottoman spaces rearranged and at times integrated the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ in new and useful ways. The example of dead end streets is an apt one here.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Selma Akyazıcı Özkoçak, “Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul,” *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 33, no. 06 (2007): 978.

¹⁰ Kafadar mentions the cost of coffeehouse entertainments would be less than that of an evening gathering at a private home. Cemal Kafadar, “Turkish Coffeehouse Culture,” Turkish Cultural Foundation Lecture Series, Istanbul, January 5, 2010, accessed 20 January 2011, <http://www.turkishculturalfoundation.org/pages.php?ID=95>

Several households shared these locations as storage units for food and fuel, and as additional space for performing chores; they thus combined the homely with the alfresco. Mikhail suggests Foucault's 'heterotopia' is a more fitting concept to describe the Ottoman coffeehouse since it denotes a layered functionality and a combination of several spaces normally juxtaposed. Coffeehouses constituted such a heterogeneous mix between the aforementioned *selamlık*, the kitchen, the garden, mosques and the street.¹¹

While coffeehouses did not provide a locus for the equal standing of the sexes, they did form an arena in which the rich and the poor intermingled more easily than in any other public setting in Istanbul. This disregard for social hierarchy played an important role in enabling coffeehouses to become centres for storytelling. There was no other location in which different economic and social classes initiated contact, sat together, drank the same drink and joined in the same conversations.¹²

Other scholars suggest that this egalitarian picture did not extend to the non-Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire. Apparently while taverns were run by non-Muslims and catered to non-Muslims and were situated outside the city gates, coffeehouses were run by Muslims and for Muslims and located within the city boundaries.¹³ These classifications might reflect tendencies, but they are not historically accurate. There are records indicating the frequent appearance of Muslims within taverns, and of Non-Muslim clientele within coffeehouses.¹⁴

In time, the egalitarian, multi-ethnic and multi-religious climate of coffeehouses created an alternative form of sociability. For some Istanbulites, conversations held whilst

¹¹ Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire: Gender, Urban Space, and the Ottoman Coffeehouse," in *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dana Sajdi, (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), 134-150.

¹² Özkoçak, "The Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul," 975.

¹³ Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1985), 95-96.

¹⁴ Cengiz Kırılı, "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire," in A. Salvatore and D. F. Eikelman, eds., *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 77, 92. Kırılı also cites several spy documents located in the Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, which testify to this multicultural and multireligious mix.

having coffee substituted religious discussions held at mosques, and for others coffeehouses offered a new venue for political and literary discourse. Up until the 16th century life in a typical Istanbulite neighbourhood had revolved around three centres: the work place, the private home and the mosque. In this scheme, each duty and necessity of life had corresponded to a particular location. Coffeehouses, on the other hand, were not answers to any crucial requisite of the people. They challenged a comfortable routine that had functioned without problems for many centuries, hence when coffeehouses etched a new type of sociability and created their own demand, it was the religious authorities that first viewed them as a threat.¹⁵

Political authorities were another fraction that felt threatened by the popularity of coffeehouses and encouraged prohibitions against them. A court historian, Mustafa Naima, noted in 1633:

Coffee and tobacco are neither more, nor less than a pretext for assembling; a crowd of good-for-nothings forever meet in coffeehouses...where they spend their time criticising and disparaging the great and the authorities, waste their breath discussing imperial interests connected with affairs of state, (dismissals, appointments, fallings out and reconciliations) they (would) gossip and backstab and lie.¹⁶

By the 19th century, state officials had begun sending spies to coffeehouses in order to gather information on public opinion.¹⁷ While coffeehouses were not the only locations where spies gathered their data, it is estimated that half of all their reports originated from coffeehouses. These accounts occupied an important role in the Ottoman administrative

¹⁵ Işın, "A Social History of Coffee and Coffeehouses," 27.

¹⁶ N. Itzkowits, ed., *A Study of Naima by Lewis V. Thomas* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 95.

¹⁷ For further information on spies in coffeehouses and the content of their reports see Cengiz Kırılı, "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire," in A. Salvatore and D. F. Eikelman, eds., *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 75-97.

system as each week the chief of police summarized them to the grand vizier, who in his turn presented the findings to the Sultan himself.¹⁸

Coffeehouses resembled both mosques and private houses in their architecture, planning and detail. Their interiors were designed to gather a number of people around a single main room surrounded by built-in, cushioned benches for seating, known as *divan*.¹⁹ This main area, which usually had a decorative marble fountain or pool at its centre, opened up to additional side rooms. The centralized organization scheme was an adaptation from the traditional layout of Ottoman houses where the central upper floor hall, called the *sofa*, functioned as the main living space and bedrooms opened off the sofa.²⁰

Courtyards made up important architectural additions to some of the large coffeehouses in Istanbul. During spring and summer, clients could enjoy their coffee and water pipe outdoors. It is probable that Ottoman mosques, which were also planned over a centralized courtyard superimposed on a cruciform layout, inspired this setting.²¹

All coffeehouses in Istanbul shared the above outlined attributes but their settings, owners, and varieties in ambience ensured different types of clientele. Some coffeehouses attracted soldiers, others hashish addicts, yet others intellectuals and mystics. Most offered entertainment such as juggling, musical performances and poetry, dancing or puppet shows. Amongst these, storytelling was considered the most wholesome and constituted a popular source of recreation.²²

The most popular types of coffeehouses, both in Istanbul and Anatolia, as well as throughout the Balkans, were the Neighbourhood Coffeehouses [Mahalle Kahveleri]. They were in close proximity to the neighbourhood mosque so that its frequenters also became

¹⁸ Kırhl, "Coffeehouses: Public Opinion in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire," 78.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 14.

²² Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, 111.

clients of the coffeehouse. All problems that concerned the local community would be solved here informally, making neighbourhood coffeehouses political, as well as social milieus.

The typical neighbourhood coffeehouse was made of wood, and situated at the central square with a clear view of the passersby. In some such coffeehouses, clients would take off their shoes before entering the premises, a custom adapted from mosques and employed in neighbourhood coffeehouses exclusively. This ritual testifies to the coffeehouse's heterotopic state.

The counter, frequently situated at an inside corner by the wall and next to the stove, was considered an important section of the coffeehouse. Next to the stove there was a *delik* or *dolap*, cabinets accommodating coffee cups and saucers. This intersection constituted the abode of *Kahveci Baba*, or Coffeemaker Father, and formed the financial and administrative centre of the premises. From the 18th century onwards barbers took their place by the stoves and coffeehouses began to serve both coffee addicts and those that needed a haircut.

Another popular type of coffeehouse catered to Istanbulite artisans. The Artisan Coffeehouses [Esnaf Kahveleri] were located in the commercial districts of Istanbul and formed the meeting points for those belonging to specific guilds. Each occupational group had their own coffeehouse; amongst these groups one could count the porters, the carpenters, and the caique rowers amongst others. Since these coffeehouses mostly catered to craftsmen, they had close ties to the bazaars of the city. Such coffeehouses also served as employment centres. When a client needed a craftsman he simply went to the coffeehouse and hired one for the day.

Janissary Coffeehouses [Yeniçeri Kahveleri] were introduced to Istanbul in the 17th century. The janissaries were the Ottoman army force, and their coffeehouses catered to soldiers. Since these coffeehouses served members of one particular profession, they

shared similarities with artisan coffeehouses. What made them different than other guild houses however, was their connection to the Bektashi order of Sufi Islam. The owners and frequenters of these coffeehouses generally adhered to Bektashi rituals, signs of which were visible within the coffeehouse itself. Certain seating arrangements were called after mystical stations such as *Baba Sofası* and *Murşid Postu*. Consequently many considered the janissary coffeehouses on par with Bektashi lodges.

When Sultan Mahmut II (1789-1839) abolished the janissary force in 1826 and remodelled the Ottoman army in European fashion, he also shut down janissary coffeehouses.²³ Many soldiers joined the fire brigades after their order had been abolished and their coffeehouses transformed into those of the fire brigades. Other firemen were picked from young, unmarried men who were newcomers to the city and who lived mostly in hostels or inns in the Golden Horn area.

The original idea behind the brigades had been to form a city wide, centralized institution. The notion failed since neighbourhood residents opposed the inclusion of young unmarried men in their midst, and local brigades were initiated in every neighbourhood instead. Watchtowers were built at key points in the city, and coffeehouses catering to the localized firefighters sprung up around them. These coffeehouses attracted a vivacious, multi ethnic, and mostly Sufi, coffee clientele. The resulting sub culture branched off into the Musical Coffeehouses [*Semai Kahveleri*] and the Minstrel Coffeehouses [*Aşık Kahveleri*]. *Semai* coffeehouses operated in the fasting month of Ramadan exclusively.²⁴

Many considered the musical coffeehouses a more rudimentary version of the janissary or the later fire brigades coffeehouses. Their ceilings were decorated with paper chains and roses, the walls with pictures, and a high platform was set up for musicians in

²³ Işın, "A Social History of Coffee and Coffeehouses," 32-33.

²⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

one corner. A minimum of four musicians was necessary to turn a coffeehouse musical, and the most popular instruments were the *zurna*, *darbuka*, *nakkare* and clarinet.²⁵

The Ramadan programs in musical coffeehouses began after the breaking of the fast and the Ramadan service, which included communal prayers in mosques. The evening entertainment lasted until the pre-dawn meal which was served around 5.30 am (depending on the season in which Ramadan was being celebrated). The evening would begin with instrumental music followed by singing, various theatrical acts and storytelling.²⁶

The Minstrel Coffeehouses [*Aşık Kahveleri*] were in between guild and janissary/fire brigade coffeehouses. They resembled the janissary/fire brigade coffeehouses with regards to their clientele and Bektashi principles, whilst they were alike the artisan coffeehouses on accounts of belonging to the guild system. Minstrel coffeehouses were less festive than musical coffeehouses but offered music all year through.

The *aşık* or *saz* poets were minstrels who commonly shared a rural background. In the 19th century they established their own guild in Istanbul, *Aşıklar Cemiyeti*. A renowned *aşık* typically became its warden, *kethüda*, and worked in establishing proper musical coffeehouses for the Ramadan season. He also oversaw the quality of their clientele, or in other words, kept the hashish addicts at bay. The *kethüda* also granted certificates to able *aşık* without which they would not be allowed to perform in Istanbulite coffeehouses. *Aşık* performances in coffeehouses made use of several Turkish literary styles such as *mani*, *koşma* and *cenk*.²⁷ The *aşık* based their songs on myths and legends, and were considered a

²⁵ Beşir Ayvazoğlu, *Turkish Coffee Culture* (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2011), 139.

²⁶ Işın, "A Social History of Coffee and Coffeehouses," 35-36.

²⁷ *Mani*, *koşma* and *cenk* are popular forms in Turkish folk literature. Each *koşma* is made up of at least three, and at most eleven quatrains. Each verse has eleven syllables, three of which rhyme. According to their themes *koşma* are divided into *güzellemeler*, *koçaklamalar*, *taşlamalar* and *ağutlar*. *Mani* are the shortest poems within the Turkish folk tradition; they are made up of four lines which are seven syllables each, and are further grouped into *düz mani*, *kesik mani*, *kirpikli mani*, *yedekli mani* and *deyiş* in accordance to their rhyming schemes. The *cenk* or *cenk-name* are epic poems that revolve around the lives of prophet Mohammed, the fourth Caliph Ali, and other heroes. For more information on Turkish folk literature and its genres see, M. Öcal Oğuz, ed., *Türk Halk Edebiyatı El Kitabı* (İstanbul: Grafiker Yayınları, 2000).

bridge between the rural and the urban cultures of the Empire since they brought Anatolian traditions and sentiments to bustling cities.²⁸

Hashish Coffeehouses [Esrar Kahveleri] catered to addicts of alcohol and hashish. Only the bravest souls in the city frequented them since these establishments were deemed both dangerous and unseemly. Many hashish coffeehouses provided beds and allowed their clientele to sleep on the premises if that was needed.²⁹

Even though only a small percentage of coffeehouses welcomed addicts, some viewed all coffeehouses as drug dens. Nurullah Ataç underlines the point somewhat charmingly:

The coffeehouse is the sanctuary of those who do not know how to organize their lives or homes or how to make friends. In short, it is the place for those running away from reality. Each coffeehouse –whether it permits opium and hashish or not– is a drug house. Life appears like a dream to those who watch the crowds on the street from the coffeehouse’s glass façade.³⁰

The Art of the Meddah

The Storyteller’s Coffeehouses [Meddah Kahveleri] were the primary settings where Istanbulites listened to night-time tales. Some storytellers, or meddah, were Istanbulites themselves, while others came from different cities or the villages of Anatolia. Coffeehouse proprietors frequently employed these tellers for meagre sums. In some cases, they weren’t paid at all, and lived off the donations of the listeners. These contributions

²⁸ Ayvazoğlu, *Turkish Coffee Culture*, 137-139.

²⁹ Abdülkadir Emeksiz, “İstanbul Kahvehaneleri,” In *Karaların ve Denizlerin Sultanı İstanbul*, ed. Filiz Özdem (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009), 134.

³⁰ Nurullah Ataç, “Kahve,” *Haber Akşam Postası*, 10 August 1937, quoted in Beşir Ayvazoğlu, *Turkish Coffee Culture* (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2011), 129.

were customary, rather than obligatory. Most storytellers were professionals who had learnt the art from older masters, others were eloquent students or scholars that wished to supplement their incomes.

Rural folk tales, stories from the *Quran* and *The Thousand and One Nights* as well as local accounts of bravery, Central Asian legends, hagiographies and miracles made up the core of their storytelling material. At times the meddah mixed stories from several different sources, sometimes they crafted tales from lived events. Some meddah changed old stories till they became new specimens. Özdemir Nutku has summarized the storyteller's sources of inspiration into nine categories: historical events that have left a mark in collective memory; stories lived, overheard or witnessed by the storyteller; written historical sources; legends; fairy tales; scenes from popular short stories or novels; characterizations [*taklit*]; shadow theatre; stories made up of sayings and proverbs.³¹ Each meddah would add and subtract details of his choice as he narrated, hence the tales could change substantially from one night of telling to the next, and from one storyteller to the other.³²

The tradition of the meddah entered Ottoman culture via its central Asian, and Arabic lineage. Turkish clans had inhabited central Asia before their gradual migration to Anatolia, which began in the 6th century. The storytellers of these tribes did not only narrate their stories but also acted them out. The shamanistic belief system of the time encouraged the tellers to use mimics and body movements to enliven their performances. Throughout the centuries, the religious significance of these gestures was lost as the populace converted to Islam, but the traditions of acting, pantomime and imitations remained and enhanced the tales of these nomadic storytellers.

³¹ Özdemir Nutku, "Aşık ve Meddah Hikayeleri," in *III. Milletlerarası Türk Folklor Kongresi Bildirileri, III. Cilt: Halk Müziği, Oyun, Tiyatro, Eğlence* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1987), 187-188.

³² *Ibid.*, 187.

The Arabic route of the meddah tradition had religious origins as well. The word meddah is derived from the Arabic root *medh*, which means to compliment or to give praise and was used within an Islamic context primarily, to refer to those tellers of stories that aimed to praise Prophet Mohammed and his family. This religious function of the storytellers fell into disuse in time, and the term meddah began to refer to any storyteller that told tales of wonder and bravery.³³ People did not forget these spiritual beginnings of storytelling, and this may well be the reason why storytellers enjoyed such respect throughout the Ottoman Empire. Another reason behind the high social status of the storytellers was their literacy.

Mevlana Hüseyin Vaiz Kaşifi Sebzevari distinguishes four different types of meddah in his 14th century study on literature, the *Futuvvutname*:

The first type are those who compliment the Prophet and his family with their eloquence and expertise in literary mediums; they tell the stories of religion through tales. The second type of meddah are those who aim at benefitting the populace by telling stories or poems penned by others. Then there are those meddah who tell tales as well as help people through other occupations, such as being itinerant sellers of water. There are also those meddah who have learned a poem or two and sell their narrations from door to door. This last group may seem like meddah, but should not be classified as such.³⁴

Meddah Şükrü Efendi, a 19th century storyteller, has a slightly different classification of the meddah:

³³ Dilaver Düzgün, "Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu," *Türkler*, vol.15 (2002): 489.

³⁴ Özdemir Nutku, "Meddahlık Olgusu," in *Meddah Kitabı*, ed. Ünver Oral (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2006), 33.

There are those meddah who read stories of bravery either from memory or from books. There are others who tell their stories accompanied by a musical instrument (these generally come from Anatolia and cities such as Erzurum and Kars). Another type of meddah fill their stories with mimes, imitations and acting (these are mostly from Istanbul).³⁵

Meddah Şükrü Efendi's definition is noteworthy since it showcases a storyteller's analysis of his own craft, and yet it is flawed in that it does not distinguish an aşık [minstrel], from a meddah [storyteller]. The aşık always had his musical instrument with him, and was primarily viewed as a poet-musician who at times embellished his musical poetry with stories and anecdotes. The meddah, on the other hand, did not typically play an instrument. He was a storyteller who could employ professional musicians to accompany his telling from time to time.³⁶

Storytelling evenings were finessed with rituals. The meddah sat on a chair, which was placed on a high platform that functioned like a stage. He held a cane in one hand, and a handkerchief was placed on his shoulder. The storyteller used the cane for several purposes; he walked with it to become an old man, or used it to call the audience to silence. Alternatively the cane was employed to produce rhythms the storyteller incorporated into his tales. The handkerchief could become a veil that turned the teller into a woman or could be used to cover his mouth as he mimicked sounds from nature, such as animals, rivers or trees in the wind.

Pertev Naili Boratav points out that the performances of the meddah were more akin to theatrical performances, rather than narration. The storyteller did not use narrative

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Metin And, "Eski İstanbul'da Meddah Kahveleri," in *Meddah Kitabı*, ed. Ünver Oral (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2006), 55.

terms such as “he/she said” or “he/she did”. He acted these statements out instead, letting the changes in his voice and gestures guide the listeners as to who was speaking at each moment. Metin And distinguishes meddah stories from all other performative arts within the Ottoman culture in that the meddah tales did not predominantly aim at laughter. The meddah told stories of heroism, mythological tales, religious anecdotes and love stories, and tried to connect with their listeners through the emotions prevalent in these different forms.³⁷

Boratav defines the meddah as that artist who turns his storytelling into a one-man troupe by combining several elements from visual folk performances. Niyazi Akı interprets the art of the meddah differently and says it should be described as a story that is made to talk, rather than a one-person play since the meddah has listeners rather than viewers. “In a way the meddah too has viewers but they do not come to watch the several characters in the story, they come to see the meddah himself who is a person from without, rather than within, the story. The meddah is that artist whose powers of imitation outshines the characters he enacts.”³⁸ These words suggest that, for Akı, a meddah’s performance is more akin to narration than theatre.

Audience participation played an important role within the Meddah’s performance. Storyteller’s had a tendency to halt their stories mid way to hear their listeners’ reactions. These small breaks were accompanied by fresh cups of coffee and discussion. The meddah typically joined his audience to ask for donations, or *bahşış*, during these pauses. It is likely that the continuation of the story was affected by the temperaments and wishes of those in the coffeehouse. A famous incident that testifies to the power of audience participation in the art of the meddah took place in Bursa, a city in North Western Anatolia, in 1616. The incident occurred as meddah and poet Hayli Ahmed Çelebi was

³⁷ Düzgün, “Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu,” 489.

³⁸ Ibid., 490.

telling the tale of “Bedi and Kasım.” The listeners at the coffeehouse grew excited with the progression of the story, with each listener picking a side, either Bedi’s or Kasım’s. They cheered the meddah with their fervent shouts and claps of joy each time their hero was mentioned. Apparently the storyteller Hayli Ahmed himself was passionate about Kasım and got so affected by the support of his listeners that, in a moment of passion, he knifed another storyteller that supported the opposing hero Bedi.³⁹

The Politics of Space

The Ottoman Empire lasted for approximately six hundred years, from 1299 to 1922. By 1920 its territories were occupied by the Allied forces against whom the Ottomans lost the First World War. A young Turkish officer, Mustafa Kemal, initiated an independence war to claim parts of the occupied terrains back. In 1923 Anatolia and a small part of Thrace were retrieved, and the new Republic of Turkey was established on these grounds.

Turkish identity was radically re-conceptualized, and differentiated from the Ottoman, in the first half of the 20th century. It was believed the Turkish Republic had to be different from the empire preceding it if it was to survive. Mustafa Kemal, who was elected the first president of the new Turkish Republic, posited that all cultures had to adopt the ways and manners of the most advanced contemporary civilization, which, in his view, was that of the West. He brought forth a dress reform disallowing the headscarf and the fez, and discarded the Arabic script for the Latin. Despite his popularity, the reforms he implemented were difficult to adopt for many segments of the society and uprooted older, familiar forms of identity. Western structures could be internalized and made to function

³⁹ Metin And, “Meddah, Meddahlık, Meddahlar,” in *Meddah Kitabı*, ed. Ünver Oral (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2006), 4.

only if the memory of the previous empire was reanalysed and rejected. The newly established Turkish Republic began to describe the Ottoman Empire as backwards, too Islamic, anti democratic, and as lagging behind the times in its cultural institutions. Coffeehouses and storytellers, along with many other Ottoman cultural constructs, were not deemed fit for a modern, Western republic.

Istanbulite coffeehouses were gradually replaced by European style cafés. Today only the neighbourhood coffeehouses remain as representatives of a bygone tradition. The artisanal, musical, hashish, janissary, fire brigades' and storytellers' coffeehouses have ceased to exist. Their shadow theaters, colourful entertainments, storytellers, musicians and jugglers have also left daily Turkish life. The question that must be asked at this instance is why coffeehouses and urban storytelling lost their popularity after a five hundred year history. Why could coffeehouse culture not transition into the republic? It is likely that the main cause behind this cessation is a particular, negative memory of the Ottoman past, along with the introduction of modern entertainment forms such as radio and television. Could some of the cultural heritage be salvaged if the old memories of the empire were questioned anew?

Structuring landscapes, constructing buildings, and designing cities are inherently political practices. Choosing to erect a skyscraper rather than a wooden house, opening a shopping centre rather than renovating a bazaar, choosing to build a café rather than a coffeehouse are not value-neutral decisions. As Fjoralba Mata discusses in relation to Albanian Socialism, political ideology can be reflected in the way space is configured, and might at times turn a whole country into a construction site.⁴⁰ The value-laden nature of such projects is perhaps even easier to observe in colonized countries where the local inhabitant's and the colonizer's decisions regarding space diverge visibly. Ann Holt, in

⁴⁰ Fjoralba Satka Mata, "Political Power and Ideas on Space and Place in Albanian Socialist Painting," *Navigating Space and Place*, ed. Matthew Melia, (Inter-Disciplinary Press, forthcoming), 5, 8.

discussing the case of Australia, emphasizes that there are several ways of politicizing space. Imposing new borders by way of fences is one, importing European plants to Aboriginal soil in hopes of likening it to home is another.⁴¹ The Turkish modernization process, which led to the loss of coffeehouses, and consequently to the loss of urban storytelling, is only one such example of shifting political opinions reflected in the use of space.

The old homes and coffeehouses of Istanbul were made of wood, and in time the Ottoman city was lost to fires. Each time a building collapsed there was a choice to rebuild the structure in a different way, and in each reconstruction the notion of place, its use, and telos were configured anew. Most new buildings were made in Western, European style. This shift in architecture mirrored the shift in identity from traditional and Ottoman, to modern and European. Ninety-two years into the establishment of the Republic, Turkish views of the Ottoman past are now more nuanced. As the need to validate a new country lessens, so does an indiscriminate denial of its Ottoman heritage. One such proof of changing attitudes is an exciting architectural project.

In the neighbourhood of Kuzguncuk, in Istanbul, there is a café called The Neighbourhood Coffeehouse, *Mahalle Kahvesi*. It is tagged *Modern Kahve*, or The Modern Coffeehouse, by the locals. The adopted name is paradoxical: after all, coffeehouses did not survive Turkey's modernity. But this contradiction is precisely the point.

Mahalle Kahvesi is part of a project The Confederation of Istanbulite Artists and Guilds initiated in 2007. The undertaking aims to reignite Ottoman coffeehouse culture in contemporary Istanbulite neighbourhoods. Mahalle Kahvesi is not made out of wood, but replicates tradition in other ways; beverages are prepared under an Ottoman dome

⁴¹ Ann Holt, "The Sensation of Place: Translating the Experiential Sensation of a Space into a Work of Art," *Navigating Space and Place*, ed. Matthew Melia, (Inter-Disciplinary Press, forthcoming), 3.

resembling the traditional abode of the *Kahveci Baba*, while the conference room is akin to the chamber where the Ottoman council of ministers, the *divan-ı hümayun*, held their meetings.⁴² The director of the project, Bendeve Palandöken, states that every detail in Mahalle Kahvesi – from its tablecloth, to its stone floors – has a resonance reaching back centuries, and that they hope to re-create 1000 such coffeehouses in the next 5 years.⁴³ This is not to say nothing has changed in modern coffeehouses; women are now a principal part of their clientele. A few modern amenities, such as flat screen televisions and free wifi have also altered this traditional setting.

The question remains whether storytellers will accompany the return of coffeehouses. Mahalle Kahvesi has already integrated some Ottoman entertainment classics within its locus, such as *ney* and *ud* recitals, as well as the shadow theatre. Mr Taluy, the manager of Mahalle Kahvesi in Kuzguncuk, wants a storyteller to entertain during the long nights of Ramadan. He has told me he is looking for a volunteer. Perhaps it is possible to create the old storyteller anew, just as it has been possible to resurrect the traditional coffeehouse. If Mr Taluy can find a new meddah for his premises, he will prove the connection between the coffeehouse and the storyteller necessary. Our spaces may indeed determine the stories we tell.⁴⁴

⁴² Gökem Çoksezen, “Kuzguncuk’ta Modern Bir İstanbul Kahvehanesi,” *Vatan Gazetesi*, January 1, 2011, accessed February 3, 2012, <http://bizimkahve.gazetevatan.com/haberdetay.asp?hkat=1&hid=16523&yaz=G%FCncel>

⁴³ “Kuzguncuk’ta Modern Mahalle Kahvesi,” *Üsküdar Haber Sitesi*, December 12, 2010, accessed February 3, 2012, <http://www.uskudar34.com/haber/3304-yasam-kuzguncuk-ta-modern-mahalle-kahvesi-.html>

⁴⁴ Mahalle Kahvesi was closed down by the time this PhD thesis came to completion.

2. Remembering the Young Ottomans: A Case Study in Non-Western Modernism

The Young Ottomans were a 19th century secret society made up of Istanbulite intellectuals who were dissatisfied with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The group was established in the summer of 1865, during a picnic in the forest of Belgrade in North West Istanbul. The activists united around two liberal premises: a belief in the modernization of the Ottoman Empire whilst preserving its Islamic principles, and the wish to initiate a constitutional parliament.¹ These goals made them oppose the ruling Sultan Abdülaziz in favour of his nephew Crown Prince Murat V.

Internal conflicts within the empire, and Young Ottoman campaigns led to the disarray of 1876, a time that went down in Ottoman history as “the year of the three Sultans.” Several unexpected events took the imperial city by storm during this period. Sultan Abdülaziz was dethroned, and soon thereafter died. Sources still don’t agree on whether he was murdered or committed suicide. Sultan Abdülaziz’s nephew Crown Prince Murat rose to the throne, only to be imprisoned 96 days later due to alleged madness. The first constitution of the empire was penned in accordance to Young Ottoman wishes, but composed under an unexpected ruler, Sultan Abdül Hamid II.

In this chapter I will analyse the opposition to Sultan Abdülaziz, and the events of 1876 through a discussion of 19th century Ottoman politics. My interest lies in the Young Ottoman proposal for a non-Western modernity in particular. From their initiation in 1865, to their disassembling in 1876, the secret society created a unique synthesis between

¹ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 10-11.

Ottoman traditions and reform movements that has been largely forgotten, but deserves scrutiny due to its originality.

19th Century Islamic Modernism

Ottomans did not see European modernity as an entirely positive development. While presenting possibilities of industrialization and technological advancement, modernity arrived in Ottoman lands alongside its darker counterparts: imperialism and orientalism.² Orientalist claims regarding the Ottoman Empire ranged from the stupidity of its peoples to their inability to self-govern. Eastern peoples were at times admired and at times shunned for their assumed over-sexualization, whilst their morality was considered both primitive and flawed.³ Imperialism, on the other hand, began to threaten the Ottoman Empire from the outside through Russia and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and from within its borders through European intervention in its internal affairs.

The 1860's saw the emergence and popular reception of Islamic modernism as an alternative to Western models of modernity and an antidote to imperialism and orientalism. It took different shapes and forms, becoming an influential ideology in the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, Crimea and South East Asia.⁴ The Young Ottomans were the main proponents of the movement in Istanbul.

The secretive society did not consider religion and modernity to be contradictory. In fact, they argued that Islam had predated the principles of modernity by several centuries,

² C. A. Bayly and Leila Fawaz, "Introduction: The Connected World of Empires," in *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon: New York, 1978), 8, 31-32, 38, 49, 66-71.

⁴ For an Arabic counterpart of Islamic Modernism see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

and supported this thesis with references to Holy Scripture and European classics in the same breath. Any tension between creed and modern values was a historical accident according to the group, and was based on misinterpretations of core religious texts. Their goal was to correct these misunderstandings through forming a uniquely Ottoman modernism based on Islamic values.⁵

It is necessary to study Ottoman conceptions of European modernity before entering a discussion on what such a local modernity could entail, but Ottoman views of Western movements morphed in time. In the 15th century, Ottomans understood modernity to be a set of tools that could be borrowed and used according to their needs. They adopted European technology in such fields as mining, cartography and firearms, while Ottoman scholars learned about Renaissance astronomy and medicine from the Jewish intellectuals who escaped the Spanish inquisition and found refuge in Ottoman lands. Despite these borrowings, Ottomans considered themselves superior to Europe when it came to culture, spirituality and military finesse. They also felt sufficient regarding education and economy, and limited adoptions in these fields.⁶ It is only in late 17th century that European advancements in technology began to signal signs of decline for the Ottomans, the first appearance of which occurred in the field of warfare. After the treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, and as a result of unprecedented territorial losses, Ottomans began to believe in the supremacy of European military techniques. The Industrial Revolution followed suit, and led Muslim travellers to marvel at the use of gas lamps in European streets. Soon economic prosperity was judged a token of Western modernism too. Cumulative European advancements led to the scientific revolution. In time Islamic intellectuals extended their admiration from military techniques to political systems and began to deem European

⁵ Charles Kurzman, "Introduction: The Modernist Islamic Movement," in *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

⁶ Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, "Science in the Ottoman Empire," in *Science, Technology and Learning in the Ottoman Empire: Western Influence, Local Institutions and the Transfer of Knowledge* (Vt: Variorum, 2004), 214.

constitutional reforms guarantors of safety and prosperity.⁷ By the 19th century modernity had transformed from a set of tools into a value system in the Ottoman worldview.

Visible progress in European nations and decline in the Ottoman Empire culminated in the declaration of the Gülhane edict in 1839 which marked the beginning of the Tanzimat era, or the epoch of re-orderings. These re-orderings aimed at reforming the Empire along Western lines. The Gülhane edict promised the eradication of tax farming, changes in conscription laws which extended conscription in the Ottoman army to non-Muslims, and equal rights to all citizens regardless of religion or race. The same principles were emphasized and expanded in the Imperial Reform edict of 1856. While earlier efforts at progress had looked back to the golden age of the empire as template, the reformers of the 19th century increasingly looked to the West for their inspiration.⁸

Young Ottomans criticized the Tanzimat reforms initiated by the Porte⁹ because they believed these efforts had a limited scope. They wanted to implement changes in even a wider range of areas including constitutionalism, nationalism, freedom of religious interpretation, scientific investigation, modern education and women's rights.¹⁰ The group wanted to achieve these goals in an Islamic spirit and criticized the Tanzimat reforms on account of their secularism. The Young Ottomans opposed acclimatizing to a purely Western, secular modernity.

While Young Ottomans had their disagreements on points of ideology and methodology, they were united on several principles that they believed would remedy the decline of the Empire. They wanted to implement constitutional machinery and aimed at establishing an Ottoman parliament. Their goal was an Ottoman variant of nationalism, which would unite the several different ethnicities living in the empire around shared

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (New York: Gordian Press, 1973), 6.

⁹ The term comes from the French *la sublime porte*, the exalted gate, and was commonly used to refer to the Ottoman court in Istanbul.

¹⁰ Kurzman, "The Modernist Islamic Movement," 4.

sentiments, and hence curb their wish for independence. Ottoman modernity would be local, rather than an imitation of a Western model, and the Young Ottomans would use literature as a tool for generating such societal change.

On March 8th 1867, Young Ottomans printed 50.000 copies of a letter addressed to Sultan Abdülaziz. The letter in question was written by Mustafa Fazıl Paşa; a contender to the Egyptian throne who had been exiled to Paris.¹¹ In his letter Mustafa Fazıl Paşa blamed the absence of a constitution for the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and outlined a draft proposal in which the Sultan was to be the leader of parliament. The letter landed in the hands of Ottoman intelligentsia, although it remains a mystery whether it ever reached Sultan Abdülaziz, and stirred fervent discussions in Istanbul on accounts of being the first well-outlined alternative to the autocratic rule of the Porte.¹²

While Young Ottomans had shared the goal of charting a constitution and the creation of a parliament since their early beginnings in 1865, the Sublime Porte did not share in these ideals. Unlike some European countries, citizens of the Ottoman Empire were made up of many different ethnicities, languages and religions and this heterogeneity led the Sublime Porte to oppose any proposals of parliamentary representation. Tanzimat reformers believed giving everyone a voice would lead to disagreements, and as a result, to the demise of a centralized empire.

It is important to note that the Young Ottoman opposition to the Sublime Porte's policies did not equal an opposition to the Ottoman monarchy per se. The Young Ottomans aimed at combining constitutional representation with the reign of a just and able Sultan.¹³ As Ali Suavi points out in the 28th issue of the Young Ottoman publication *Muhbir*:

¹¹ Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 28-31.

¹² Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 38-39.

¹³ It is interesting to compare Suavi's ideas to European political philosophy regarding sovereigns. Hobbes (1588-1679) famously suggested that the life of man was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." He claimed the only way to ease it was by agreeing to basic freedoms and equality, and then transferring absolute power to a monarch. In his opinion people had no right to rebel against a King. John Locke (1632-

“Europeans desire that...justice come from the bottom up. This is why debates take place in assemblies and finally trickle down to the rabble and cause the troubles that we all see. Too bad!

On the contrary, justice must come from the top down. Because ‘justice’ is like a huge rock that can fall from above with the touch of a single person. Throwing it up from the bottom requires very many forces. Even Homer, who lived nearly three thousand years ago, has been translated by Şehristânî as saying ‘there is no good in an abundance of leaders’. In simple Turkish this means ‘wherever there is multiplicity there is shittiness’ [*nerede çokluk, orada bokluk*]. Justice comes from the top down when a competent official is in charge. Because when an official is competent, he also places himself under the law and protects it. It is with this protection that equality and freedom – that is, justice – are made permanent.”¹⁴

Young Ottoman Thought

Ottomanism became a state policy in the 19th century with the promulgation of the *Hatt-ı Şerif* of Gülhane in 1839. The most important aspect of the charter was that it granted citizens of all religions equality before the law. The millet system through which Ottomans

1704) believed the social contract was between the people and the King, giving citizens more authority than allowed for in the Hobbesian system. Montesquieu (1689-1755) introduced the principle of the separation of powers and deemed parliamentary democracy necessary because the sovereign could not be trusted fully. In the Ottoman case, the argument for a parliament starts with a trustworthy, rather than an untrusted, sovereign. Islamic tradition sees prophet Muhammad as both a spiritual and a political leader, whose political functions were taken over by the Caliph. Once the caliphate passed on to the Ottoman dynasty in the 16th century, the belief was that the Ottoman Sultan became the hand of God on earth. Consequently, the *raison d’être* for a parliamentary democracy amongst the Ottomans was different from that of their European contemporaries: whilst Europe saw the ruler as a possible threat and created its democratic institutions to curb his powers, the Ottoman world thought of a parliament purely as a representation of the will of the people which at the best of times would be guaranteed by an able Sultan. In this equation, a capable ruler was necessary for the functioning of democratic ideals.

¹⁴ Ali Suavi, “Serbestlik,” *Muhbir* 28 (4 March 1867), 2, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 71 and Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 380.

had been grouped into different, self sufficient religious communities had granted rights as well as concessions to non-Muslim citizens, but it had also emphasized their non-Muslim, hence separate status. As Davison points out, “regardless of religion or sect” was a phrase that was repeated innumerable times throughout the Tanzimat period as the Ottoman legislators began to break the barriers of the millet system.¹⁵ Tanzimat reformers hoped equal rights would strengthen the loyalty of Ottoman subjects, be they Muslim, Christian or Jew, and diminish separatist tendencies, resulting in the prosperity of the Ottoman Empire as a whole.¹⁶

While the Young Ottomans were proponents of Ottomanism too, and thus proponents of equality between all Ottoman citizens, they believed that the Tanzimat reforms privileged the non-Muslim millets over and above the Muslims.¹⁷ Despite the Tanzimat measures, nationalist sentiments were taking hold amongst the non-Muslim millets; Ottomanist policies were not eradicating the tensions within the empire. Meanwhile, Ottoman Turks lacked community organization. As Ali Suavi notes in *Le Mukhbir*:

Coming to the topic of equality under the law and in transactions, in this respect the Christians have not achieved equality with the Muslims but have greatly surpassed them. Because the Christians have their rich religious community [*millet*] merchants, and their community representatives, and their community assemblies under the Patriarch, and their protectors in Europe. For example if a Christian is oppressed by a local official [*kaymakam*], in the first hour he runs to the community merchant, the Patriarchate is immediately informed of the matter, and the Patriarch leans

¹⁵ For a thorough analysis of the millet system see the next article in this thesis.

¹⁶ Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 40.

¹⁷ Mardin, *Young Ottomans*, 37.

on the Ottoman government. Meanwhile the foreign consulates also get involved, and they finally get the local official dismissed.

Is there any place Muslims can have recourse to?¹⁸

The institution Muslim Ottomans placed themselves under was the state itself, but the state was no longer acting in accordance to Islamic principles. The Young Ottomans claimed that while non-Muslim millets were getting religious protection alongside civil rights, the Turks were deprived of both. The state was shifting towards secular governance, while there was no community assembly to defend them against violations.¹⁹ Hence, the modernism of the Young Ottomans differed from that of the Ottoman Porte in as far as it incorporated Islam within its notion of modernity, and in as far as it emphasized Turkishness within its notion of Ottomanism.

As a matter of fact, the notions of Turkishness, Ottomanism and Islam were used interchangeably amongst the Young Ottomans, which leads to difficulties in trying to decipher their exact version of Ottomanism. At times “Ottoman” referred to any Ottoman citizen regardless of his or her millet, at times it referred to Turks only, and at times to Muslims exclusively. The meaning of the statement was to be inferred from its context. Another reason for the confusion in terminology was the disagreements amongst the Young Ottomans themselves. In this vein Namık Kemal’s, Ali Suavi’s and Süleyman Paşa’s thoughts offer an interesting comparative study.

Namık Kemal was the first writer to have introduced patriotic terminology to the Turkish language. The concepts of “hürriyet” [freedom], “milliyet” [belonging to a single nation] and “vatan” [fatherland] were his bequests to Turkish, and constituted

¹⁸ Ali Suavi, “Müsavat,” *Le Mukhbir* 2 (7 September 1867), 3, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 75-76.

¹⁹ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, 216, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 31.

philosophical cornerstones in 19th Century Istanbul. Hürriyet, in Kemal's thought, had to do with safekeeping Ottoman sovereignty which was constantly questioned both from within and without the empire. Externally, by the West who tagged the Empire "the sick man of Europe" and internally, through the uprisings of its inhabitants. "Milliyet," which was a term derived from the millet system previously discussed, suggested different groups could belong to a single nation. According to Kemal the applications of the terms "Hürriyet," [sovereignty] "milliyet," [belonging to one single nation] and "vatan," [fatherland] would result in the notion of an Ottoman homeland [*osmanlı vatani*]. In its turn, a united homeland would result in an integrated defense against foreign interference, which would consequently heal the "sick man of Europe."²⁰ In sum, Namık Kemal's line of thought favours a cosmopolitan Ottomanism.²¹

In Ali Suavi's philosophy we can see a propensity towards a Muslim *ümme*, a worldwide Islamic community, rather than a multi-religious nation as proposed by Namık Kemal. Suavi analyses Europe as operating on the classification of race; "A French man cannot be a minister in the English government. Likewise, an Algerian Arab cannot obtain the privileges of a French man."²² He emphasizes two points; that the Ottoman focus on religion is better than the European focus on race, and that even when the Ottoman Empire focuses on religion as the primary identifier, faith does not interfere with Ottoman politics.²³ Suavi goes on to show how many non-Turks and non-Muslims have prospered in leading political positions within the Ottoman Empire.²⁴ This line of thought emphasizes a united Ottoman identity with an Islamic disposition:

²⁰ Cemil Koçak, "Namık Kemal'in Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi*, ed. Mehmet Ö. Alkan, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2011), 247.

²¹ Kemal's attempts at teaching Armenian actors proper Turkish enunciation, which will be discussed in the next chapter, might put his Ottomanism into doubt or at least add a proto-Turkish tint to it.

²² Ali Suavi, "[untitled article]," *Le Mukhbir* 38 (12 June 1868), 2, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 85.

²³ Ibid., 85-87.

²⁴ Ibid., 87.

Let me say again that language is not the language of the Arabs, it is the language of Islam. Those sciences are not the sciences of the Arabs, they are the sciences of Islam. Brother, arguments like ‘that is Arabic, this is Turkish, and this is Ottoman,’ have been brought up by those who wish to cause Islam to fall into nationalism and racism.²⁵

Süleyman Paşa’s views on Ottomanism are different than both Kemal’s and Suavi’s and can be classified as an early form of proto-Turkism. Turkism was the latest nationalist ideology to develop in the Ottoman Empire and began gaining strength at the beginning of the 20th century through the influence of Turks living in the diaspora.²⁶ Süleyman Paşa’s thoughts exemplify the initial intellectual steps of this movement from within Istanbul. His academic writings are a showcase of patriotic and nationalist thought. His *Mebani ul-inqa* (Foundations of Composition, 1872) was the first textbook to date that scrutinized Turkish literary genres. His *Tarih-i A’lem* (History of the World, 1874) was the first modern history book written by a Turk, about Turkish history and through utilizing original sources. Süleyman Paşa wrote it as a text book to be taught at the Military academy, and with the hope that it would instil a sense of pride and self-knowledge in its Turkish readers. He notes in its introduction: “All history books written in Europe are full of calumnies of either our religion or our nationality, and are not fit to be translated or to be studied in our schools.” A third textbook was on Turkish, rather than Ottoman, grammar.²⁷ In a letter he wrote to Recaizade Ekrem Bey, a famous Turkish author, Süleyman Paşa explains:

²⁵Ali Suavi, “Lisan ve Hatt-ı Türkî,” *Ulum* 3 (30 August 1869): 126, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 96.

²⁶A fuller discussion of Turkism falls outside the scope of this paper. For information on the history of Turkism in the Ottoman Empire see Yelda Demirağ, “Pan-Ideologies in the Ottoman Empire Against the West: From Pan-Ottomanism to Pan-Turkism,” *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, vol. 36 (2005): 150.

²⁷The language used in the Ottoman Empire was loosely termed the Ottoman language (*Lisân-ı Osmânî*). It was written in the Arabic alphabet, its content was largely Turkish with a strong influence from the grammar and vocabulary of Persian and Arabic primarily, and the local languages of the empire, such as Greek and Armenian, secondarily. Ottoman went through many transformations within the 600 years of the Empire. These periods can broadly be marked as the Old Ottoman Turkish (from the 13th until the 16th century), the Middle Ottoman Turkish (from the 16th until the 19th century) and lastly, the New Ottoman Turkish (from the

It is incorrect to speak of Ottoman literature, just as it is wrong to call our language the Ottoman language and our nation the Ottoman nation. The term Ottoman is only the name of our state, while the name of our nation is Turk. Consequently, our language is the Turkish language and our literature is Turkish literature.²⁸

As Johnson points out, in practice Ottomanism, Islamism, and the early manifestations of Turkism co-existed and even intermingled in the same individual until the end of the Ottoman Empire.²⁹

Despite their differences of opinion, all Young Ottomans felt Tanzimat had weakened the moral and ideological base of the Ottoman society, and failed to provide a suitable substitute in its place. They proposed a new emphasis on religion to remedy the problem, and became the first Muslim intellectuals to attempt harmonizing Western political institutions with Islam.³⁰ In its original form, the Islamic community had been an embryonic democracy. If it was not so today, this was due to misapplications of Islamic laws and principles.³¹

Within this scheme, Ali Suavi opposed the secularism of the Ottoman Porte. His views were not based on a critique of the principle itself, but on a critique of Christianity:

19th century until 1928). With the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923 and the language reforms initiated by Mustafa Kemal in 1928, the language went through a radical transformation: it would no longer be written in the Arabic alphabet but in the Latin, and it would be “purified” of its Arabic and Persian vocabulary. Concurrently, it would no longer be called Ottoman Turkish but simply Turkish. A language committee was established to adapt the Latin script to the phonetic demands of Turkish, resulting in a new alphabet of 29 letters. The script was founded by an Armenian, Hagop Martayan (1895-1979). Martayan was offered a new surname – Dilaçar – by Mustafa Kemal: a coined word meaning language opener. While spoken Ottoman Turkish and modern Turkish share many similarities, Turks have lost the ability to read Ottoman Turkish unless specifically trained. For further information on language use in the Ottoman Empire see Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 33-38.

²⁸ Robert Deveroux, “Süleyman Paşa’s *The Feeling of the Revolution*,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1979): 7-8.

²⁹ Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 35.

³⁰ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 131-132.

³¹ Erik-Jan Zürcher, *The Ottoman Empire 1850-1922 - Unavoidable Failure?*, 7.

<http://www.transanatolie.com/english/turkey/turks/ottomans/ejz31.pdf>

We have heard the claim that ‘if the holy law interferes in worldly matters there is no progress for the state.’ This statement is quite correct if applied to the Christian holy law and state, for even today in the Old and New Testaments which are found in Europe there are no regulations regarding transactions, but what is the purpose of saying this about the Islamic holy law?³²

Namık Kemal, on the other hand, formed a detailed theory of how Islam and democratic governance combined, leaving criticism of other religions out of this equation. For Kemal, good governance depended on Islamic law, and Islamic law was applicable only upon the formation of a government. He held the view, as per other Islamic political theorists, that humans were naturally inclined to hurt one another, and hence established associations for safety and protection. These assemblies then elected specialists among themselves to guarantee order. Once a government was formed in this manner, the best method for its application was Islamic law. Hence Kemal forwarded a secular explanation of the origins of society that asserted the supremacy of Islamic rule.³³

Following the formation of a government, there was another contract through which allegiance to the ruler was legalized. Kemal posited that this allegiance was functionalized through the *biat* system, which determined the legitimacy of the caliph, the chief Muslim ruler. The social contract was binding only insofar as the caliph enforced divine law. Upon failure of fulfilling this duty, the people could break the contract. Consequently, while opting for religious rule based on Islamic institutions, Kemal left the door open for a democratic people’s uprising, and in doing so again combined modern and Islamic

³² Ali Suavi, “En-Nazar fi’l-Mezalim,” *Le Mukhbir* 25 (29 February 1868), 2, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 83.

³³ *Ibid.*, 290-291.

principles.³⁴

According to Kemal, *meşveret* was another Islamic principle conducive to modernity. *Meşveret*, or *shura* in Arabic, was one of the four core organizational principles in Islam, the other three being justice, equality and human dignity. For Kemal, *meşveret* was a parallel concept to Western democracy and was based on three prior precepts: first, that all persons in any given society are equal in human and civil rights. Second, that public issues are best decided by majority consensus, and third, that justice, equality and human dignity are best administered through a *shura*, or consultative, government. The Qur'an itself offers two related yet different explanations of consultation. The first of these refers to Prophet Mohammed consulting his companions before making his own decisions, the other refers to a community of the faithful administering its own affairs through mutual consultation.³⁵ It is this second model Kemal put forward instead of Western democracy; he believed the most successful periods of the Ottoman Empire came about due to the actualization of the *meşveret* principle.

Kemal also stated that the Ottoman state had long utilized the principle of the separation of powers through the distinct roles the Sultan, the *ulema* [the scholars of religion], and the janissaries had within the operational structure of the Empire.³⁶

The Young Ottomans spread their ideology through literature. The written word was both a political and personal passion for the groups' founding members who had met at the translation bureau of the Sublime Porte. The agency had been founded in 1821 to translate government correspondence, and soon became an institution where foreign languages and cultures were scrutinized. The intellectuals at the bureau were aware of the most recent political developments in Europe through their interpretation work, and spent

³⁴ Ibid., 293-295.

³⁵ Sadek Jawad Suleiman, "The Shura Principle in Islam," accessed June 17, 2014, <http://www.alhewar.com/SadekShura.htm>

³⁶ Cemil Koçak, "Namık Kemal'in Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası," 249.

time abroad either as students or in official capacity. The use of literature as a tool to reach, educate and indoctrinate the Ottoman populace must have seemed natural to them, and their methods proved successful due to the recent developments in Ottoman publishing.

Ottoman printing has a long history. The first printing house in Istanbul was a Hebrew press established by David and Samuel Nahmias brothers who had fled the Spanish Inquisition and found refuge in Istanbul. Their first publication, a treatise on the code of law by Rabbi Jacop ben Asher, came out in 1493. The first Armenian press followed the Hebrew and was established by Abgar Dpir Tokhatetsi in 1567, while Nicomedos Metaxas laid the foundations of the first Greek press in 1627. The Turkish press followed last and was set up by Ibrahim Müteferrika in 1729.³⁷ Despite this long record, letters did not play an important role in the dissemination of modern ideas until 1835 when new educational institutions led to a rise in literacy levels.

Early 19th Century saw the establishment of the imperial medical school, which was preceded by the imperial engineering school established at the end of the 18th century, and the establishment of the *Darülfünûn*; a higher education institution that was separate from the traditional Ottoman madrasas and modeled after the European University instead.³⁸ The Tanzimat reforms, coupled by these institutional changes, led to an increased number of publications in the fields of medicine, technology and scientific advances as well as political propaganda.

From 1835 onwards, innumerable public and private Ottoman presses and publishing houses were initiated in the empire, producing almost 3000 books during the next half-century. Stanford and Ezel Shaw note some of these publications were based on religious themes (390 books, or 13.45 percent), others were poetry collections (356 books, or 12.27

³⁷ Nil Palabıyık, "The Apparition of the Printed Word in the Ottoman Capital: Book Production and Circulation in Constantinople 1453-1729," (World History Workshop, University of Cambridge, January 24, 2013), 2-4.

³⁸ Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, "Science in the Ottoman Empire," 220.

percent), works on language (255 books, or 8.79 percent), and history (184 books, or 6.34 percent). Original and translated novels, and short stories were 175 in number (6.03 percent). There were 135 government publications (4.65 percent), 92 plays (3.17 percent), 77 books on science (2.65 percent), 76 on mathematics (2.62 percent), and 23 on economics and finance (0.79 percent). In sum, the vehicle of the printed press was present for those wishing to use it and the Young Ottomans were keen.³⁹

The Young Ottomans produced several publications in which they discussed models of local modernism, and criticized the policies of the Porte. The first of these publications was the *Tasvir-i Efkar*, which was edited by Namık Kemal. It was followed by the *Muhbir*, which was edited by Ali Suavi. In an unpublished letter Namık Kemal wrote in 1867, he emphasized that literature was the primary tool for Ottoman progress and that the Young Ottomans were currently in charge of publishing several periodicals.⁴⁰ Ali Suavi believed press was the vehicle through which the plight of the people was brought to light, and that nothing could remain secret in countries with a wide variety of newspapers. Suavi called on fellow journalists to follow his lead and simplify their language so as to reach more readers: “Let’s write the newspapers in Turkish, which is the language of the common people in Istanbul.”⁴¹

The simplification of the Ottoman language was a recurrent theme for Young Ottomans and surfaced in the field of theatre, as well as in journalism. Young Ottomans formed a part of the Literary Committee at Armenian director Güllü Agop’s Gedikpaşa Theatre where they launched a programme for proper enunciation aimed at its actors.⁴² Alongside this initiative, the group wrote and produced original plays in modern Turkish. Süleyman Paşa’s monographs in the field have already been mentioned. Through their

³⁹ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 128.

⁴⁰ Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, 25, 37.

⁴¹ Ali Suavi, “Gazete,” *Muhbir* 28 (4 March 1867), 1-2, quoted in Aaron S. Johnson, *A Revolutionary Young Ottoman: Ali Suavi (1839-1878)* (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2012), 71.

⁴² The literary committee, Agop and his theatre will be studied in detail in the upcoming chapter.

articles, plays and academic work, Young Ottomans deemed simple Turkish necessary for the transmission of political ideas.⁴³

Political Activism and the Events of 1876

While the Young Ottomans wanted a Sultan to lead the future Ottoman parliament, they did not think Sultan Abdülaziz was fit for the challenging task. The group believed the Sultan had lost his authority to the new class of bureaucrats who were headed by viziers Ali and Fuad Paşa. They also held Sultan Abdülaziz responsible for the dismemberment of Ottoman territories, which had gained pace through the establishment of independent states.

The Young Ottomans hoped Crown Prince Murat V, Sultan Abdülaziz's nephew, would replace his uncle and rise to the throne. Murat V was considered an open minded and democratic crown prince, and for these reasons the Young Ottomans considered him the best candidate to form a constitution and parliament. If Crown Prince Murat V became the next Ottoman Sultan, all the goals of the secret society would be accomplished: the modernization movement in the empire would be accelerated, a constitution and eventual parliament would be established, and capable viziers would replace Ali and Fuad Paşa.

⁴³ The simplification of Turkish was not solely a Young Ottoman project. As Stanford and Ezel Shaw point out, the Porte shared the same goal and believed simplification of Ottoman would encourage literacy, enable wider comprehension of written culture as well as the spread of new ideas. Starting from 1845, the advisory committee of the Porte suggested simplifying Ottoman by getting rid of its Arabic and Persian vocabulary. Turkish counterparts would then replace these discarded words. In 1855 the Porte decreed that official documents be written in simpler Ottoman Turkish, and this shift in language was utilized in the Reform Decree of 1856. Along with a Turkification of vocabulary, the simplification of Ottoman involved attempts at developing a system of orthography and spelling to render the Arabic script more readable, as well as the development of standard spellings. For further information see Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume 2, Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 129-130.

These steps did not unfold according to Young Ottoman plans, but constituted the group's main pillars of activism from 1865 to 1876.

Even though they were a remarkable faction, the Young Ottomans were not the only ones that opposed Sultan Abdülaziz' reign. There were two other groupings that wanted the deposition of the Sultan: The Porte, or the Ottoman court in Istanbul, and the *Softa*, or conservative students and scholars of religion.

The contentions that gave rise to the opposition within the Porte were several. The Tanzimat reforms had not been successful in uniting Ottomans, financial problems had led to draught and hunger in the countryside and a loss of jobs in bigger cities. Russia and Austria were still threats, and the Balkan subjects were in disquiet. Hüseyin Avni Paşa, the minister of war, took the lead in promoting the overthrow of Sultan Abdülaziz within the government body and suggested that the Sultan be replaced by Crown Prince Murat V. Fearing the consequences of Hüseyin Avni Paşa's subsequent power, grand vizier Midhat Paşa tried to convince the Sultan to form a constitution but failed.⁴⁴

Hüseyin Avni Paşa's antagonism to Sultan Abdülaziz rose from personal ambition, rather than political idealism. There are three possible theories that go to explain the disparity between the two men. The first suggests that Sultan Abdülaziz and Hüseyin Avni Paşa disliked each other due to conflicting romantic interests.⁴⁵ The second posits Hüseyin Avni Paşa's vengeance was due to Sultan Abdülaziz having fired and exiled him on a previous occasion.⁴⁶ A third theory, forwarded by Sultan Abdül Hamid II in his subsequent memoirs, claims Hüseyin Avni Paşa worked for the English government and that both Sultan Abdülaziz's death and Sultan Murat V's madness were planned and carried out

⁴⁴ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 156, 163.

⁴⁵ Meltem Valandova, *Hüseyin Avni Paşa* (Masters thesis, Ankara University, 2007), 17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

consciously.⁴⁷ Whichever theory may be true, sources agree Hüseyin Avni Paşa was more interested in his own success than in a representational government.

The Softa opposed Sultan Abdülaziz for very different reasons. While the Young Ottomans focused on unifying Islam with modernity, the Softa were focused on purifying traditional Islam. The conservatives, led by the religious scholars, were unhappy with the secular turn the Empire had taken through the Tanzimat reforms in the fields of finance, law, and education. They believed the equal rights given to the non-Muslim millets, and the influence foreign states exercised within the empire were to blame for Ottoman decline. These sentiments, strengthened by the partially similar views of the Young Ottomans, led to a wave of Islamic revivalism in the capital.⁴⁸

Islamic revivalism became a popular movement in the Istanbul of the 1870's, particularly because it coincided with the ill treatment of Muslims in neighbouring regions. Russians persecuted the Turks in Central Asia; Muslims were killed in Taskent, Samarkand, Buhara and Hiva. Chinese Muslims were revolting in the province of Yunnan. Bosnian and Bulgarian Muslim villagers were massacred as independent nation states were formed in former Ottoman territories. Cemaleddin al-Afgani, who was a philosopher on the Council of Education in Istanbul, began a series of public lectures in popular mosques, and at the newly opened university. Al-Afgani's ideas centered on "using the artifacts of the West to combat the West, and uniting the Muslims of the world against Europe and its supporters." Al-Afgani's popularity had an impact on state policies.⁴⁹ In 1874 the government restricted missionary activities by banning the sale of Christian scriptures in Ottoman Turkish. New regulations made the conversion of Muslims into Christianity illegal. The Ministry of Education began to monitor the curriculum of foreign schools that

⁴⁷ Ismet Bozdağ, *Sultan Abdulhamid'in Hatıra Defteri* (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2000), 56.

⁴⁸ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 157-158.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

had been independent hitherto, and forbid them from advocating Christian superiority.⁵⁰ But these restrictions did not go far enough in satisfying the conservative segment of the population. On May 8, 1876, religious students joined the growing opposition to the rule of Sultan Abdülaziz and denounced his government for two failures: nonintervention in the face of large-scale massacres of Muslims, and European interference within the Ottoman state.⁵¹

While several groups wanted an end to Sultan Abdülaziz's reign, his dethronement was essentially the work of three men: Hüseyin Avni Paşa who was the Minister of War, Redif Paşa who was the President of the Military Council, and Süleyman Paşa, director of the military academy and schools.⁵²

Süleyman Paşa knew Hüseyin Avni Paşa from the island of Crete where he worked as his subordinate from 1866-1868. He was later introduced to Redif Paşa during his service in Yemen.⁵³ He returned to Istanbul in 1869, where one of his neighbours, Sami Paşa, hosted regular intellectual gatherings. Süleyman Paşa began frequenting this salon and met the Young Ottomans there. He soon became a member of the organization, as well as the head of one of its secret cells.⁵⁴

As with other Young Ottomans, Süleyman Paşa was against the rule of Sultan Abdülaziz. Firstly, he found the Sultan ignorant, and condemned him on accounts of employing like-minded men in the Porte who did not know "arithmetic, zoology, geography, botany or geology." Secondly, Süleyman Paşa believed Sultan Abdülaziz was corrupt, and that the Porte encouraged nepotism. Thirdly, in Süleyman Paşa's opinion, anyone who opposed Sultan Abdülaziz's regime was accused of bigotry indiscriminately,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 162-163.

⁵² Süleyman Paşa also wrote an autobiographical account of the conspiracy to which the following section will refer: Robert Deveroux, "Süleyman Paşa's *The Feeling of the Revolution*," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1979): 3-35.

⁵³ Ibid., 3-6.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

and this weakened the Islamic prestige of the empire on the world stage. Lastly, he was convinced ministers were serving the interests of foreign powers rather than local needs.⁵⁵

Süleyman Paşa notes that the Minister of War, Hüseyin Avni Paşa, approached the President of the Military Council, Marshal Redif Paşa, about what could be done to save the empire. Redif Paşa in his turn approached Süleyman Paşa who was head of the military schools. Süleyman Paşa pointed out that if the war minister so desired, the issue could be solved with one or two battalions.

What can be ascertained from Süleyman Paşa's autobiographical account, *Feeling of the Revolution*, is that the military take over was his idea, and that he considered himself a member of the clandestine Young Ottomans. But even though Süleyman Paşa discusses participating in their salons, he does not mention discussing the take over with his fellow intellectuals. There are three possible reasons for this. It could be that Süleyman Paşa wanted to protect the secrecy of the Young Ottomans and the identity of its members, and hence chose to exclude them from his account. Or it could be that Süleyman Paşa wanted to emphasize his own role in the undertaking, and in doing so he pushed the Young Ottomans to the background. Equally plausible is the possibility that Süleyman Paşa never discussed his plans with the Young Ottomans, and that he operated individually without their consent.

Süleyman Paşa did discuss the dethronement with other military figures however. Both minister of marine Kayserili Ahmet Paşa, and Midhat Paşa agreed to participate in the take over. Süleyman Paşa's next step was to convince the Sheikh ul-Islam, the highest ranking *ulema*, and the grand vizier. Once he completed this mission, he contacted Major Izzet Efendi. Süleyman Paşa had control over three hundred armed students at the military

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

schools, but more soldiers were needed for a deposition and Major Izzet Efendi of the 5th imperial guard battalion would provide the necessary support.⁵⁶

Despite a change in the date of the overthrow, and several problems including Crown Prince Murat's refusal to exit the palaces out of fear, the deposition was carried out. Süleyman Paşa's account shows the soldiers involved in the take over were not aware of their instrumentality in Sultan Abdülaziz's dethronement. They had simply obeyed the orders of their superiors, and many were upset when they discovered the consequence of their actions.⁵⁷

Sultan Murat V's reign caused initial disappointment amongst the Young Ottomans since he did not announce a constitution. Nonetheless, the new Sultan mentioned the will of the people in his public speeches, which the Young Ottomans interpreted as reference to the forthcoming parliament. He also noted that religious law, *şeriat*, would be protected, and that all Ottoman subjects would be free and equal before the law regardless of religion or race, resulting in the unity of the fatherland. These promises satisfied Young Ottoman demands: constitutionalism, Islamic modernism, and Namık Kemal's cosmopolitan Ottomanism.⁵⁸

While Sultan Murat V's political statements seemed apt, his psychological state was not stable. He did not want to be left alone, and seemed distressed by the way he had ascended to the throne. His coalition of ministers disagreed about the plans for a constitution and the parliament that would follow from it. While Midhat Paşa was a keen constitutionalist, the grand vizier, and Hüseyin Avni Paşa rejected both a constitution and a parliament, putting the new Sultan under further strain.⁵⁹

In the interim, the former Sultan Abdülaziz had been moved to the Topkapı Palace

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4

⁵⁸ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 126.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

that was no longer in use, and was confined to the same room in which his uncle had committed suicide. His request for relocation was delivered to Sultan Murat V with a two-week delay. It is claimed that Hüseyin Avni Paşa was to blame for the hold back. Eventually, Abdülaziz's wish to move to the Beylerbeyi Palace, which the former Sultan had designed himself, was denied. He was placed in the Feriye Palace instead, next to the army barracks and close to the Dolma Bahçe palace where Sultan Murat V lived and ruled. It is noted that the former Sultan Abdülaziz was forbidden to walk by the Bosphorus during his imprisonment in the Feriye, and was referred to with the simple title of "Efendi". There are also photographs of him alongside low ranking soldiers, all of which suggest he was not treated with the traditional respect due a former Sultan.⁶⁰

On Sunday, June 4, 1876, Abdülaziz was found dead on the floor of his Chambers in the Feriye Palace, with his veins cut and one artery slashed. Ottoman sources disagree on whether he committed suicide or was murdered; the dispute has never been resolved. In either case, Sultan Murat V's mental health would take a turn for the worse after the event.

A Viennese doctor was appointed to diagnose the distressed Sultan Murat V; the prognosis was melancholy. The Sultan was prescribed rest and leech therapy. But Murat V's active political involvement was necessary in a period of uprisings and decline. The Porte decided Sultan Murat V's brother, Crown Prince Abdul Hamid, who had not previously been favored, should now replace him as ruler. Murat V was imprisoned at the Çırağan Palace on the 31st of August, just 96 days after his rise to the throne. He lived at the Çırağan, next to the Feriye where his uncle had died, for the rest of his life. There were several attempts to rescue the Sultan and reinstate him to the throne but they all failed. Sultan Abdul Hamid II ruled the Ottoman Empire for the next 33 years. In his first year in power, in 1876, he signed the first Constitution of the Ottoman Empire, only to dissolve it

⁶⁰ Ismail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Kronolojisi*, vol.4 (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1972), 267 and Abdullah Kılıç, "İşte Abdülaziz'in Kanlı Gömleği," *Zaman Gündem Online*, February 16, 2007, accessed December 10, 2010, http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_iste-abdulazizin-kanli-gomlegi_500950.html

in 1878.

The Young Ottoman movement never came to an official end but its members dissipated following the failure of their agenda.

After the collapse of the Young Ottomans, a new political movement, the Young Turks, sprang up amongst the intelligentsia. On the surface, Young Turks were the continuation of their predecessors; they aimed at bringing the short-lived constitutional era back, they wanted to continue the modernization project, and they started out as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. But two important traits distinguished them from the Young Ottomans. Young Turks were positivists, and they would eventually embrace an exclusive Turkish nationalism.

The Young Turks believed religion must be utilized as stepping-stone to a scientific understanding of the world. This somewhat confusing stance is perhaps made clearer by the famous Young Turk edict: “Science is the religion of the elite, whereas religion is the science of the masses”. The group posited that the only way to modernize the Ottomans was through teaching them a positivism cloaked in Islam. Once the masses were made sufficiently open minded through these teachings, religion would be replaced by proper science.⁶¹ While the Young Ottomans believed in the union of modernity and Islam, the Young Turks only feigned belief so as to replace religion with positivism.

The second difference between the Young Ottomans and Young Turks regarded their identity politics. The Young Turks began as a cosmopolitan group but morphed into a society of Turkish nationalists. They gradually came to believe Ottoman patriotism could not succeed in uniting the heterogeneous ethnic mix of the Ottoman Empire. The group did not pursue different angles of Ottomanism, but chose to focus on Turkish identity exclusively, eventually replacing all mention of an Ottoman nation with a purely Turkish

⁶¹ Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 201-203.

one. This change led many non-Turks to leave the group. While it had not been clear what the Young Ottomans had meant by “Ottomanism” – at times coming close to proto-Turkism, and at other times to pan-Islamism – the nationalism of the Young Turks was an ethnocentric ideology devoid of diversity.

The Young Turks were successful in establishing the second constitutional era in 1908, and carried out the last coup d'état of the Ottoman Empire in 1913. Despite initial success, their accomplishments were short lived as the Ottoman Empire entered World War I on the side of Germany in 1914. Many important Ottoman army generals of the time were Young Turks who played a crucial role in initiating the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The Ottoman Empire lost the World War in 1918. The last Ottoman Sultan, Vahdettin, transferred his powers to the British, but not without inviting the leader of the resistance, Mustafa Kemal, to his premises for encouragement in his fight for independence.

Mustafa Kemal fought a winning battle. By 1923 the foreign forces were expelled from Asia Minor along with the Greeks who had collaborated with the British in occupying Western Anatolia. The new Turkish Republic was established, and Mustafa Kemal became its first president.

Mustafa Kemal's rule equated modernity with a purely Western model, and in this sense owes more to the Young Turk heritage than it does to the Young Ottoman. Under Kemal's auspices, the Ottoman dress code changed and the Latin alphabet was replaced the Arabic. Turkish became simplified beyond recognition as the older generation lost their reading ability overnight. The caliphate, which had been the symbol of Islam for Muslims all around the world, was abolished in 1924. Many Sufi lodges were closed in an attempt to control and subdue religion. In short: a secular Westernization stripped off its local flavours replaced the Young Ottoman goals of Islamic modernity.

Ethnic nationalism and assimilation policies, which had been foreign to Ottoman governance until the establishment of the Young Turks, became central tenets in the

Turkish Republic. Freed from the complexities of cosmopolitanism, modern Turkey deemed anyone who resided within its borders a Turk. It did not matter whether these citizens were Kurdish or Armenian by origin. Schools commenced the day with an anthem that begins: “I am a Turk, I am correct, I am hard working”. Mustafa Kemal’s saying “Happy is the one who can say I am a Turk” crowned state institutions. Modern Turkey abandoned the multinational politics of the Ottoman past, and focused instead on creating an umbrella Turkish identity that included other ethnicities within it by diluting them. In the Turkish Republic a synthesis of the West and the East like the one the Young Ottomans had proposed, was no longer in the cards.

Despite their theoretical and political shortcomings, the Young Ottomans illustrated a sincere attempt at a local, non-Western modernization. Would the Turkish Republic be different had it inherited their legacy instead of the Young Turks’? Two possibilities come to mind. The extremisms of both secularism and Islamism, which direct Turkey even in contemporary times, might have been prevented. Secondly, the multicultural Empire might have transitioned into a democratic, multicultural state. Acknowledgement of the different cultures that made up the Turkish Republic might have bypassed the dangers of ethnic nationalism that is now directed towards the minorities and the Kurds. For these missed opportunities alone, the Young Ottomans must be remembered and studied further.

3. The Games We Play in Istanbul: Armenians and Turks on the Ottoman Stage

The earliest Turkish nationalist play to appear on the Ottoman stage was produced by an Armenian theatre director named Agop Vartovyan. *Vatan Yahut Silistre* was performed at the Gedikpaşa Theatre of Istanbul on the 1st of April 1873, and went down in history due to the political turmoil it caused on the night of its premiere. Contemporary Turkish readers of *Vatan Yahut Silistre* know it's playwright to be the prominent Turkish author and Young Ottoman activist, Namık Kemal, but most are not aware of its Armenian producer, and the play's intricate links to the Armenian enlightenment project.

Kemal's philosophy and Vartovyan's theatrical directorship showcase the fluid nature of 19th Century Ottoman identities betwixt imperial and nationalist ideologies. In what follows, I offer a historical analysis of theatre in Istanbul, as well as within the Armenian diaspora, in order to chart the political and cultural circumstances that enabled a Turkish playwright and an Armenian director to collaborate on the first nationalist play of the Ottoman Empire.

European Theatre in Istanbul and Amongst the Armenian Diaspora

European style theatrical productions were staged in the embassies of Istanbul as early as the 17th century, but this new form of entertainment did not reach Istanbulites until the

19th.¹ While embassy theatres appealed to the educated higher classes who spoke foreign languages and had a familiarity with high culture, palace theatres and the *Muzika-yi Humayun* (The Ottoman Palace Orchestra, established in 1859) geared towards the Sultan's court, foreign guests and army officials.² Greek and Armenian companies managed theatres catering to the general public. In fact, although Istanbul was the hub of Greek theatre from 1858 to 1922, it was the Armenian community that would popularize the form for Turkish-speaking Istanbulites.³ Sirapyan Hekimyan's theatre company *Arevalyan* and Istapan Eksiyan's *Vaspuragan* performed bilingually, in both Armenian and Turkish, from 1859 to 1867.⁴ The key development for Istanbulite theatre occurred in 1869 however, when Agop Vartovyan received a ten-year concession from the Ottoman Porte, which gave him sole rights to stage plays in the Turkish language alongside his native Armenian. It was through Vartovyan's monopoly that modern European theatre reached the masses for the first time.

An important question comes to mind from this brief history. Why did the Ottoman Porte want to popularize European theatre among a Turkish speaking audience? And for what reason would it choose to do so through an Armenian theatre company instead of a Greek one? Language use had a role to play in the Porte's decision. It seems Armenian actors were more willing, or more able to perform plays in Turkish when compared to their Greek counterparts. While Armenian companies performed bilingually, there are no records indicating that Greek companies performed in Turkish.

Nationalist developments of the time may also have influenced the Porte's choice. The Ottoman Empire, which had been applying the multi-religious *millet* system since its

¹ Istanbul's first theatre was built by the French ambassador, Marquis de Nointel, and catered mostly to the French speakers in the city.

² Fırat Güllü, *Vartovyan Kumpanyası ve Yeni Osmanlılar* (Istanbul: Bgst Yayınları, 2008), 22, 31.

³ Chrysothemis Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou, "Greek Theatre in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean from 1810 to 1961," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 25, no.2 (2007), 268-70.

⁴ Güllü, *Vartovyan Kumpanyası*, 23.

foundation in the 14th century, went through important political changes in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the Roman, to the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires, Istanbul had always been home to various peoples, among them: Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Romaniote, Ashkenazi, Sephardic Jews, and Levantines. These groups had lived alongside one another without giving up their local traditions or religious beliefs. Their harmonious co-existence was safeguarded through the *millet* system, a form of imperial indirect rule vis-à-vis confessional communities.⁵

From the 18th century onwards, political developments within and outside of the Ottoman Empire began to reflect negatively on the age-old arrangement. The idea of the nation-state eventually replaced the *millet* system, a process which gained strength after the French Revolution.⁶ The organization of Ottoman *millets* went through some substantial changes following the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832). One by one, different Balkan groups separated from the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchy in Istanbul under which they had previously been subsumed as Orthodox subjects, and went on to establish their own national churches. Soon afterwards, these groups became nationalist movements seeking independence from Ottoman rule. The *millet* system, traditionally based upon religious affiliation, became dysfunctional in the face of ethnicity-centred identity formations.

The Ottoman Empire's loss of land in the Balkans and the rising nationalism amongst Ottoman minorities had repercussions for the status of the Armenian community. Revolts amongst the other *millets* led the Ottoman Porte to identify the Armenians as *millet-i sadıka*, or the loyal *millet*, since the community was not aiming at independence at the time. The 18th and 19th centuries saw Armenians take over and excel at governmental

⁵ For more information on the *millet* system, please consult the first article in this thesis.

⁶ Dimitris Stamatopoulos, "From Millets to Minorities in the 19th-Century Ottoman Empire: An Ambiguous Modernization," in *Citizenships in Historical Perspective*, ed. Steven G. Ellis, Gudmundur Halfdonarsan and Katherine Isaacs (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006), 253.

posts typically occupied by Greeks, while Armenian money changers, or *sarraf*, became involved in tax sub-contracting in close collaboration with the Muslims. Following these executive and economic changes, the expansion of European theatre was also thrust into Armenian hands.⁷

Yet another reason behind the Porte's preference for Armenian managers might have been their success at utilizing theatre for political means. Armenian theatre companies had a strong activist history, while Greek theatre companies remained largely non-partisan. It may be that the Ottoman Porte and Turkish intellectuals had a political agenda in popularizing European theatre for a Turkish audience, and that they considered the Armenian community more apt in actualizing this vision. The *modus operandi* of the Armenian troupes, their political use of theatre and idealism is intricately linked to the Armenian enlightenment project, a proper understanding of which requires knowledge of Abbot Mechitar and his followers.

Mechitar of Sebaste was born Manouk Petrosian to an Apostolic Gregorian family in Sivas on the 7th of February 1676. He converted to Catholicism when he was fifteen, and became a priest at nineteen years of age. Mechitar studied at several monasteries in Anatolia, translated religious works from Greek into Armenian, and gained a loyal following amongst the Catholic Armenian community. He moved to Istanbul in 1700 with sixteen of his followers, and established an Armenian school there in 1701.⁸ Two years later, Mechitar and his congregation left Istanbul due to sectarian conflicts between Apostolic and Catholic Armenians; they were granted exile in Italy and settled in Morea, which was under Venetian rule at the time. When Morea came under Ottoman rule in 1715, they moved further north to Venice. Venice was not a strange city to Armenians,

⁷ Ibid., 255, 256.

⁸ Gürsoy Şahin, "Sivaslı Mıhitar (1676-1749), Mıhitaristler ve Ermeni Milliyetçiliğine Katkıları," in *Hoşgörüden Yol Ayrımına Ermeniler Cilt-2* (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayını, 2009), 244-6.

who had a strong historical and political presence in Italy dating back to the 6th century.⁹ The Serene Republic gifted the island of San Lazzaro to Mechitar and his followers. They took refuge there, and established a monastery that became a focal point of the Armenian Enlightenment, or the Armenian Renaissance.¹⁰

The Armenian Enlightenment sought religious, linguistic and cultural revival. Regarding the first, Mechitar began his theological work in Anatolia and resumed it in Istanbul and Venice, writing fourteen personal works and twenty-seven translations, as well as editions of religious books, hymns and spiritual praises. His first publications in Venice were the *Compendium of Theology of Blessed Albert the Great* in 1715, *The Spiritual Garden* in 1719, and the *Mechitar Book of Vices and Book of Virtues* in 1721. Mechitar also penned catechisms, which he first produced in classic and then in contemporary Armenian in 1725. In 1733 he published an illustrated version of the catechisms for children. He also prepared a new Armenian edition of the Bible, which went into print in 1735.¹¹

Mechitar's religious work went hand-in-hand with his endeavours in linguistic revival. He had witnessed the low literacy levels of his fellow Armenians during his travels in Anatolia, and was keen to raise their level of education. To this end, he and his fellow monks worked on making the Armenian language more accessible to the uneducated masses, and this project became one of their key contributions to the Armenian Enlightenment. Mechitar's efforts focused on both vernacular and classical Armenian; he understood the importance of the vernacular for the vast majority of Armenians who did not have the means to learn the ornate classical language, which had originated in the 5th

⁹ The Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation Online, "From 6th to 11th Century," *Armenians in Italy*, <http://mechitar.com/arminitaly/index.php?iM=83> (accessed 10 Dec. 2013).

¹⁰ Harry Jewel Sarkis, "The Armenian Renaissance, 1500-1863," *The Journal of Modern History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937), 443-446.

¹¹ The Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation Online, "Mekhitar's Publishing Activities in Venice," *History of the Congregation*, <http://mechitar.com/aboutus/index.php?iM=74> (accessed 10 Dec. 2013).

century. Hence Mechitar published the first manual of vernacular Armenian, based on the dialects used in Asia Minor. The subsequent publication of books in this dialect laid the foundations for 19th Century Armenian.¹² However, as a theologian Mechitar was also convinced of the importance of classical Armenian. Many ancient Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Persian and Latin manuscripts had survived only in their ancient Armenian translations, and most of these books were religious in nature. Mechitarists published the first book on classical Armenian grammar in 1730 to make these texts more comprehensible to the masses. Sarkiss summarizes the focus of Mechitarist endeavors as the development of the Armenian language, the interpretation and clarification of Armenian history, and the publication of historical documents:

By publishing the works of ancient Armenian authors, they tried to make them accessible to all and to make everyone familiar with the antiquities and memories of the Armenian nation after subjecting them to the light of analysis and examination.¹³

Mechitarists wanted their rich heritage and enlightenment ideals to reach the Armenians scattered around the world. To this end, they established schools in Venice, Paris, Elisabethpol, Varadin, Istanbul, Trabzon, Izmir, Muş, Harput, Mardin and Karasu Pazar.¹⁴

Mechitarists had a theatre in most of the schools they established, as well as in the monastery on San Lazzaro. The first play on the island was performed in 1730, and the community staged plays at the Venetian carnival regularly.¹⁵ Both the Monastery in San Lazzaro and the school of Rafael, established in Venice by the Mechitarists in 1836, played an important role in the Armenian cultural revival, and in disseminating Enlightenment

¹² Sarkis, "The Armenian Renaissance," 443.

¹³ Ibid., 442.

¹⁴ Yervant Baret Manok, *Doğu ile Batı Arasında San Lazzaro Sahnesi: Ermeni Mıkhitarist Manastırı ve İlk Türkçe Tiyatro Oyunları* (Istanbul: Bgst Yayınları, 2013), 50.

¹⁵ Manok, *Doğu ile Batı Arasında San Lazzaro Sahnesi*, 39-40.

ideals. Many monks on the island and students at Rafael were from Istanbul, and they took their knowledge of theatre back to the imperial capital.¹⁶ They sent the plays staged in San Lazzaro to centres in the Ottoman Empire, Iran and India, where fellow Armenians read, discussed and produced them once again in Mechitarist schools.¹⁷ The first such performance took place in a school in Istanbul in 1810, where *The Life of King Arsavir* [*Arsavir Takavori Ganki*] was staged.¹⁸

The plays in question varied in topic. Some were religious in nature, some were about important historical characters or events in Armenian history, and others were comedies set in Istanbul. Since many Mechitarists were also Ottomans, they knew Turkish, and their archives held no less than twenty-five plays written in the language.¹⁹

It is significant that the Mechitarists endorsement of the Armenian Enlightenment did not lead them to oppose Ottoman rule. Rather, they united an Armenian national awakening with Ottoman loyalties. This can be seen in the Mechitarists' use of the Ottoman Turkish language, their cultural, personal and financial contacts with Ottoman lands, and in their use of the Ottoman flag in San Lazzaro. Both the Mechitarists and the Porte considered the island part of the Ottoman Empire. Even though San Lazzaro was not within its borders, it was occupied by Ottoman subjects and upon the recognition of the Armenian Catholic millet in 1830, the Porte marked its imperial presence on the island. This was a relationship with mutual benefits: the Mechitarists gained legitimacy in the eyes of the world through Ottoman protectorate, and were furthermore able to distinguish themselves from Roman Catholics, while the Ottomans in their turn continued relations with an important branch of the Armenian millet, and proved their power in the Mediterranean through governance of San Lazzaro, which, according to millet principles,

¹⁶ Such as Mıgırdıç Beşiktaşlıyan, Sırabıyon Hekimyan, Sırabıyon Tıgliyan, and Sabuh Laz-Manasyan.

¹⁷ Manok, *Doğu ile Batı Arasında San Lazzaro Sahnesi*, 49.

¹⁸ Güllü, *Vartovyan Kumpanyası*, 33-34.

¹⁹ Manok, *Doğu ile Batı Arasında San Lazzaro Sahnesi*, 41, 53.

was left free to practice its culture and religion as it pleased.²⁰ The earliest documents relating to the formal exchange between the monks and the Porte dated back to 1846. In a letter to Reşid Paşa, Abbot-General Kirkor Hurmuz expressed his gratitude to Sultan Abdülmecid I for granting the Mechitarists his *Imperial Portrait* and *Order of Glory*. Abbot Hurmuz assured Reşid Paşa that the portrait of the Ottoman patriarch would be hung in the Grand Hall so that “the sacred image of the Sultan would always be visible to the pupils of the Monastery and that they always feel devoted to the Empire full of sentiments of fidelity and patriotism.”²¹ In 1870, Jean Sorguggil, Father Superior of the Mechitarists in San Lazzaro wrote a petition to Grand Vizier Ali Paşa in which he requested a *berat*, an official seal, which would declare the Mechitarist Congregation in Venice under the protection of the Ottoman Empire:

The Congregation of the Religious Armenian Catholics of the Mechitarists of Venice, as well as their convents, houses, colleges, and schools, founded in the Empire or abroad are under the special protection of the Imperial (Ottoman) Government; and that there can be no intervention against the free exercise of their civil rights.²²

Ottoman Sultans also gifted flags, coats of arms, the *Mecidi Order* and official letters of recognition to Mechitarists for their services to Ottoman citizens, all of which still exist in the Monastery today. Manok’s research into the Mechitarist archives reiterates these findings; he finds no anti-Turkish or anti-Ottoman propaganda in Venice despite the halting of Ottoman-Armenian relations after the Armenian Genocide of 1915.²³

²⁰ Defne Kut, *Presents for Presence: Ottoman Imperial Depictions as Power Symbols: The Case of Mechitarist Monastery in Venice* (History Project, Bogazici University, 2014), 8.

²¹ BOA, HR.TO 407/17, quoted in Defne Kut, *Presents for Presence*, 7.

²² BOA, HR.TO 543/4, quoted in Defne Kut, *Presents for Presence*, 9.

²³ Manok, *Doğu ile Batı Arasında San Lazzaro Sahnesi*, 13-14.

The most telling symbol of cultural symbiosis on San Lazarro was its use of language. The Mechitarists staged plays in Ottoman Turkish, but their medium was not the Arabic alphabet used by the Ottomans. Rather, Mechitarists penned their theatrical pieces in Armeno-Turkish: Ottoman Turkish written in the Armenian script. Armeno-Turkish was mostly written by and for Armenians whose mother tongue was Turkish, and dated back as far as the Seljuk period, with manuscripts appearing in the 14th century.²⁴ While the Mechitarists were not the first group to utilize Armeno-Turkish, they were the first ones to write plays in the script, as early as 1798.²⁵

Vatan Yahut Silistre

The Ottoman Porte would have been aware of this rich Armenian history when it granted Vartovyan his ten-year monopoly to stage plays in Turkish. He excelled in the task and staged fifty comedies, ten tragedies, forty-four dramas, and ten operettas and vaudevilles in his Gedikpaşa theatre between 1874-5.²⁶ My focus in this paper is a controversial play Vartovyan produced in 1873: Namık Kemal's *Vatan Yahut Silistre*. The production was influential in several ways. It was a Turkish patriotic play and the earliest of its kind in Ottoman history. *Vatan Yahut Silistre* was also one of the first productions to exchange the complex sentence structures of Ottoman Turkish with a straightforward and easy use of Turkish that could be understood by the general public. It utilized Kemal's patriotic vocabulary, and was the outcome of a close collaboration between Vartovyan and

²⁴ Mehmet Kutalmış, "On Turkish in Armenian Script," *Journal of Economic and Social Research*, vol.5, no.2 (2003), 51.

²⁵ This date is from an Armeno-Turkish play that survived the 1883 fire of San Lazarro. There might, however, have been earlier plays which were lost in the same fire.

²⁶ Kerem Karaboğa, *Geleceğe Perde Açan Gelenek: Geçmişten Günümüze İstanbul Tiyatroları 1* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010), 24.

Gedikpaşa Theatre's newly established literary committee. And last but not least, *Vatan Yahut Silistre* was unique because of the protests it incited on the night of its performance.

The first act of the play begins with a monologue by its heroine Zekiye. She talks about her love for Islam Bey – Islam is used here as a personal name – who happens to be standing before her house, unbeknownst to her. As she is talking, Islam Bey comes in through the window and declares his undying love for Zekiye, adding that he must nevertheless leave her. The country is at war, and Islam Bey's romantic love is secondary to his love for the fatherland. He leaves Zekiye's house and makes a passionate speech of patriotism to the followers awaiting him outside her window, inviting those who love him to follow him to war. Upon hearing this, Zekiye disguises herself as a man and joins the soldiers on their way to Silistre.

Islam Bey's call to arms is reminiscent, in its mix of humility and fervency, of Kemal's own dedication at the beginning of *Vatan Yahut Silistre*. The playwright dedicates his work to the soldiers who have lost their lives defending the fatherland, even as he considers his writing unworthy of them. Kemal writes that for those who know the true meaning of fatherland, the only options are "to die for it, God forbid in case of calamity; or to fight for it in case of victory."²⁷ Islam Bey declares his mission to his comrades in a similar manner. He says he is ready to die and sacrifice his feeble body for the fatherland; "The only thing greater than a human being is God (Allah) and God (Allah) orders us to love the fatherland ... We are going to protect the land, and God (Allah) is going to protect us."²⁸ Both the beginning of the play and its dedication aim to ignite patriotic feelings, and do so by disparaging the self, and by coalescing Islamic and nationalistic vocabulary. The same method is repeated throughout the play.

²⁷ Namık Kemal, *Vatan Yahut Silistre* (Istanbul: Bordo Siyah Klasik Yayinlari, 2004), 40.

²⁸ Ibid.

The second act takes place in the castle of Silistre, which the Ottomans are defending against the Russians. Islam Bey is wounded, and Zekiye volunteers to care for him. Upon waking, he recognizes her immediately. Meanwhile, the enemy has been on the attack, and the only way to save the castle is to destroy their ammunition supplies. Three volunteers, among them Zekiye and Islam Bey, successfully undertake this task. Finally, in Act Three the soldiers celebrate their victory and Islam Bey reveals Zekiye's true identity, upon which the commander Sıtkı Bey recognizes her as the daughter he had abandoned many years before. Islam Bey and Zekiye's marriage is arranged, and the estranged families reunite.²⁹

The dramaturgic success of *Vatan Yahut Silistre* has been subject to dispute since its first publication. Its overtly long passages, non-Islamic and hence unrealistic conventions – such as entering the house of an unmarried woman through the window – and similarities to Victorien Sardou's play *Patrie!* have all received criticism.³⁰ Kemal himself noted that he wrote the play to incite nationalist fervour, and that he wrote it quickly.³¹ Yet despite its literary flaws, *Vatan Yahut Silistre* was translated into several languages including German, Russian, French, Arabic and Serbian. Why did a play that was widely judged as mediocre become so successful? For a reason not many plays can lay claim to: the political impact of its final sentence.

Vatan Yahut Silistre ends with the words “Muradımızı isteriz!” Translated literally, the sentence means, “We want our wish”. However, “Murat” [wish] is also a private name; that of the Crown Prince whom the dissident Young Ottomans favoured, and hoped would replace the current Sultan Abdülaziz. Following the play's opening performance, an enthusiastic crowd asked to see its playwright on stage. When Kemal did not appear, the audience marched to the newspaper *İbret* where Kemal was a columnist and placed a

²⁹ Namık Kemal, *Vatan Yahut Silistre* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1983), 1-88.

³⁰ Güllü, *Vartovyan Kumpanyası*, 104-5.

³¹ Ibid, 97.

thank-you letter at its door. They shouted, “Long live Kemal! Long live the fatherland! This is our wish! God grant us our wish!” The wish in question referred to the rule of Crown Prince Murat.³² *Ibret* printed the thank-you note two days after the eventful performance, and three days later it published an article analysing the success of the play and the failure of the government. Five days after *Vatan Yahut Silistre* was staged, the authorities temporarily closed down Gedikpaşa theatre, and suspended *Ibret*’s publication. Kemal and other writers connected to Vartovyan’s theatre were exiled: Ebuzziya Tevfik and Ahmet Mithat were sent to Rhodes, Nuri and Hakkı to Acre, and Kemal himself to Cyprus. Vartovyan and the managing editor of *Ibret* got arrested, but were released shortly thereafter.³³

While the political use of the stage to disseminate patriotic ideals came from an Armenian heritage, *Vatan Yahut Silistre*’s content was shaped by the Young Ottoman movement.³⁴ The Young Ottomans were a group of dissident intellectuals who formed a political union during a picnic in Istanbul in the summer of 1865. They opposed the policies of the viziers Ali and Fuad Paşa, and were angry at the loss of imperial power and Ottoman territories. They thought this disintegration could be remedied by introducing constitutional representation to the empire. The Young Ottomans aimed to establish the first parliament of the Ottoman state, and to carry out reforms for its further modernization. The group was not opposed to monarchical principles and believed in the necessity of a sovereign sultan. They did not consider the current ruler Sultan Abdülaziz fit for this task however, and deemed Ali and Fuad Paşa insufficient reformers. The Young Ottomans were in contact with Sultan Abdülaziz’s nephew, Crown Prince Murat, and hoped he

³² Nermin Menemencioglu, “The Ottoman Theatre 1839-1923,” *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.10, no.1 (1983): 53.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The group has been scrutinized in the previous essay, *Remembering the Young Ottomans: A Study in Non-Western Modernism*, but for the benefit of the reader who may have chosen to read this article first, and also because the Young Ottomans are now discussed within a new context, I have chosen to reiterate important aspects of their ideology.

would be the next heir to the throne. While the group aimed to follow the political lead of Europe in establishing a constitutional parliament, their intense patriotism made them think of reforms for Ottomans, by Ottomans, and along Islamic lines.³⁵

Playwright Namık Kemal was the most philosophical member of the group. He had an Islamic upbringing, and belonged to a Bektashi family. The Bektashis typically espoused the sufferings of common men, so Kemal's care for the people had an original, religious source, which led to his later adoption of liberalism.³⁶ Mardin argues that Kemal created a systematic political philosophy that united 19th Century European liberal thought with Islamic philosophy.³⁷

Another influential element in Kemal's political thought is his patriotism. He defines the concept of the fatherland as "a most precious gift from God, because one's first breath was taken in it." His definitions of the fatherland focus on land and sentiment and are not exclusive to one ethnic or religious identity:

The fatherland is not composed of the vague lines traced by the sword of a conqueror or the pen of a scribe. It is a sacred idea resulting from the conglomeration of various noble feelings such as the people, liberty, brotherhood, sovereignty, respect for one's ancestors, love of the family, and childhood memories.³⁸

The goal of establishing a constitutional parliament, which was the *raison d'être* of the Young Ottomans, also bears testimony to the multicultural aims of the group.

³⁵ Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 10-21.

³⁶ Ibid., 288.

³⁷ For more information on Kemal's theories on Islam, democracy and fair governance please consult the second article in this thesis.

³⁸ Namık Kemal, "Vatan," *İbret*, March 12, 1873, quoted in Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 327.

Vatan Yahut Silistre incorporates Kemal's notions of modernity, Islam and patriotism. Kemal hoped the play would lead to the popularization of the modernist Crown Prince Murat, who in his turn would establish the first parliament of the Ottoman Empire in which all nations could be represented equally.

Vartovyan and Kemal's Cultural Reception

Both Vartovyan and Kemal played an important role in the formation of modern theatre in Istanbul. Yet while documents regarding Kemal's life and reception abound in Turkish literature, sources on the impact of Vartovyan's life and work are limited, and reactions to his legacy are complex. Fırat Güllü posits that commentaries on Vartovyan's life are helpful in charting various degrees and slants of Turkish and Armenian nationalism. He subsumes these reactions under two categories, racial nationalism and cultural nationalism, and posits Vasfi Rıza Zobu as an exponent of the first group.

Zobu published a series of six articles on Vartovyan in the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* in 1958. In these articles, he suggests that Vartovyan was a Christian Turk descended from Turcoman tribes who mixed with Greeks and Armenians, and converted to Christianity in the process. According to Zobu, Ottoman rulers forgot these Turkish Christians since they organized society according to religion rather than ethnicity. Güllü, on the other hand, argues that Zobu's proof for Vartovyan's Turkishness is weak. Zobu quotes a conversation recalled by Vartovyan's son that took place when he was only two years old. In this conversation, Vartovyan supposedly told his son that their family came from Kayseri, a city in central Anatolia, a long time ago. Since Vartovyan died soon after, the memory is difficult to verify, and state records only indicate that Vartovyan was born in Istanbul in 1840. Despite the lack of sufficient proof for his theory, Zobu uses

Vartovyan's "Turkish" identity to encourage a celebration of his life. The argument that follows is simple: since Vartovyan is actually a Turk, there is no obstacle against putting his photograph on the walls of Turkish state theatres.³⁹ This re-appropriation of Vartovyan's identity includes and expands it within a wider Turkish one, albeit Christian. However, since Christianity would constitute an impurity in the idealized Turkish-Islamic synthesis, Zobu further effaces the problem of Vartovyan's religion through emphasizing his well-documented conversion to Islam. This line of argument bypasses the dilemma of acknowledging an Armenian predecessor for the contemporary Turkish stage.

The cultural nationalists are milder but not weaker in their assimilation tactics: their arguments suggest it is of no importance to be a racial or ethnic Turk, as long as one is a cultural Turk. This view is adopted by Metin And in his response to Zobu's articles. Since Vartovyan was a cultural Turk, as can be interpreted from his role in bringing theatre to the wider Turkish public, there is no shame in tying the beginnings of theatre to an ethnic Armenian, And believes.⁴⁰ This argument comes despite And's various works on Ottoman theatre, in which he openly cites its Armenian beginnings. And's attitude exemplifies what Homi Bhabha refers to as the creation of cultural diversity with the simultaneous containment of cultural difference: Bhabha points out that a host society or the dominant culture may allow for cultural diversity, but only insofar as it can specify the interpretation of it.⁴¹

Armenian studies on Vartovyan bear unfortunate similarities to the Turkish ones. Thus, Sarasan focuses on Vartovyan's supposedly greedy personality and regards his sole motive in staging Turkish plays to be financial. Stephanyan takes this argument one step

³⁹ Güllü, *Vartovyan Kumpanyası*, 41-42.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 42-43.

⁴¹ Rutherford, Jonathan, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 208.

further, suggesting that Vartovyan has betrayed Armenian Enlightenment goals and the Armenian people by staging plays in the Turkish language.⁴²

Kemal's reception in Turkey has been homogenous compared to the mixed reactions to Vartovyan. While Kemal is univocally acclaimed as the father of Turkish nationalism and the modernizer of Turkish literature, his involvement and cooperation with Vartovyan has been all but forgotten. Kemal's poetry is still a standard part of Turkish anthologies, and it is through his concept of the fatherland [*vatan*] that Turkish citizens first encounter patriotism.⁴³ School textbooks highlight *Vatan Yahut Silistre* and its patriotic content, but neglect to mention Gedikpaşa's Armenian directorship and the Armenian heritage of Istanbulite theatre. Kemal, robbed of his cultural, intellectual and historical context, is presented as the initiator of a long line of Turkish nationalist literary figures that continue to our contemporary times. In fact, as Selim Deringil has shown, Kemal's influence has been so thorough that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the founder of the Turkish republic) wholeheartedly embraced, and even copied, his political philosophy, writings and principles. In particular, Deringil suggests that republican nationalism shares the trend of expressing secular aims in religious terminology: a remnant of Kemal's vast body of work.⁴⁴

For both Turks and Armenians, the 19th century offered myriad political possibilities: the continuation of the Ottoman Empire, a parliament with equal representation, the union of the Armenian diaspora, as well as reformation in religion, language and education. Modernism, traditionalism, religious rule and secularism were all

⁴² Güllü, *Vartovyan Kumpanyası*, 47-52.

⁴³ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 283.

⁴⁴ Selim Deringil, "The Ottoman Origins of Kemalist Nationalism: Namık Kemal to Mustafa Kemal," *European History Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1993): 163-191.

equally viable. It would not be too far-fetched to assume that Vartovyan thought it possible to unite Armenian and Turkish Enlightenment in the same location – his Gedikpaşa theatre.

Political animosities between Turks and Armenians have led to emotional interpretations of Vartovyan's life and work; it is difficult to interpret 19th century Istanbulite theatre in the light of 20th century violence. Both Kemal and Vartovyan can best be understood as exemplars of a fluid, transitional identity in the period. But while the Turkish Republic's reception of Vartovyan was ambivalent at best, Kemal was heralded as the father of Turkish nationalism, and became part of the literary canon. Contrary to what their posthumous receptions suggest, Kemal and Vartovyan had more similarities than differences. They both took part in patriotic Enlightenment projects, and used theatre to convey their ideologies. They collaborated on a joint artistic project, that of establishing a theatre which welcomed all communities living in Istanbul. What separated them was not their respective language or religion, but their ethnicity, the reverberations of which only increased in the following years. There is no doubt that Vartovyan would have been incorporated into mainstream Turkish historiography alongside Kemal had history played itself out differently.

4. Deciphering an Ottoman Fairy Tale: *Tayyarzade* throughout the Centuries

It is perhaps unusual to study new fairy tales, when the term “fairy tale” brings to mind generally old things: well-worn stories, firesides, memories of grandmothers. Searching for novelty in history presents a similar reversal in logic. I had to position myself in the presence of the past, and decipher what would have been considered fresh in a time gone by. The present essay tries to combine these two tasks by studying a new fairy tale from the Ottoman past. Clarifications of terminology and methodology are essential before venturing into this relatively unknown field. What are new fairy tales, and what is an Ottoman tale?

Claire Massey’s *New Fairy Tales* (2008) was the first journal to feature and discuss new fairy stories exclusively. In her first editorial Massey noted: “We don’t believe the fairy tale canon is complete or that we should only retell old stories. We believe that there are many new fairy tales out there waiting to be written, read and, loved”.¹ The journal published six issues of previously untold stories that incorporated and played with elements from traditional fairy tales. John Patrick Pazdziora has built on Massey’s work and defined new fairy tales as those whose first telling could be situated in a particular time, and whose teller could be determined.² Pazdziora’s definition enables new fairy tales to acquire a historical scope; if its telling can be situated and its author identified, a new

¹ Claire Massey, “Letter from the Editor,” *New Fairy Tales*, vol 1 (2008): 2, accessed December 3, 2011, <http://www.newfairytales.co.uk/pages/archive.html>.

² John Patrick Pazdziora and Defne Çizakça, “Introduction: On Making New Fairy Tales,” in *New Fairy Tales: Essays and Stories*, ed. John Patrick Pazdziora and Defne Çizakça, (New York: Unlocking Press, 2013), vii-xii.

fairy tale may appear in any old century. The aim of this paper is to incorporate one such tale from 16th Century Istanbul within the new fairy tale canon.

An Ottoman tale, on the other hand, is any tale created by an Ottoman citizen, and as such it can belong to a myriad of nationalities and may span a vast period of time. The Ottoman Empire lasted from 27 January 1299 to 1 November 1922 and was succeeded by the Turkish Republic in 29 October 1923, which is now heir to the Ottoman literary archives.

There are two ways to search for a new Ottoman fairy tale. The first requires the mastery of the Ottoman language, direct access to the maze of archives scattered throughout contemporary Turkey, and the patience to decipher the baroque curves of Ottoman writing. The second method does not presuppose the above expertise but is no less complicated; it requires a search for the Ottoman new fairy tale from within Turkish sources. The present essay opts for this second route since I lack the required language skills and also because the aim of this investigation is twofold: to embark on a literal *and* a cultural study. The goal is not solely to discover a new Ottoman fairy tale, but also to study its reception in modern Turkey; to chart the manners in which a contemporary culture (Turkish) inherits its literary past (Ottoman). Consequently this article delves into collective memory and inevitably, into collective forgetfulness.

The Difficulties in Searching for a New Ottoman Fairy Tale

Searching for a new Ottoman fairy tale through the medium of Turkish is not a straightforward task. First, as noted in the second article within this thesis, the language used in the Ottoman Empire was loosely termed the Ottoman language (*Lisân-ı Osmânî*). It was written in the Arabic alphabet, its content was largely Turkish with a strong influence

from the grammar and vocabulary of Persian and Arabic primarily, and the local languages of the empire secondarily. Ottoman went through many transformations within the 600 years of the Empire. These periods can broadly be marked as the Old Ottoman Turkish (from the 13th till the 16th century), the Middle Ottoman Turkish (from the 16th till the 19th century) and lastly, the New Ottoman Turkish (from the 19th century till 1928). One must note that many languages apart from Ottoman were used in the empire as well; there was no centralization of language outside of state administration.

When the Ottoman Empire came to an end and was succeeded by the Turkish Republic, the newly formed nation went through a language reform conducted by its new president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This language reform had two constituents; the adoption of the Latin alphabet, and the purification of the language from its Persian and Arabic lineage. The reforms were applied widely and with precision. One result of this transformation was the increased literacy rate throughout the nation; while the Arabic alphabet took children a long time to learn, the Latin alphabet was mastered in about three months.

Another consequence of the language reforms came to light with the second generation of Turkish nationals: the ability to read Ottoman Turkish was lost. This resulted in an inevitable disengagement from the Ottoman past. Teaching the Arabic alphabet was discouraged in the first years of the republic. These cautious measures suggest that the eradication of the Ottoman language was deemed necessary for the creation of a new and independent Turkish identity, freed from its Ottoman legacy. In contemporary Turkey, nearly ninety years after the transition from the empire to the republic, Ottoman continues to be left out of school curricula. As a result, the ordinary Turkish citizen is not equipped to read written sources dating before 1928. Only a very small number of the population, historians and scholars of Ottoman literature, can read and understand Ottoman documents.

This language shift puts Ottoman fairy tales out of the ordinary citizen's reach, making their access possible only through secondary sources.

Second, even for the rare reader who has mastered Ottoman, the available fairy tales are few and far in between. One reason for this is the medium in which most Ottoman fairy tales were told: the largest portion of this genre was narrated orally. Traditionally, Ottoman fairy tales were passed down from one storyteller to the next, making them dependant on either good memory or handwritten notes, most of which have been lost in time.

Third, even in cases where Ottoman fairy stories have been transcribed, published, and shared, their translation into modern Turkish has been scarce. Most translations have abbreviated or summarized the Ottoman texts in question, as shall be discussed in the following sections. Furthermore, no study has so far focused on the Ottoman fairy tale heritage exclusively. This omission forces the fairy tale enthusiast to search unsystematically, with hopes that a tale may be found in unexpected places.

Mustafa Nihat Özön's *Türkçe'de Roman* (The Novel in Turkish) is one such place and constitutes the locus of my research. The primary reason I have chosen to focus on Özön's book is its popularity. *Türkçe'de Roman* was published in 1936, and was one of the first books which studied the Ottoman heritage of the Turkish novel; it was required reading at many universities. No other book took the Ottoman genealogy as theme again until 1978.³

In the introduction to the first edition Özön states that the chapters of his book might be judged as too weighty or numerous, but that he must be excused for three reasons. Firstly, all the texts he investigates are written in the Arabic alphabet, secondly they are written in a language and style that is, in 1936, difficult to understand, and thirdly

³ Güzin Dino's *Türk Romanının Doğuşu* was published in 1978 (Istanbul), O. Evin's *Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel* in 1983 (Minneapolis), Robert P. Finn's *Türk Romanı 1872-1900* in 1984 (Ankara).

the acquisition of most of these books was by sheer serendipity.⁴ Özön's third reason, the element of chance, shows how undervalued these pieces of old literature were at the time, and in fact still are, in the Turkish Republic.

The following sections of my paper will focus on one fairy tale Özön translated from Ottoman and then summarized in *Türkçe'de Roman; Tayyazade*. Along with the other fairy tales Özön summarizes in his work, *Tayyazade* would have been of the earliest Ottoman tales Turkish readers who had forgotten Ottoman would have read.

The story of Tayyazade, goes as follows:

Hüseyin Efendi was a retired accountant. Once upon a time his seaside house in Yenikapı was filled with guests, but nowadays it served no one. Hüseyin Efendi sat in it moaning and groaning from loneliness, complaining about the state of the world.

One of Hüseyin Efendi's acquaintances, a dervish by the name of Mahmut, brought a boy called Tayyazade to Hüseyin Efendi. This boy soothed the heart, and he was very polite; no one could surpass him in elegance or eloquence. He spoke Persian and Arabic, he knew music, his voice was beautiful and he played the *tambur*. He was perhaps eighteen, definitely not a day older than twenty. Hüseyin Efendi liked the boy and considered him no different than his son. Day or night, he did not let Tayyazade leave his side.

Even though their relationship was flawless, a misunderstanding eventually arose and muddied the waters. Hüseyin Efendi had prepared a gift for Tayyazade on occasion of the feast, but it got mixed up with the package of another servant. Tayyazade was greatly saddened by this turn of events, and swore never to set foot in Hüseyin Efendi's house again.

Hüseyin Efendi sent word that Tayyazade return, when he did not, Hüseyin Efendi changed his clothes and ventured to find Tayyazade himself. He did not return home for a long while, instead a man who

⁴ Mustafa Nihat Özön, *Türkçe'de Roman* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi: 1936), 9-11.

brought papers signed by Hüseyin Efendi came. With each signature, the stranger withdrew a thousand lira from Hüseyin Efendi's caretaker. The caretaker let the women of the harem know of this conundrum. The women thought Tayyazade guilty of the misdeed.

Hüseyin Efendi's wife and five other women from his harem hid sticks underneath their skirts, and went to Tayyazade's house to question him about the signature and money. They learned from Tayyazade that he had not seen the Efendi since leaving the house. In fact, he was now getting worried, and wanted to seek his master himself.

Tayyazade began to follow the man who once again visited Hüseyin Efendi's house and asked for a thousand lira. The stranger then entered the palace of Fazlı Paşa in the district of Sultanahmet. Tayyazade sat in front of its gates and pondered what he should do. Suddenly, eight handmaidens and a beautiful girl came out of the palace and invited Tayyazade in.

When the palace gates opened, Tayyazade saw two times twenty Hungarian slaves on either side of the door. The girl, the eight handmaidens, and Tayyazade gave their *bahşiş* to the slaves, and the slaves opened another door, behind which there was a courtyard, through which they walked towards another gate, which then opened and revealed two times twenty Bosnian and Albanian slaves. They too were given their tips. Behind a third gate Tayyazade saw thirty eunuchs. Once they passed the eunuchs, on the stone stairs at the end of a marble courtyard, there were twelve Hungarian concubines and upon seeing Tayyazade, they said to the beautiful girl who had welcomed him to the palace: "Our dear *Kalfa*, this prey of yours leaves us speechless indeed!" and they began to applaud. Tayyazade was taken to a room where he was served drinks and food, and from there he was taken to another room where Gevherli Hanım was awaiting him.

Gevherli Hanım was a spinster who wore rings and earrings and necklaces and anklets and nose rings, and then more of each of these things. Much later the beautiful girl told Tayyazade that Gevherli Hanım was the daughter of the *Paşa* who owned this palace and that she had married three younger *Paşas* herself, one after another, and after they had died – each and every one of them – she had turned her father's palace into a prison.

The old palace, new prison, had forty rooms, and each room had one *odabaşı* and four concubines. Every day, one concubine went out into the streets to hunt for a well-dressed man who pleased the eye. The concubines would take him, and entertain him, and eat away his money until the man was penniless, after which they would give him a conical hat and a cloak, and lock him into the prisons. They would use his signature to rob his family, just like they had done with poor Hüseyin Efendi. When Gevherli Hanım understood no more money was to be had from the prisoner's house, she would order him killed.

The beautiful girl told all this to Tayyarzade, and reassured him that no harm would ever come his way; she herself would stand between him and Gevherli Hanım.

The next day Tayyarzade was taken to Gevherli Hanım's court but with one excuse or another he managed to secure four free hours in the outside world. When he exited the palace Tayyarzade came upon Sultan Murat IV who was walking in the vicinity with his storyteller, Tıfli. Tayyarzade told these two companions his story upon which they broke into the palace, ordered Gevherli Hanım's death, and freed the poor men from their prisons.⁵

Tayyarzade is a story that belongs to the canon of the storyteller Tıfli. The information we have about Tıfli the storyteller is scattered and fragmented. We know, for instance, that Tıfli was born in the city of Trabzon on the Black Sea coast of Anatolia in the 16th century, but we do not know in which year. We also do not know when he moved to Istanbul. Tıfli's real name was Ahmed Tıfli Çelebi and his father was Abdülaziz Efendi. He is said to have recited poetry from an early age but is best known as a storyteller who became a personal *meddah* to Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640). Tıfli was a Sufi, a follower of Sheikh Idris-i Muhtefi of the Melami order of dervishes. Evliya Çelebi, a famous Ottoman travel writer, mentions that Tıfli was also known as "Tıfli the Stork" due to his exceptional

⁵ Ibid., 112-114.

height. It is known that Tıfli's poetry continued appearing in 18th and 19th century Ottoman journals, long after his death. His fame also lived on in oral narrations where he was mentioned side by side with Sultan Murat IV.⁶

It is difficult to fit the tale of *Tayyarzade* into one clear literary category. The reception of *Tayyarzade* in particular, and the canon of Tıfli stories in general, has been complex and affords no consensus. Some scholars have viewed the Tıfli canon as part of the anonymous pool of meddah stories. Yet others have classified the Tıfli canon as part of the folk tale tradition, and some have viewed the stories as part of the literary (written) Ottoman lineage.⁷ This confusion is not so much the result of muddled criteria as it is the result of the richness within the canon at hand. The Tıfli stories carry elements of various disparate traditions within themselves; their eclecticism constitutes a particularly difficult case for literary differentiation. Some Tıfli stories contain components of written language, such as catalogues and indexes, while others do not. Some Tıfli stories are made up of several connected tales, while others contain many side stories, yet others are episodic and some are only made up of two episodes that are based on simple plot lines, similarly, the length of the stories varies greatly. While some Tıfli stories have been embellished with pictures and decorations, others are plain. While some of them make use of causal logic, others move forward by coincidences or miraculous events. While some tales of the canon are realistic, others delight in exaggeration and turn into fairy tales.⁸

Even though there is no clear categorization of the Tıfli stories, most scholars believe them to have been either told by Tıfli himself, or to have been written down by him. Özdemir Nutku refers to the Tıfli tales as the creations of Tıfli, while Metin And alludes to them as Tıfli's personal canon in his article on the meddah. Pakize Ataç argues

⁶ Bekir Çınar, "Tıfli Ahmet Çelebi: Hayatı, Edebi Kişiliği, Eserleri ve Divanı'nın Tenkitli Metni" (Ph.D. diss., Fırat University, 2000), 11.

⁷ David Selim Sayers, "Tıfli Hikayelerinin Türsel Gelişimi" (Ph.D. diss., Bilkent University, 2005), 4.

⁸ Ibid., 186.

the stories were written down by Tıfli himself, while Pertev Naili Boratav proposes they were narrated by Tıfli and possibly passed down to us by anonymous scribes.⁹ Whether they were written down by him, or narrated by him, the stories of Tıfli are unanimously traced back to Ahmet Tıfli Çelebi. The certainty of source enables *Tayyarzade* to fit the first criteria of a new fairy tale, that its author be identifiable. The second condition is that the fairy tale be situated in a particular time; *Tayyarzade* originates in 17th century Istanbul, during the reign of Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640).

While we have established *Tayyarzade*'s maker as Tıfli, it is less straightforward to categorize the story as a fairy tale. *Tayyarzade* has not typically been considered a fairy tale in Ottoman studies, with the exception of two notable scholars, Özdemir Nutku and Robert P. Finn. Finn has classified all of Tıfli's canon as fairy tales, *masal*, while Nutku has noted only that Tıfli's canon contains many elements that can be found in traditional fairy tales such as the appearance of helper figures who try to unite separated lovers.¹⁰ The main reason scholars of Ottoman have not considered *Tayyarzade* and other Tıfli stories to be fairy tales is the following: Turkish literary studies perceive fairy tales, *masal*, to be anonymous stories, having no identifiable tellers.¹¹ We have already established that new fairy tales are those tales that can be traced back to their creator, and in this sense Tıfli's *Tayyarzade* can indeed be considered a fairy tale, even though this definition is not commonly adhered to in Turkish literary studies.

Another reason forwarded for excluding *Tayyarzade* from the fairy tale canon has been its realistic components. Şükrü Elçin has noted these attributes as the following: "The names of the main characters are traditional Muslim names while the names of places and the architecture is one we are familiar with throughout Istanbul. The heroes and heroines of

⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹ Metin Ekici, "Türk Sözlü Geleneğinde Anlatıcılar ve Anlatmalar Arasındaki İlişkiye Art Zamanlı (Diyokronik) ve Eş Zamanlı (Senkronik) Bir Bakış," in *Fikret Türkmen Armağanı*, ed. Gürer Gülsevin and Metin Arıkan (İzmir: Kanyılmaz Matbaası, 2005), 226.

the stories are ordinary folk that have ordinary lives and jobs. Almost all of them live within the scope of reason, whether they are ethical or not.”

Elçin’s arguments are interesting to keep in mind while studying *Tayyarzade*, but it must be noted that the employment of real locations, architecture, common names and ordinary people are not characteristics that would lead one to exclude the possibility of *Tayyarzade* being a fairy tale. Fairy tales can have many realistic components and still remain true to the fairy tale genre by highlighting the element of wonder. *Tayyarzade* forms just such an example by utilizing the wonderful and the unlikely through various cultural codes.

Within the Eastern fairy tale canon, particularly in the *1001 Nights* and Ottoman fairy tales, there is a devoted repetition of particular numbers. Some of these are one, three, seven, and forty. Of these, the number forty is probably the most beloved. *Tayyarzade* makes use of the cipher frequently.

Turkologist Mehmet Yardımcı considers forty to be one of the holiest numbers within Turkish folklore, as it is repeatedly used both in the Qur’an and the Alevite legends of Anatolia to suggest divinity. Important days of mourning and days of celebration last forty days and forty nights within Islamic settings. The number forty is also significant within the shamanistic past of the Turkic people prior to their arrival in Asia Minor. Hence in the Oğuz Kağan ve Satuk Buğra Han legends of Central Asian Turks, the hero Oğuz begins to walk in forty days of infancy, signaling his unusual strength. In the legend of Manas the number forty is repeated hundred and twenty seven times in total and is used in reference to forty brave men, forty soldiers, forty brides etc. Repetition of numbers is imbued with magical, mythological, and religious connotations within Turkic fairy tales.

The effect such repetition has in written texts is one of allusion: the numbers suggest the presence of the supernatural.¹²

Forty has a special importance in *Tayyarzade*. Two times twenty slaves guard the gates of the secret palace, which is later turned into a prison. The building also has forty rooms. Through the number forty, *Tayyarzade* distances itself from the ordinary, and opens up to a world that no longer operates with common logic.

Another important cultural code the canon of Tıfli utilizes is that of daytime wonder. Ignác Kunos, a Hungarian collector of Turkish fairy tales has noted this specificity as the following:

Turkish fairy tales are as crystal; reflecting the sun's rays in a thousand dazzling colours; clear as a cloudless sky and transparent like the dew upon a budding rose. In short, Turkish fairy tales are not the stories of the Thousand and One Nights, but of the Thousand and One Days.¹³

This statement is nowhere clearer than in the Tıfli canon, where it is mostly the daytime that houses the unusual, the uncanny, the repetitive and the wonderful.

The character of Gevherli Hatun, a female Bluebeard, appears during the day. Strangers enter her palace in daylight. The slaves and the maids hunt for newcomers in sunshine. This violent order could surely have been portrayed at night, and had this story been a part of the Arabian Nights, it probably would have been. But Tıfli has placed all these unusual elements in the middle of a well-known city, amongst the ordinary happenings of the day. Rather than interpreting the daily feel of the tale as suggestive of realism, as Elçin has done, it is more reasonable to interpret these elements in the line of Kunos's analysis as constituting day time fairy tales.

¹² Mehmet Yardımcı, "Geleneksel Kültürümüzde ve Aşıkların Dilinde Sayılar," *Çukurova Üniversitesi Türkoloji Araştırmaları Merkezi*, accessed January 20, 2012, <http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/HALKBILIM/18.php>

¹³ Ignác Kúnos, *Forty-four Turkish Fairy Tales* (London: G. Harrap, 1913), xii.

Ottoman Sultans were revered, as well as feared within the Ottoman Empire and Tıfli utilizes this sentiment in *Tayyarzade*. There were not many instances in which they were visible to the public. The involvement of Murat IV in the daily dealings of a storyteller and palace entertainer would have been unlikely. Yet in all the stories within the Tıfli canon, the Sultan and Tıfli appear to be the best of companions. They travel in the city on a regular basis, they save distressed citizens just at the right moments, and together, they are invincible in solving the plethora of problems that is Istanbul. It is not too far fetched to interpret this pair as typical fairy tale helpers, guarantors of a happy ending.¹⁴

The Missing Aspects of *Tayyarzade*

To the listener accustomed to the traditional fairy tale narrated in private homes or coffeehouses, or to the reader used to reading the fairy tale from stylistically arranged written sources, *Tayyarzade* seems to be missing several elements of the Ottoman fairy tale.

Ottoman fairy tales, just like the tales of Romania and Ireland amongst others, typically start with a run. Runs are employed to start or end the tale, signal topic shifts and mark episode boundaries.¹⁵ The following three examples are commonly used Turkish/Ottoman runs and their translations.

1. *Ben ben iken, deve tellal, köpek hamal iken, leylek muhtar, kedi berber iken, kurbağa tüccar, yılan urgan, hırka yorgan iken, babam beş yaşında,*

¹⁴ While the present paper judges *Tayyarzade* as a new fairy tale, this category is not the only one within which *Tayyarzade* can be placed. Kavruk notes that whatever classification system is used, it is not possible to fit a classic story strictly into just one category. Stories generally have aspects of several different categories, even if they can mostly be judged as an exemplar of a single type. Sayers, "Tıfli," 14.

¹⁵ Deniz Zeyrek, "Runs in Folktales and the Dynamics of Turkish Runs: A Case Study," *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 52, no.1 (1993): 163.

*ben on beşimde iken, ben babamın beşiğini tıngır mungır salları iken, kediler koyunları kırpar, sivrisinek saz çalarken, ben su içer, develer elekten geçer iken, tilki haklı ile haksızı seçer, ben de o sırada arpa biçer iken, eşek mihmandar tavşan ile kaz hükümdar iken bir varmış bir yokmuş.*¹⁶

[When I was me, and the camel a town crier, and the dog a porter, and the stork a mukhtar,—and the cat a barber, and the frog a merchant, and the snake a hawser, and the cardigan a duvet, and my father in his fifth year, I in my fifteenth, softly rocking his cradle, and when the goats sheared the sheep, and the mosquito played the lute, and I drank water, and the camels passed through the sieve, and the fox distinguished just from unjust as I reaped barley, and the donkey was a guide, and the rabbit and the goose were rulers, once here once nowhere.]

*

2. *Onlar ermiş muradına, biz de çıkalım kerevetine.*¹⁷

[They have reached their desire, I heard, may we go up to its wooden bed.]

*

3. *Gökten üç elma düşmüş. Biri bana, biri masal anlatana, biri de Sıdika Hanıma. Çöpü, kabukları da dinleyenlere.*¹⁸

[Three apples fell from the sky, I heard. Let one be for me, one for the storyteller, and one for Sıdika Hanım. Let the stalk and the peel be for the listeners.]

¹⁶ Kúnos Ignác, *Türk Masalları* (Istanbul: Sosyal Yayınları, 1987), 277, quoted in Zeyrek, “Runs in Folktales and the Dynamics of Turkish Runs: A Case Study,” *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 52, no.1 (1993): 164.

¹⁷ Naili P. Boratav, *Az Gittik Uz Gittik* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1969), 155, quoted in Zeyrek, “Runs in Folktales and the Dynamics of Turkish Runs: A Case Study,” *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 52, no.1 (1993): 164.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Tayyarzade is devoid of runs. In other words, the beginning, end, and transition points of the story are missing. The tale begins from a late, arbitrary start: our hero is already in old age, and steeped in sadness. The story ends suddenly as well, without detailing Hüseyin Efendi's emancipation and reunion with Tayyarzade and his family. It seems highly probable that Tifli the storyteller began his tale with a set of runs that formed a smoother introduction to both the storyline and the hero, and that he embellished his tale with more runs to indicate transition and finality. These runs are likely to have been lost in time, or omitted during the transcription process.

Tayyarzade has also lost its nuances of characterization in time. *Tayyarzade* was probably narrated in a coffeehouse, or directly to the Sultan in the Ottoman palace. It must either have been transcribed by other listeners immediately or after the occasion, or written down by Tifli himself prior or posterior to the occasion of narration. There is no historical evidence to support either theory. In both cases, there is an essential part of storytelling that cannot be transferred to the medium of writing however, and that is the art of acting out different character types, facial expressions and accents.

Özdemir Nutku goes so far as to say that the plot of a meddah story is merely an excuse for the storyteller to bring his acting talents to the fore. Nutku points out that the tale of the meddah would always be accompanied by unplanned jokes, poems, anecdotes, songs, sayings, legends and local gossip. The meddah had acquired fame due to their ability at—*taklit*—copying. The meddah were not only apt at copying the behaviour and accents of the many ethnic groups that comprised the Ottoman Empire but they also mimicked the sounds of nature such as trees in the wind, animals, rivers and even earthquakes. These fundamental pieces of oral culture are lost in the transcribed Tifli canon, even though they might have been the core reason behind Tifli's fame.

Yet another missing aspect of *Tayyarzade* is detail. The tale is a layered one. Doors open onto courtyards, which then open on to more rooms, which are opened by many slaves who are guarded by many women who then all lead to and serve the mysterious female Bluebeard figure, Gevherli Hanım. Yet as layered as the tale is, there is not much emphasis on detail in *Tayyarzade*. How do these doors look, for example? Are they made out of brass or iron? How does the handsome youth look, or the lonely old man? The lack of detail is noticeable not only when it comes to physical attributes, but also to the details of the plot line. The time Tayyarzade spends with Gevherli Hanım is not elaborated: what do the two talk about? What are their impressions of one another? How are their bodies situated within the bigger room? And why would Gevherli Hanım—a cruel and intelligent woman with a mind for deceit—allow Tayyarzade four hours of freedom? Equally important and missing from the tale is the manner in which Tıfli and Sultan Murat IV get rid of Gevherli Hanım and her servants. Tıfli leaves us guessing as to why a Sultan would get involved in such relatively mundane matters in the first place.

It is likely that all these details were told during long story nights, also likely is the possibility that these details morphed and changed with each telling, affording Tıfli and his audience new pleasures every evening. The medium of writing is devoid of these playful components inherent to storytelling. If the story is indeed in the details, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine just how much of *Tayyarzade* has been lost.

From the New Fairy Tale to the Inevitable Rewrites

The missing elements of *Tayyarzade* suggest a complex history of cultural and literary transmission. The journey of a new Ottoman fairy tale follows an interesting trajectory, which makes the incomplete nature of *Tayyarzade* necessary rather than accidental. Four

important stages must be differentiated and discussed when it comes to the reception of *Tayyarzade* in contemporary Turkey: narration, transcription, translation and summarization.

Pertev Naili Boratav believes the Tıfli Canon to have been made up of meddah stories. The meddah stories were tales narrated in coffeehouses of the city. Boratav notes that the Tıfli canon incorporates the styles (*uslub*), themes (*mevzuu*), and flair (*eda*) of the meddah tales. Boratav goes so far as to suggest that the Tıfli canon might indeed be the first transcribed versions of the currently available meddah tales. According to Boratav these transcriptions would have then inspired more stories, and would have been used as study material by practising storytellers. Hence, in the case of the Tıfli canon a continuous interplay between writing and performance is the norm.¹⁹ The first form *Tayyarzade* took would have been performative storytelling rather than written text.

As stated above, it is unknown whether *Tayyarzade* was noted down immediately by one of the listeners present during the occasion of storytelling, or by Tıfli himself either prior to the occasion or afterwards. It is also possible that *Tayyarzade* was transcribed after many such evenings of storytelling, perhaps even by several scribes.

These uncertain speculations create space for several versions of *Tayyarzade*. Indeed, though they all ascribe *Tayyarzade* to Tıfli the storyteller, several differing transcriptions of the tale have been discovered. It is possible that many more versions exist in the archives of Istanbul. So far, five distinct versions of *Tayyarzade* have been identified.

According to chronological order these versions are from the year 1872-3, 1875, 1917-8, 1924-5, and 1957. The four first editions are in Ottoman, while the one from 1957

¹⁹ Sayers, "Tıfli," 36.

is in the Latin alphabet and in modern Turkish, but at the time of penning this essay, has been out of print for several years.

The first edition is titled “Hikaye-i Tayyazade” (Tayyazade’s Story), and has been printed by the *hurufat* technique. Though the name of the scribe is unknown, it is noted that the printing took place in *Camlı Han* in 1872-3. The second version of *Tayyazade* is from the year 1875 and is an edition titled “Tıfli Efendi Hikayesi” (The Story of Master Tıfli). This second edition has been printed by the lithography technique in the printing house *Litografya Destgahı*. The third edition of the story is titled “Tayyazade Yahud Binbir Direk Va’kasi” (Tayyazade or the Happening on the Thousand and One Poles), it has been printed in *Bab-ı Ali Caddesi’nde Cihan Matba’ası’nda* (Cihan Printing House on the Street of Bab’i Ali), using the *hurufat* technique. The fourth edition of the text is titled “Tayyazade Bin Bir Direk Batakhanesi” (Tayyazade the Thousand and One Pole Joint), and has been printed in the *hurufat* technique, two different publishing houses are mentioned on its cover page: *Şems Matba’ası* and *El-Abdl Matba’ası*. The fifth edition has been printed in the new alphabet by *Hadise Basım* in *hurufat* technique. The scribes are unknown for all five editions. A sixth later version of *Tayyazade* has been written by a famous Istanbulite author, Reşad Ekrem Koçu. This edition must be considered a re-write, rather than a transcription however, since Koçu takes ownership of the story.

Hence, at the level of transcriptions there are two possible ways in which *Tayyazade* has changed. The first stage is constituted by the differences between oral storytelling and the written word. Inevitably, the writing loses important elements of the performance: the mimicry of the storyteller, his body language, acting abilities, and mannerisms are untranslatable while details and runs are possibly left out of the written text.

On a second level, when we begin discovering different transcriptions of *Tayyazade* throughout the centuries, the singularity of the story is lost. We can no longer

trace back words, idioms, and expressions to Tifli the storyteller. Even though *Tayyarzade*'s plot has not changed through its different transcriptions, the language must surely have been affected by the individual scribes of each edition. The different transcriptions of the story make it difficult to separate Tifli from the literary talents of its anonymous scribes. A study of these nuances requires fluency in Ottoman, which, as has been noted above, is lacking in contemporary Turkey.

For the sake of accuracy, those who study *Tayyarzade* must go back to its earlier print editions. As stated above, these editions are in the Arabic alphabet and in the Ottoman Turkish language. Some scholars have translated *Tayyarzade* from its Ottoman Turkish versions into modern Turkish but the accuracy of their translations is difficult to confirm. What is certain is the difficulty of undertaking the translation of Ottoman texts in general. Even for the scholars of the Ottoman Turkish language, translation is not without its enigmas, mostly due to the absence of vowels in the Arabic script. The following account charts the difficulties involved in this endeavour:

One consequence of language reform is that the “authoritative” text of Ottoman documents and especially literary works has grown increasingly distant from the original, Ottoman manuscripts. Because the Arabic/Ottoman [A/O] script does not indicate some vowels, because Turkish vowels written as “long” Arabic vowels are transcribed as “short,” and because several A/O script vowels and consonants have multiple possible readings, there is no way to create a readable (letter for letter) transliteration of an Ottoman text. Every Ottoman text transcribed into a Latin alphabet contains major interpretive interventions by the transcriber. There is no possibility of reading back from any current form of transcription to the original text.²⁰

²⁰ Walter G. Andrews, Murat Inan, Sevim Kebeli, Stacy Waters, “Rethinking the Transcription of Ottoman Texts: The Case of Reversible Transcription,” *Turkish Studies: International Periodical for the Languages, Literature, and History of Turkish or Turkic*, vol. 5, issue. 2 (2010): 1212-1213.

Unfortunately, the scope of literary loss does not end with the stage of translation. *Tayyarzade*, along with many other Ottoman fairy tales, has reached contemporary Turkish readers only through summarization. Most students of fairy tales are familiar with *Tayyarzade* through *Türkçe'de Roman* as has been noted previously. *Türkçe'de Roman* studies many primary examples of Ottoman fairy tales, but none of these tales are presented in their entirety. Özön has summarized each translation in order to cover as much material as possible in his canonical work. Özön bases his translation on the original first prints of *Tayyarzade*, he also includes pictures of these editions in his text. But despite Özön's loyalty to first editions, a summary in translation moves even further away from *Tayyarzade* as Tifli would have told it.

Ottoman new fairy tales are paradoxes in transmission and translation. The sentiments, the locations, the *lebenswelt* of the Ottoman fairy tale are all familiar to the Turkish reader, but access to them has been severed, language bridges have been burnt. *Tayyarzade*, just like other Ottoman fairy tales, is readable only through a long list of omissions.

We have charted the difficulties in discovering new Ottoman fairy tales through deciphering the journey of one such tale: *Tayyarzade*. Without the knowledge of a lost language, that of Ottoman Turkish, the search for the literary past comes up against too many obstacles. The incorporation of Ottoman Turkish as a second language into school curricula would eradicate all these problems, but another language shift in the near future appears unlikely. What options remain then for the enthusiast of Ottoman fairy tales?

The remoteness of the Turkish reader from the original Ottoman texts need not only present a problem; this position can also open up new and exciting possibilities.

Reading the Ottoman past, unintentionally but inevitably, becomes a game of deconstruction. The reader has to stay aware of the omissions within the available texts and try to reconstruct what an original tale could have said and meant, how it would have felt on the tongue, in the coffeehouses of the city and in the imagination. Guessing what has been passed over silently, deciphering the untranslated or even mistranslated, understanding the exact meaning of terms, places, relations no longer in use; in short, learning the language of ghosts, comes with the territory of the Ottoman tale.

Derrida suggests that every text is *undecidable*, in that it conceals conflicts within it between different authorial voices. This point is amply illustrated in *Tayyarzade* when one considers its numerous scribes. The *undecidability* of language is fundamental to the nature of language for Derrida. It is not a problem of particular texts, but of writing *sui generis*. The problems it presents can only be solved through more language, which in its turn needs to be deconstructed through even more language *ad infinitum*. A stable, singular meaning can never be reached. The novelty of deconstruction is that this lack of certitude is not presented as a loss but as a gain, not as a problem, but as an ongoing solution. Stability of language and certainty of meaning are not necessarily desirable since they freeze the process of understanding.

As with all deconstruction, deciphering *Tayyarzade* becomes an activity of re-writing. In the attempt to understand, new interpretations are added to the tale. So much has been excluded from its summary that filling in the gaps constitutes the act of reading. Consequently, the search for understanding includes an inevitable re-writing of the fragmented fairy tale at hand. Reading becomes an active seeking that incorporates guesswork, language and cultural translation, mistranslation, omission, and interpretation. Reading an Ottoman fairy tale requires agency.

The act of reading *Tayyarzade* in Turkey mirrors the liminal form of the Ottoman fairy tale itself. From its very beginnings, the Ottoman fairy tale is both narrated and

written; it belongs to both an oral and a scribal tradition. In its reception within the Turkish setting, the Ottoman fairy tale stays true to its original, amorphous form. And just like those old evenings in coffeehouses; every story invites a new telling, every telling invites a new writing, every writing is met with several readings and each reading turns into a myriad of new narratives.

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