

## **Menekşe Toprak, Ağıtın Sonu / The End of the Elegy**

**novel, 205 pages, İletişim Publishing, 2014**

**Awarded with the Duygu-Asena-Novel-Prize, 2015**

### **Summary**

Fatma is a 36-year old Kurdish-Alevite woman raised in her uncle's house in a poor neighborhood. Her father was killed by right-wing guerillas during the clash between the leftists and nationalists, which lasted until the 1980s in Turkey. Her mother re-married, but the new husband didn't accept Fatma into the home. Growing up in her uncle's household, the only opportunity for Fatma was to receive a good education. Smart and diligent, she succeeds. She studies business administration in Ankara, receives a European Union scholarship for a Master's degree in Potsdam, Germany, and starts working for a multinational company on the border between Germany and the Netherlands. Years later, thanks to the economic crisis, the company downsizes and moves its operations to Russia. Fatma loses her job, but is promised a position in Russia if and when management needs a new employee. Leaving the Netherlands and her estranged boyfriend Bartal behind, Fatma comes to Istanbul. She stays with Bahar, an old friend.

The novel opens with a chance encounter between Kerem and Fatma on an Istanbul island, where she is stranded during a sou'wester storm. Kerem stokes her homesickness and longing for a sense of place. Instead of waiting for the company's call to Russia, she decides to settle down in the city and rents a furnished apartment. The apartment belongs to Nevin, a playwright who also

composes fairy tales. When she moves in, Fatma discovers the fairy tales Nevin has written. She listens to the story of her elderly Armenian neighbor Naira, and she scours the city for Kerem, hoping for a second chance meeting. Everything she sees, reads, and hears reminds her of her own history. The reader finds out about Fatma only bit by bit, over the course of her recollections. Harbored in the story of her past are her father, mother, and college boyfriend Barış, but also her Kurdish grandmother, who never told fairy tales but was known for improvising elegies after a death. Finally, Fatma indeed bumps into Kerem again, though her expectations aren't fulfilled. Her disappointment and heartache compel her to reunite with her mother, who had abandoned her as a child.

The *End of the Elegy* starts out as a love story, but the reader soon confronts the isolating culture of urban mega-centers. Istanbul is changing rapidly, as neighborhoods are demolished for the sake of urban transformation. At the same time, relationships between men and women are riddled with mistrust, and Fatma and Kerem have no more than a one-night stand. Love—the thing she yearns and hopes for from this relationship—isn't in the cards. Indeed, many of the women around Fatma are going through the same thing. In a society stuck and directionless between traditional (Islamic) and Western cultures, the modern woman is either sexually exploited or lonely.

At the end of the novel, Fatma—now called up to Russia—tells her story to Nevin, the owner of her apartment. She tells her all about Kerem, but in the course of it narrates her whole life story. While speaking, Fatma realizes she has always been improvising elegies, just like her grandmother. The elegy soothes her as she utters it and confronts her pain; it is transformed into a fairy tale. The novel ends with Nevin telling the tale of Fatma's yearnings.

## **The End of the Elegy**

Menekşe Toprak

Translated by Ilker Hepkaner and David Gramling

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It was entirely the sou'wester's fault, she thought much later on. If I hadn't been stuck on that island during the storm, I'd have just passed through, gazed the city like a stranger, and carried on living like usual. But that wasn't how it happened. In the hearts of most, that kind of a storm would have sparked homesickness, but she felt utterly freed by it. Maybe it was because she was for the first time harboring the kind of thoughts she'd always considered arcane. After all, she was born into a landlocked city, had lived only in two landlocked cities, and whenever she heard nautical terms like sou'wester, Euraquilo, porthole, groin, she had that feeling of cracking open a window into mysterious, distant lives. Such terms were this city's possessions and today she was standing among people who were their real owners, who lived engrained in them.

Standing in the waiting room of the ferry building, she watched the passengers waiting for their departure. Most of them were neither irritated nor surprised, as if something they already knew was just being confirmed. Either they clung to their cell phones, like the young, curly-haired woman right to her side, telling the person on the other end of the line how they can't make it back to the city tonight, or they were hastily leaving the building, taking harsh steps out onto one of the streets toward the foothills of the island, struggling to not get knocked over by the wind. But there were, too, non-locals who had no

idea what to do: they harangued the port clerk, as if they'd found the person responsible for the sou'wester; others looked helplessly at each other, or asked questions of the other passengers... She's watching them, but not mingling. It's almost as if someone had just now invented a game and she was there to vouch for how well the players were following the rules; she found pleasure in being the unaccountable outsider gazing in.

For some reason, later on, she noticed the old American couple, Jill and Thomas. Their quavering and perturbed hands locked into one another's, the husband and wife looked utterly aged as they stood there gazing around, as if pleading for assistance. "They're looking for me, they want my help," she thought. She didn't care. Just as the old lady's head turned towards the ferry building door, she shot out onto the street.

The dark clouds overlapped as they moved along, the wind whistled. Awnings squeaked, shutters cracked, pieces of paper whirled about. The lemon tree in front of the restaurant, which a couple hours ago had been her own likeness—a thin-wristed, elegant woman frozen with one leg over the other in a dancer's pose—was now shaking, an invisible hand grasping her body, dragged by her hair by another invisible hand.

As she tried to push back the hair flailing all around her face, she hiked her backpack up on her shoulder, and buttoned her long cardigan's front buttons. She walked a while, then ambled around two guys busy taking plastic chairs and tables inside from the porch of the restaurant, she passed under the long and narrow pergola along the seaside. At a corner of the pergola, a couple of cats cowered like wisps of fur. But the dark sea was choppy with anger, enormous water blocks sweeping white foam to shore. It wasn't there to console the cats, apparently.

She breathed heavily in. Exhaling the humid air in her lungs, she felt a bit cleaner and refreshed. Is this what they call lightness? Knowing the limits of time, but standing upon the eternity of the moment... If she had only one night left in her life, would this thing we call a moment linger like this? Humans get bogged down fearing the future, maybe because they think they'll live forever. But to take life lightly, to grasp things not as disasters but as new pathways! To believe that life can flow into different seas, to be tempted to start everything over again, from ground zero, to live the moment without thinking anything, like now, looking, watching, never-minding — all possible! Possible! All her worries seemed polished away, now that she'd learned what a sou'wester could do. The knot in her throat that had been nagging at her for weeks now, the knot that almost felt like a tree trunk pressing down on her, but that persistent malaise was no longer there. Sweeping away anything in its path, the wind had taken away the tree trunk too.

When she finally heard the sounds, which at first had been hoarse and anonymous hums but later crystallized into dogs barking, she turned her head toward the shore. Two dogs with raggedy fur were running towards the pergola she was standing under, with a man behind them shouting "Heal!" As they approached, the man's face became clearer. His black eyes, his symmetric face, the hair over his fleshy lips, his dark skin... Very familiar, very beautiful and—maybe because so beautiful—also inscrutable. Had she not caught a glimpse of a smile on that face, that warm gaze, she would've recalled the day of the sou'wester differently: as a joyful experience, probably in shorter sentences. It was an interesting day, she would say. I met an American couple on my way to the island. I wandered the island for a while with them, then on my own. A warm wind started blowing, then it went sour and started to roar. I was stuck on the island, I was hungry, I had to look for a restaurant, then a hotel, but I

was content enough I suppose, even happy. As everyone was looking around for shelter from the wind, a young man was out playing with his dogs. The man was handsome, maybe that's why he was so very self-aware—fond of being gazed upon and desired. He was in character, like the guy in *Dancing with Wolves*, almost. Despite how obviously cliché, how infinitely childish those male characters were.

But she wasn't put off by the man, nor was she scared of the dogs running at her. Even though one of the phobias she'd battled for years but failed to overcome was her fear of dogs. In childhood, she found every dog threatening, except some of the lazy ones—all the dogs roaming around in gangs, guarding streets, jerking along garden fences barking with spumy saliva and appalling, corroded teeth, every one of them was threatening, every one out for blood. So many years having passed since then, it did seem she'd gotten over her phobia of pet dogs, until the next dog bark made her heart pound faster.

She wasn't scared this time, no. Maybe she did get a bit leery when the dogs sauntered around her, when their wet noses reached out but didn't quite touch, just started to sniff around her skirt. The dogs' skin exposed amid their mangy fur looked like so many patches, and the scab scars over them made the patches more visible. Though his tousled, curly hair and scruff might have suggested he was a rambler of some sort, his outfit was too clean for him to be the owners of these dogs. He looked like an educated, middle-class hobo in his navy blue raincoat, beige flax pants, dark sneakers.

"Aren't these street dogs?" She almost shouted as she tried to suppress the wind's roar.

"Our island dogs."

"You live here?"

“Sort of, for now. But I split my time with the city,” said the man. He approached, bent over, pet the light-colored dog on the neck as it almost stubbed its head on his leg, then he pushed the animal’s jutting ribs toward it off. “Come on boys, get out of here, now!” He straightened up and said “Let me guess, you’re from the city...”

“Yes.”

How enchanting it was to say: “Yes, I am from there, the city.” Really, where is the city? Crowded Beyoğlu, Bahar’s neighborhood Kadıköy, the area around the airport that she knows best... Until last year, she tended to stay at a hotel close to the company’s branch near the airport when she visited the city once or twice a year for a meeting or to promote a new product. Since the visits lasted only a couple days, she would take the plane back as soon as possible without seeing any other parts of the city. That’s why that one neighborhood—growing larger in bits and pieces, growing taller with every new year’s skyscraper—seemed to her like a city in its own right. An ordinary landlocked city with no connection whatsoever beyond it, distant to the sea and to history.

When will the ferries start back up? Where do non-islanders stuck on the island go at night to stay? Important as they were, these questions were rattling around through her mind just for chit-chat’s sake. Her questions faded away as soon as she noticed the fixed gaze of the child, right across the pergola, walking in a see-through raincoat, his tiny body almost flying off in the wind. The boy was carrying a banner under his raincoat, right on his chest, that read: “Martlet Hotel. Clean and Reasonable Prices.” Just then, raindrops started hitting his raincoat, falling into little sluices. The storm had slowed down and she could hear the rain tapping on the roof of the pergola.

“It was obvious,” the man said as he drew in under the eaves. “You...” was his next word, but then he turned around. “Kerem!” someone was calling him. “Kerem, oh man, where have you been?”

A man with long, blond hair and two women, beside the guys who had hastened their efforts as the rain pressed down on them, were looking towards the pergola. One of the women was short, round-faced. She could sense a careful stare coming from her, but wasn't entirely sure. The other girl, apathetic and self-involved, was pushing her hair out of her sweatshirt hood against the shoulders of the tall, blond man. Now the dogs were circling around the three of them.

Kerem pulled his hoodie on as he leaned towards his friends, and scolded “Where have *you* been?” He kissed his friends on the cheek swiftly. He kissed the petite girl just like he kissed the other two: Friendly, with no handshake, on the cheek. So the girl was not his girlfriend. Blond guy scolded back: “Oh man, stay cool!” She couldn't hear if he was addressing one of the dogs or Kerem. Now, they were all laughing together. When Kerem shifted position and made his face plain to her, his radiant smile reappeared. His proper teeth reminded her of a commercial. It reminded her of the mouth of a woman after biting an apple with her white, healthy teeth, fresh like right after she'd breastfed. His straight posture was unique to well-fed men who worked out regularly, his slender bone structure, his adam's apple bouncing as he laughed... She sensed an irritating churn flowing through a narrow streambed from her chest to her guts. She knew where exactly her guts were, yes yes, her guts were in her body, but beyond that, she felt her heart pumping blood to its veins. The body wasn't moving, but the fluids inside were running at full gallop. When she sensed the petite girl was looking her way, she turned her head to the

sea. She pulled on both sides of her cardigan and firmly crossed her arms as if she was holding her own body together.

Their voices were becoming distant now. When she looked back, she noticed the four friends were walking towards the restaurant across from the ferry building. The blond guy wrapped his arm around his girlfriend's waist, who buried her head in his chest; the other girl was walking so coy and delicate... A woman's voice got lost in the storm's roar: "We must try another method. More striking, more astonishing, you know?" This must have been the petite one. The girl was moving her arms and hands to excess, one could tell she was very devoted to this topic that demanded more striking, more astonishing methods. Was it jealousy, what she was feeling? Something like shyness, maybe. Shyness, being excluded, lack of belonging, the resentment of not being in the group... When Kerem suddenly turned around, she made a gesture she'd long forgotten, her hand touched her nose. So the memory hadn't been forgotten; that bump, as if it had never been removed years ago, would come back and settle in its former place. It maintained its existence just like any other limb, once detached from the body, would still recall itself. Her nose under her hand was beautiful, and in the right place, but the former bump was still on her mind. So was her age. She was turning 37 three months later, and for a couple weeks now the two lines on her forehead had been becoming more visible, more bifurcated.

Inside the restaurant, the tables covered in white, scattered smells of wet clothes, wool, and human breath recently meeting the heat but still not completely intertwining and melding with it... Wet footprints on beige, slick marble, shadows of people clasping hands and looking for an empty table,

waiters rushing... It was like she was the last passenger to enter a roadside restaurant, after waking up from slumber at the back of the bus on a rainy night. The only thing missing was that smell of green beans and olive oil, kept in the serving tray too long, mousaka, white bread, and overdue tea being delivered to all the tables. But she was seeing familiar faces from the ferry building: There was the one she'd eavesdropped on while she was on the phone, the two middle-aged women who'd accosted the clerk of the ferry building, the young mother of two... All having given in to the inevitable, relaxing, chilling out. And Kerem and his friends! The quartet sat down at table right by the column dividing the restaurant, they seemed quite casual, as if they were house regulars.

With her mind on Kerem's table she patted her forehead dry, and she gazed around with a familiar unrest. A hand, she expected, might wave to her anytime, a wink inviting her to the table, a smile... Though barely, she could still recall the cafeteria, humming along with noise of a TV hung on the wall in a dark corner. Faces together, whispering, turning their eyes away to avoid eye contact, groups with their backs turned to her, her uneasy gait at 17 or 18... Her mouth dry, the smell of the wet cardigan and the sweat of her armpits...

She had an eye on a narrow table not too far from Kerem's group, then her eyes landed on Thomas and Jill, sitting by the window. Thomas was inviting her over, pointing to the empty chair by his wife.

She took off the wet cardigan as she sat down, straightened up her bra strap which had fallen over her upper arm. Now she was relieved. As she sipped the rakı Thomas served—Thomas was drinking dry rakı, and Jill red wine—a sweet flanerıe overcame her.

From her seat she could see Kerem's shoulders, how while speaking he kept turning his head toward the blond friend sitting by him, the gestures of his

hands, arms. When the petite girl was looking elsewhere, Kerem turned his head around; scanned the place with his eyes, stopped when their eyes met as if he had found what he was looking for, smiled, and—as if promising to come back to her later—put his hand on the back of the blond guy’s chair and returned to his friends.

Thomas, who—if he’d been from around here instead of America—might well have broken out into an Istanbul folk song over his rakı, was an entertaining old guy, who loved wining, dining, and good conversation. His natural cheer kept his chin and hair alive. Despite his wrinkled skin and shriveled flesh, his white hair was vibrant and shiny. His wife, who looked bored and tired, was an active-type woman with an obviously worked-out body and a wrinkled, long neck.

Although she wasn’t able to catch some of the words they pronounced in their American accent, or poured out in a mumbled stutter, she listened to the couple nonetheless. That said, the table across from them had most of her attention, as did the many and various names she hadn’t thought of for a long time now, some names with forgotten faces, old corridors of the institute, classrooms... How serious everything was back then, how much she would make out of a single negative stare, whether close-up or distant, how meaningful each one of them were. For instance, the day she caught Koray’s eyes. What did she, and only a few other students, get on the statistics exam, 75? 80? Back in those years, the only way to channel her anger, no, the only way to actually appease or tame the anger, was to be a good student. But her intelligence—actually she had no idea what intelligence was, she wasn’t even sure whether it existed, though she was used to hearing about it or proving that it existed by her high grades at school—based on which she, or others, gained confidence during the beginning of the English prep courses in the second semester of

freshman year and yet, though she worked really hard, didn't stand out among students mostly from private or magnet schools. Was it because the classes were taught in English, or because she was in a strange city, or because the thing they call her intelligence was actually not capable of thriving beyond the borders of the neighborhood she grew up in; she didn't know but by then she'd been paralyzed for a year-and-a-half, and luck was not on her side. Later on, something happened: the intransigence of her seditious intelligence was vanquished by her first high grade in statistics. Still, her success in class didn't translate into rest of her life. Yes, she would repeatedly catch Koray looking, but these stares would become distant and unreachable as soon they left the classroom. Maybe a slight head gesture signaling their acquaintance, that's all. Koray, Selda, Cenk, the blond and brown-haired roommates... They were a gang. When they stepped out of the classroom, not only their stares but also their language, their predetermined and shared prospects, their destinies would change. Their expensive brand jeans, the music they listened to, their tans from the summer, the lovers they kissed with such ease, some of them sporting distant, fulfilled looks even at their age... Her anxiety would grow as she walked by them, she would turn beet-red. Her clothes would sag, her hatred of her threadbare sweater would smolder, she would find no place to put her hands and arms. Worst was when her eyes caught Koray's, her hand would immediately land on the bump of her nose. Then there was Meryem, saying "Don't be silly, your nose is perfectly fine, it is just a bit aquiline," which never consoled her. Walking towards Meryem, she would routinely put all the blame on her, "She's been clingy like a leech since day one," she would tell herself. Regardless, when Meryem wasn't at school, she wouldn't know which table to sit at, how to share what with whom. She'd glance over at the books, the handouts of the union members sitting together in the darkest corner of the

cafeteria whispering to each other, but she would give them a wide berth. They would talk to the young kids from God-knows-what corner of Anatolia, who were now completely strangers to her though she used to chat and share class notes with them. Were they a 'gang' too, from afar? The scrawny one was interested in Meryem, while Seyit, with his face full of adolescent pimples despite being at least eighteen, was all into her. She was displeased by this interest. Her face would go sour, and her gaze would search for Koray. Meryem on the other hand was obsessed with Cihan, who of this trio was the most obviously from the Eastern provinces, but she tried to keep it to herself. The boy was brown-haired, tall. He had a confident look. Meltem would occasionally make jokes about them speaking in their language, then gripe "What are they talking about? Huh?" Her face would sour, her disgruntled looks would flush with suspicion. Then she would go on complaining, saying "As if they don't speak Turkish." She would tell Meryem "It's none of our business, they can speak whatever they want." But she would never tell her that they were talking about this one blonde girl's beautiful legs and eyes, or how one of the boys apparently couldn't tuition because his father had yet again flaked on sending his allowance money, or how Cihan hates his major, and his economics classes. As a matter of fact, Meryem didn't know that she could understand their language at all. But she wouldn't dare speaking with the boys in their language, because though she understood it she couldn't speak it, and caught words only in bits and pieces.

She felt exhausted at all these thoughts passing through her mind, How much she had dwelled on Koray's face freshman year, then forgot it in sophomore year, even right after a brief glimpse of him. Later on, as she focused back on the mezze on the table and her conversation with the couple, she forgot about Koray, and Meryem, with whom she lost touch after

sophomore year, forgot her anxiety at eighteen. She stopped staring at Kerem's quivering, laughing shoulders, his shapely hands holding the raki glass, the petite girl's facial expressions.

When Thomas started declaring how the Greek mousaka they had in Munich was different from the one they had in Greece, and the one in Greece from the one in Turkey, the topic-to-be was clearly how cultures and food become hybrid migrants just like people do. Thomas was claiming to have eaten the best-ever döner kebab in Berlin, and his wife was explaining this away on the basis that Thomas had German parents and grew up with his mother's cooking: "See, Turkish döner in Germany is served with a sauce geared towards the German palate." Thomas objected, claiming Americans consume more sauce than Germans, and if his palate has developed in this way, he owes it not to his mother but to American food culture. But Jill was determined: "No, I've never seen them serving döner kebab in America, but rest assured, if they did, people would have eaten it with ketchup. Thomas! Look at your name. Typical German name!"

"Thomas is not exclusively German, it's common in all the Christian cultures" was his rebuke. "For Italians Thomaso, for Polish Thomazs. You know of course, the name comes from Saint Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ." Thomas was counting out other names: Peter, Mary, Mark, Eve... Disturbed by all the emphasis on his Germanness, he continued: "The same goes for the Muslim societies..."

The table across from them had started to move. Kerem stood up, he was approaching her. How old is he anyway? 29, 30? No indication of hair loss, not one single silver hair. Worked-out, well-fed, slender but muscular body. A cute green turtle head on his beige shirt, sleeves rolled up over his wrists onto his long arms. Kerem was coming towards her with his turtle and its black eyes.

“Your name for example,” said Thomas meanwhile, “is the name of an important Muslim leader.”

She noticed only later that the man was talking to her. Thomas was saying her name but pronouncing it wrong. In some kind of Arabic, Persian or American accent. She wouldn't have it. With an eye on Kerem, she said “Fat-ma” with emphasis on each of the syllables and a tonality he'd surely be able to hear. “Fat-ma!” As Kerem passed by her with his hands in his pockets, she thought his elbow touched her hair, and then the wind caressed her face. She turned back. Over beyond the bathroom sign, Kerem was heading downstairs. He had a swaggering way of walking, she thought. But this was a casual judgment that just came and went, she didn't pay much attention to it. Kerem's hairy arms, and the green turtle with its eyes mischievously popping out of the beige T-shirt made their ways to the most delicate, the most alive corner of her mind.

After the storm, the sea moved gravely, as if last night's chaos had never happened at all. The island was like the worn-out face of a disturbed patient, looking around in awe after a long episode of intense pain had subsided. Windows opened their eyes to the outside, shutters quietly swung as if breathing, awnings crooked here and there in front of shops, tree branches broken but still hanging on, scattered garbage bags, Coke cans, cats scratching garbage bins, dogs roaming around... And there, the lemon tree in front of the restaurant! Survived the storm without damage, back to its posture, greeting frontwards with its elbows.

Fatma turned and looked to where Thomas and Jill were sitting in the closed passenger area of the ferry. But the unruly sunlight kept her from seeing inside. She was sure though that the yesterday's adventure had been enough for them both, and now the couple was quietly sitting in a protected corner of the closed section, anxiously awaiting the return to their hotel in Sultanahmet. This old couple had travelled almost the whole world, fearlessly it seemed, but now they were disconcerted, as if they'd fallen away from the world as they know it. So there are in fact rules to adventures, to going to exotic places. Nomadism had conferred on the old people the medications they had to carry, the habits, the systems that worked seamlessly for them: Pills to balance the one's blood pressure and the other's diabetes, one's aching bones and the other's wool pajamas enveloping its rheumatoid body... Maybe you can protect yourself against the weary duress of nomadism only if you drag along all your routines and habits. This reminded her of the story of three Polish workers Thomas had told last night.

Three plank-flooring craftsman, more or less famous in Vienna for their mastery, precision, and cheap labor were working on the house of a woman, who'd then told the story to Thomas. They'd been spending the night in their van. The woman offered the three of them one of her rooms instead, but when she entered the room to get something she'd forgotten there, she encountered the following scene: a vestment covering a cardboard box, two lit candles, an icon of Mother Mary, two framed family portraits... And two men and a woman eating their dinner of nothing but onion omelet. Wrapped in the smell of resin, the craftsmen had furnished their home with family portraits and a Mother Mary icon, baby Jesus in her arms. They had forgotten their nomadism thanks to these familiar objects.

Fatma thought about why this story affected her so much, as she failed at falling asleep in the humid hotel room last night. She'd taken nothing with her when she set off for Potsdam with the master's degree scholarship she'd won twelve years ago, not even a picture, or a figurine, or another object to remind her of her faith. Just a couple of new novels, one or two CDs, an English economics dictionary, a small German-Turkish dictionary, casual clothing, that's all. She'd left this country as if nothing remained of it after a fire. Right after finishing her master's degree, she applied to the marketing department of a multinational telecommunications firm, which was located on the border of the Netherlands and Germany, as if exiled from the big cities. She worked in the Warsaw branch of the company for a while, and there she met Bartal, who was commuting among the headquarters and the branches. She'd been more or less silent while doing all of this. She kept silent while talking, kept silent while laughing, kept silent while not talking. When she got promoted to marketing director for Eastern Europe and got her own office in the headquarters, she was happy with the prosperity and success that came with

it, but yet again she kept silent. When she analyzed consumer profiles in Turkey for market research and made charts with numbers of all sizes, and the department manager said “Congrats, good job!”, this made her happy too, but yet again she kept silent. When she worked a couple of months in the Turkmenistan branch, and another couple of months in the Berlin branch, she kept silent there too. While having dinner with Bartal on a boat on the Rhine, even when she couldn’t contain herself as Bartal held her hand for the first time, she kept silent. Seemed as if she kept silent when she made love to him, when resentful towards him, and when fighting with him. If she’d ever had her own genuine voice, a shadow, a mist always neatly covered over that voice. Her actions, her words were being executed by someone who was not exactly her. For a moment last night, she’d almost forgotten about that silence and uneasiness, and as she heard her own voice, still unknown to her, her perception grew sharper.

When she realized a familiar silhouette was standing right in front of her, she almost lost her balance over the guardrail she was leaning on. Kerem was on the shore, and one of the dogs was with him.

With his plastic bags full of bread and newspapers, she felt such a local air about him that she once again thought about how he’d left the restaurant with his friends last night. As they were heading out, the petite girl had said, “I am beat, Kerem, you should make me some tea!” The girl was almost shouting, as if she wanted to make sure that people around heard. Kerem, on the other hand, leaned towards her as he spoke, and put his arm over her shoulder. They must have gone to Kerem’s place, and sprawled out over comfy couches or maybe even floor cushions, however his place was. Kerem will have made tea for his friends. They must have chatted, enthused together, discussed the girl’s striking plan. Then, under the secret shelter of the night... Was she jealous

when she thought about Kerem making love to this girl? She wasn't jealous of Kerem, but of the situation, she was just reminded that it's not that easy to take hold of something even in her arm's reach, something just missed and already forgotten.

Kerem had stopped paying attention to the dog, and looked directly at Fatma. When his hand, now free of the bags, raised slightly to say hello, the resentful voice inside her disappeared, and Fatma almost couldn't contain herself. Maybe nothing is as it seems: those who look unequivocally, permanently content about their lives may be in search of something new, chasing after others to find it. If only she could dare come down off the deck, if only she could make a move towards Kerem, who was standing there looking at her, though he was clearly supposed to go back to his friends after shopping for breakfast

But the motor of the ferry was starting up, two ferry dock workers were untying the ropes tied to iron hooks on the ground. She was leaving with some anxiety about leaving but also some joy about life in general. When Kerem gradually receded into a little speck then completely disappeared, Fatma's indistinctly raised hand was still in the air. The island grew farther away, then the wind started up, white seafoam chased the ferry from below, seagulls from above.

The wind out on the sea was so harsh that even the seagulls sometimes lost their balance. But the birds were determined, rambunctious, rake... The seagulls of Rotterdam or the Baltic Sea were neither this nimble nor this boisterous. Do the birds also assume the soul of the cities they live in? Birds in central Europe fly more individually, more humbly, quieter; these ones are so alive and insatiable, perfect hunters, chasing the pieces of bread thrown by the little old man leaning on the guardrail.

Her gaze shifted to the man throwing bread. The man was clapping awkwardly, again and again, at the birds competing for the thrown bread, he was laughing with a juvenile delight that didn't suit his male body. The laughter of a man who remembered a childhood where laughing or crying out loud were deemed equally disgraceful. The man threw a piece of simit between two seagulls; the larger one snatched the treasure. The man's lower front teeth like yellow nails anchored in flesh... Fatma turned her head to the front of the ferry. They were approaching a giant peninsula, imposing inclines on both sides of it jutting toward them.

That's it, the city she used to watch on TV, envious. She used to get together here with other employees of the Frankfurt company for a week. She had finished her morning shower in her hotel room, and she was blow-drying her hair in front of the TV. The morning report was on the Turkish news channel. The city lay behind the anchorwoman with all its life and lives, under the crystal skies. She was watching how the anchorwoman talked, rather than what she was saying, she was looking at the traffic jam on the bridge behind her, the sea below the bridge, the silhouette of the city. She felt as if she was being pushed away from the middle of the city by the broadcast on the screen. As if she hadn't left her homeland voluntarily but was forced to exile, extracted like discharge. Perched on the edge of the bed just like that, a wet towel in her hand and her hair dripping on her lap, she watched this city she'd visited only once or twice and started sobbing. She felt completely detached from the world behind the screen. Even though this world was not the one she came from anyway. She'd grown up in a central Anatolian city with neither sea, nor ferries, nor long bridges, and then she'd spent seven years in Ankara. Still, she went through a different set of emotions: when she was away: people were

collectively experiencing something, they were founding and developing a life in opposition to hers, all in solidarity against her; and she was spending her years watching and trying to understand all of it.

The rays of the sun jittered on the waves, the endless water gave off a spritely glimmer. As the ferry approached the land rising above the mansions on the shore, she said to herself “Why must this be a temporary stop-over?” Had I been just waiting to be called away to another country so I wouldn’t have to return to a life filled with the panic of my early youth, to have to feel anything—because I was too afraid of broken dreams? In this city, there must be a job for me, a house, something to fight for... This time she saw the light of Marmara Sea shining over the domes of the mosques on the historic peninsula, which was now all one green-grey color.

She was at the entrance to one of the parallel streets. The street reminded her of narrow canals surrounded by tall sluices, undulating towards eternity. Beige, gray, smoke-colored buildings standing shoulder to shoulder, their rusty façades suggested a harmonious and orderly picture. As she walked, this order fell away. Vehicles parked on both sides of the street, stoops at building entrances, sign boards standing in front of shops, garbage bags torn apart by street animals and garbage men, contemptuous cats on sidewalks and front doorsteps, water bowls placed by the buildings for the cats, lazy dogs with city inspection ear-tags... An old woman was swiftly walking in front of her while a middle-aged transvestite with balding long hair passed on the opposite sidewalk. One could hear the sound of a bell from very far off.

When she arrived at the front of the apartment building she was looking for, she looked up. This narrow, black building resembled a thin, old man stuck between giants; its windows were dark, and the white paint was flaking. She thought she saw a face behind the iron-barred window of the ground floor apartment, she recoiled. Now she was able to put her finger on something she'd noticed but couldn't put words to since coming down this street and looking at door numbers: On the street here and there curtains were opened part way, faces appeared at the windows, uneasy hands took the place of faces, and parted curtains closed abruptly. Fatma sensed that she'd found the middle class people, people who understood the concept of shame, but couldn't bring themselves to openly stare at people. Just as she was thinking this was a good enough reason as any to turn around, the iron door she was standing at opened, and a small, old woman appeared in front of her.

Until a couple of years ago, Fatma was never able to imagine the youth of elderly people. It always felt as if the elderly had always been old, the young always young, and the kids always children. People were never younger or older than the moment she encountered and got to know them. This woman, however, with her vigilant and suspicious ways of looking, reminded her that she indeed used to be young, and is still curious. Her short, curly hair was thick but too grey considering how old she actually was, her eyes had little sparks of curiosity in them, refuting her age.

“Miss Fatma?”

“Yes, that’s me.”

“Welcome, I am Naira. We spoke over the phone.”

Miss Naira was tiny. The objects around this tiny body were almost expanding, dilating in import in comparison. The bulk of keys in her hands, for instance, or the abrupt growth of the door she stood by... On the other hand, the woman stood therewith her decisive and straight posture as if reminding Fatma of something with the keys. When a few hours later she thought what that might meant, the other elderly women she knew came to mind. The elderly women of her childhood who held the keys of locked chests and vaults, who grew stronger though they shrank and got smaller, who were despotic towards daughters-in-law and resistant to sons and husbands, but always loving and caring toward the grandchildren.

The landing smelled of soft soap. Under the light leaking ungenerously through frosted glass, the stone floor looked clean, as if recently washed. This smell of hygiene and coolness gave the narrow entrance a feeling of spaciousness. She could see water meters arranged inside a niche right by the door, and power meters in a cabinet above, with its door ajar. Had the old lady not displayed the

interior of the cabinet by opening it all the way, and then closing its door with the uneasy temper of an over-anxious housewife, she might have never realized it all. Had she not heard the rattle behind her, she might have not looked as carefully as she did at the door of the apartment under the staircase.

Along with the rattle coming out of the apartment, she could hear a voice hissing, as if it came from a toothless woman, shouting “Orhan, my son, where are you?” Just then the door opened, a thin man with a wide forehead and young face came out of the door. Fatma changed her mind, the reason why his face looked youthful was due to the young, even childlike shape of his eyes. His yellowish pale skin seemed to have never been exposed to sun. He was tugging at his terry cloth sweatpants under his t-shirt, while trying to fit into his closed-back slippers which he’d apparently pulled on at the last minute. Wasn’t his face the one she’d seen earlier?

The toothless woman was hissing: “Why is this TV not working, Orhan?”

The man at the door almost turned back, but he didn’t. His sharp shot went back and forth rapidly between the two women.

“What is going on Miss Naria?”

“Nothing, you go back to your house. The lady is here to look at the apartment upstairs, Nevin’s place.”

The woman inside: “What’s happening, who came, Orhan?”

The man turned his head back toward the apartment and shouted “Nothing Mom,” then fixed his eyes right on Fatma as he turned his head back to then. Fatma grasped onto the iron stair rails. As she followed the woman up the stairs, for a moment she thought the man was still standing in the same spot watching them—though she knew at this point it was impossible—his stare upon her legs and buttocks. She straightened up her posture.

“She’d been decorating recently. Everything was renovated. But she had to leave before enjoying all that.”

At first she couldn’t tell whom this old woman was talking about in such resentful terms, standing at the entrance of the narrow hallway. But the woman continued on explaining: “Actually, all the apartments are identical in the building. Two bedrooms in each. But Nevin merged the two rooms when she bought the place.” She went in through the open door right by the entryway. “And here, the bedroom...” She went silent as if she grasped the ridiculousness of declaring the name of a space that was patently a bedroom. Her hand kept on talking though, she pointed out the bed, its frame only a few centimeters off the floor.

Fatma touched the headboard as if greeting her own old furniture. She’d had the same bed, a green one, for a while. She always liked the bed maximum two hand-widths above the ground, and she liked this bed’s familiarity and smoke color. Right by the bed, there was a small nightstand, made of the same wood, and a night lamp stood on the nightstand. On the varnished hardwood floors, an orange rug, a massive wardrobe, a standing iron-framed mirror right by it... In the living room on the other side of the hallway, another familiar piece of furniture: a light and cheap wood table, which was actually compressed fiber despite its oaken look, a white bookcase one meter in width... This piece of furniture gave the precise illusion of a handmade masterpiece, but was nothing but a fabricated piece of furniture that could only assuage lower-class antique enthusiasts, and in every city she briefly passed through, it reappeared. So did the convertible couch with its full size bed and even the felt blankets, diagonally thrown over two sides of the couch so as to refrain from too tidy an

image. Just like prepackaged meals thrown from freezers into microwave ovens, which taste exactly the same with the exact same quality, such furniture found its permanent place in people's homes all around the world. Clean, simple. A couple of years into their use, some parts wear out. The shelves of the bookcase can no longer stand the weight of heavy books, rapidly deteriorating until they get thrown out. By now she was like a Western tourist, bored of having to judge which food in this exotic country wouldn't upset her stomach, and she took a deep breath when she came across a McDonald's restaurant. This do-it-yourself furniture, the eternal reminders of ephemerality, now made her feel settled.

Past the door opening onto the balcony, she could hear the clacks of hammers, hums of motors, children's voices, the distant rattle of the city. Pale buildings under the ink-blue sky leaned on the hill in an exquisite chaos.

Propping one hand on the table and the other on her hip, the old woman was finally tired and silent, staring at everything as if discovering it for the first time, as a stranger would. As Fatma turned back to the room from the entrance of the balcony, the woman walked over to the couch limping—Fatma just realized the limp—and sat down with her hands on her knees.

“Miss Naira, I like the house!” she said.

“The house is nice, yeah. Who did you say told you the place was up for rent?”

“A friend. A friend who knows Nevin.”

“Is that so? Well, if you're friends with Nevin, then you all must have sorted it out together.”

“No, I don't know her. They just gave me your phone number. You're ultimately supposed to make the decision.”

Miss Naira's face brightened. She was happy, like a kid finally invited into the game. It was so clear, just by how she subtly shifted on the couch. As she sat back, her feet came up off the ground. One of her slippers slipped off unexpectedly, followed by the other one. She wiggled her bare, swollen feet, freed from the slippers. She turned slightly on her side, held one of her legs up, and stretched it out on the couch. Green varicose were showing under her white skin, running up her inner leg towards her knee.

"Please excuse me, I had an operation on this leg three months ago. Even when I get a bit tired, it starts hurting so bad. Let me rest for a while, then we'll go upstairs. If you like the house, we'll have some coffee, and talk. I live two floors up."

"Do you manage the building's affairs?"

"Oh my dear little one, no. This is a building like no other. It's a family building. My husband was an architect, he built it himself. It used to be so cheerful back in the day. Every door was unlocked. Every day a daughter-in-law would cook, and we would call everyone into one of the apartments to eat together. But now, everyone has left for a different place. To France, to America. Another in-law was in Germany. Praise be, she lived until 90, she passed last year. My sons didn't go abroad, but they also didn't want to live in this neighborhood. They moved out to gated estates in suburbs. May God watch over my little ones, they are doing well, very well. They own their own bosses, they make a ton. They invite me over constantly: 'Think of it, clean air, lots of greenery, a swimming pool.' But what am I gonna do with a pool? I was 17 when I got married, I first opened my eyes in this house my husband built. He was nice, my husband, he bought whatever I wished for. He was nice, thank God, a bit jealous, but he was nice."

She was going to continue, but she hesitated. She looked at Fatma's face carefully, and then continued: "We're Armenian. But we don't treat anyone differently. Look at them downstairs; they have been our tenants for 20 years now. Never mind Orhan's crazy stares. He has no one other than his old mother, he's a poor, frightened man. After all, the neighborhood has changed a lot. It's now filled with people we don't know or don't have any idea about. That's why he comes to the door when he hears a sound. It's good in a way. Strangers wouldn't dare to come into the apartment. I hope you are as warm as Nevin was. Whenever she stopped for coffee, she would ask me things. She used to ask about my mom, our family, our forebears... Just when we became good friends, when I thought a true companion had arrived in this building, she left. As I said, my husband built this apartment building. No one has damaged one brick of it for the last 50 years. Hasn't damaged but... Oh, I wish they'd let us be."

"What do you mean let you be?"

"Oh God, how can I say, my daughter. Well-bred men are wandering around here, the land is close to the city, it's valuable somehow. Look at that street over there... They started building a hotel. They tell me they're going to buy up everything around here and build big apartment buildings. Thank God the owners of the apartments aren't enthusiastic."

The woman was silent once again, she massaged her leg with a grimace on her face. It seemed to Fatma she was mumbling, uttering some incomprehensible names. Not long afterward, Miss Naira caught her second wind. She dropped her legs to the floor, searched around for her slippers, leaned forward.

"Who are you, tell me. You said on the phone you were coming from where?"

“From the Netherlands. The company I worked for folded...”

“So you’re unemployed.”

“Sort of. I don’t think I will have a hard time finding a job here. And it’s not a big deal. I have some savings. I can pay six months in advance if you wish.”

“No husband, no kids? Parents? I don’t know, you can’t be coming just out of the blue...”

“I didn’t get married. Parents died when I was a kid,” said Fatma and added quietly. “In a car accident.”

“Peace be upon them, what can I say?”

“So, Miss Naira? I’ll be paying six months’ rent in advance.”

Miss Naria looked at Fatma’s face at length, looked her up and down like a tradesman checking the quality of the merchandise, “Look,” she said finally, “I don’t like words like Miss or Auntie, call me Sis.” Then she sighed. “You look clean. So is Nevin. She, just like you, looks into a person’s face modestly, with grief. Women at your age, I don’t know what you’re doing all alone. From one homeland to the next. No kids, no family... All this loneliness—for how long, my daughter?”

Miss Naira’s talk didn’t bother Fatma, not yet. Now she had a furnished house, savings enough for a year till she finds a new job, a new life in this city...

In the pitch dark, her eyes seeing nothing, fixed on the ceiling, still somewhere inside the dream she'd been having, she is passing between rooms, wandering in cluttered cellars. She keeps on running inside a labyrinth with a dripping ceiling. She can make out some shadows moving behind the light at the end of the labyrinth, she wants to shout but here she doesn't have a voice. As if she is wandering in a land she knows very well from the past but has stayed away from it for a while, and this land does not surprise her at all when she lays her eyes on it. Objects, the darkness of the labyrinth, wetness, everything is identical to places in her childhood nightmares. There seems to be a kind of artificial space within memory, and while in real life no one and nothing can maintain their form amid constant change, everything in her dreams stand still, right in their places, no change at all. Maybe eternity only belongs in dreams and memories recalled.

She moved a little, the magic and the horror of the dream seemed to be passing. She was sweaty, her t-shirt was drenched. Her mouth was bone dry. Throwing the comforter off, she got up from the bed.

Ready for the dark in the narrow hallway, wondering where the switch is, she could make out the light in the living room at the other end of the hallway. At first, she was angry for having left the lights on, but after two quiet steps, she was almost glued to her spot. She had never turned any lights on in this house, she didn't even know where the switches were. What had she done the day before? After looking at the apartment, she'd gone to Miss Naira's apartment two floors up. She listened once again to the story of the apartment building and Miss Naira's dead husband, got a little bored, nibbled at the food the woman had served on the table—she learnt something new about life, the

fact that as you grow lonely, you open your heart and your table even to a stranger—paid one month’s rent in cash with a promise to pay five months during the week, and then she took the keys and came downstairs. Her goal was to pick up her stuff from Bahar’s place and leave there early to move into this apartment. But she got too lazy to go all the way to Bahar’s, especially now that she was full, and excited about her new place. She texted Bahar saying that she won’t come back tonight, wandered around the apartment for a while, checked the positioning of the furniture, really liked the fact that there even was silverware there, perched on the edge of the bed, then laid down as if enchanted by a sleeping potion. She recalled sliding her jeans off as she slipped under the comforter.

Having totally forgotten about how she was soaked to the core, she walked towards the light with mindful steps, holding her breath. As she approached, the objects became clearer. The white fringes of the red rug, the hardwood floor, the handle of the balcony door... When she noticed a sound like heavy breathing from inside and at the same time a cool breeze slipped through her bare legs, she froze with horror. Could somebody have gotten into the apartment through the balcony? But that’s impossible. She’d had vertigo looking down the balcony last night. The apartment was on the second floor in the front, and on the fourth in the back.

A couple steps farther down, she noticed the shadow on the table, she nearly jumped out of her skin. A head with blond, fuzzy hair was moving back and forth, the hair sweeping across the table. Her heart in her mouth, she wanted to scream, but she couldn’t. She could only whisper, “Who is there?” She remembered knives of all sizes arranged in order on the kitchen wall magnet. She could make out a sound from far off, only barely. From a totally different direction, another similar sound echoed. It was the morning call to

prayer, the loud-speakers from the mosques like choir members starting a song—with various, delayed notes stepping in intervals of several seconds, overlapping . Right then, another mosque’s call to prayer rumbled up as if it were inside the house. A dog howled, barking started, then wood squeaked, a door moaned on its hinges, another door shut from another direction, a flushing sound made its way along the walls, waters ebbed, pipes grumbled. The call to prayer woke the dogs and neighbors in the dark of the morning, saving her from her nightmare.

The room was empty. In front of the open window, a curtain was blowing, long fringes of the curtain were spreading out over the table, unwinding and then blowing again. All other objects were chilled by the breeze: the throws over the blue couch, their fringe moving, the newspaper stack on the lower shelf of the bookcase rustling.

Fatma breathed a sigh of relief. As she closed the window, then the balcony door, which was ajar, she began thinking how on earth the light switches were on. Could Miss Naira have walked in while she was sleeping inside? The man downstairs? But... hadn’t the woman said something about switching on the fuse in the power meter cabinet at the entrance of the building? Yes, yes, this was the only logical explanation. The woman must have switched the fuse on.

She felt cold. She rubbed both her hands rapidly on her shivering legs, then picked up one of the blankets on the couch and wrapped it around her waist. She was completely awake, she sat down on the couch for a while as if she had to do something but couldn’t recall what it was. Then she stood up, walked towards the bookcase.

On the middle shelves there were popular novels which once upon a time she’d also ordered online, on higher shelves Russian, French classics. Then,

right by a couple of volumes on cinema, the biography of Türkan Şoray... She pulled the book out and continued to peruse the library. Thin poetry books, an English-Turkish dictionary, some religion, mythology and fairy-tale books, the Christian Bible, two Qurans (one thick, one thinner), the Hebrew Bible... All this was separated from various newspapers and magazines by a metal book-end. She crouched down, randomly went through the chunks, remembering all the stuff she'd accumulated throughout all those years. She'd left it all in the cellar of Bartal's. The English economics dictionary, CDs, novels ordered online, binders from work seminars, an Eiffel Tower model, a palm-sized piece of the Berlin Wall inside glass, a bronze figurine of a matador standing straight opposite a bull with his cloak in his hands, a set of matryoshka dolls in the shape of Russian village girls... There she was, alive, without any of it, not even missing anything. There she realized—something she also knew back then—that she'd left all that stuff in Bartal's house hoping that they would be her reason to come back. Her gaze stopped moving when she came across the word “composition” on an A4-format notebook. She pulled it out. Without ever knowing what kind of a smell she was longing for, she brought the notebook to her nose, it smelled different from her childhood notebooks, it almost smelled like ethanol. She carried the notebook and the biography of Türkan Şoray to the couch.

As she opened the notebook, she found a bunch of folded papers. A print-out of five pages with the title *The tale of the man, the horse, and the woman*. She browsed the notebook. Tangled, disorderly notes taken in sometimes black, sometimes blue and occasionally red pen. The handwriting reminded her of a student who was confused and bored in class, mischievous, such a daydreamer that she couldn't finish her sentences while taking constant, rapid notes. She tried reading the two-page scribbles describing an unruly room, as if

from a stage-play set. When she raised her head, she thought she saw the room. The wall, the couch she was sitting on, the table by the window, the balcony right across from her... When she closed the notebook and put it on the couch, she tried to remember the last time she saw a play. Was it when she was a student in Ankara? How was the play, who knows?

She stood up, opened the balcony door, propped one of the chairs against it. She picked up the papers with the fairy tale signed by by Nevin Su and sat down on the chair. It was dawn. The grey light of the morning flooded the neglected, dirty buildings with intensity, ruling over the hill into ghostly shadows. Exhausted, yellow reflections from a few windows... Without these reflections, she could have taken the landscape for a Mexican village in a Western, deserted after the plague, ruled over by dogs.

## ***The Fairy Tale of the Man, the Horse, and the Woman***

*Once upon a time, a swarthy and stunning young man lived in a land far, far away—for some, but not that far if you ask me. The young man had no one but his widowed mother, two sisters, and his horse, which he loved more than anything. The young man was so handsome that, when he passed by, they flocked in the doorways and the shadows inside the houses multiplied. When the horse reared up or whinnied longer than usual in front of one of the houses, it was known that the horse was speaking in the young man's stead, was doing what he could not, and they would holler back. After all, with his sleek body and white head-covering on his forehead, the horse was more handsome than the young man, and the young man handsomer and faster than the horse; the men would all stare and sigh at the horse, women and girls at the boy. Too proud for such adulation, the young man didn't have an eye on anyone. In fact all he knew was how to carry wood to his home, race the wind on his groomed horse, and hunt in the woods.*

*But as the young man got used to the freedom, competing against wild animals for the prey he hunted, he stopped coming home almost entirely. Even during his brief return trips, he'd leave the bounty and wood he collected in front of his house and return to his forest. The young man's mother didn't know what to do. Catching her son at the doorstep at nights, she begged to no avail "Come in, sleep in your warm bed, settle back into our ways here." When she realized things were not going the way she hoped, she asked the wise man of the land for a remedy.*

*After listening to what the old woman said, the sophisticated, white-bearded wise man said "The human is a feeble creature. Men are even weaker. After they touch a woman, then they go soft and tame. The only way back from forest is through the touch of a woman's skin."*

Upon her return, the young man's mother brought up the subject to her next-door neighbor. "Then, let's just marry him off. Look, there are so many girls watching him," said the neighbor lady. "As if I'd never thought of it myself! In fact, I knew it even before the wise man told me," replied the sorrowful mother. "But I can't even see his face. You should have seen how he looked this last time... His hair is long and messy, he's become nothing more than a cave man. What would want to marry him if she saw him in the daylight?"

Right at that moment, Dilnaz, eternally in love with the young man and hence a frequent visitor to this house, overheard the two neighbors' conversation. Dilnaz was a young and beautiful, healthy and wealthy woman widowed in the very first week of her marriage. The young woman returned home at once, had her servants ready her carriage, and got on the road. She passed the houses, left the towns behind, rode over the hills, and right there she arrived at the river by the entrance of the boy's forest. Tired and sweaty Dilnaz was.

The young man chasing a thirsty gazelle by the water approached the river. He was planning to hide behind the bushes and lurk. But right there he saw a woman coming out from behind a weeping willow, walking towards the river in her thin, transparent undergarment. It was his first time seeing a woman naked, the first time he realized being naked could be so beautiful. The young man forgot about his gazelle prey, and started watching the woman.

Dilnaz, after peacefully cooling off in the water, cleansed away her sweat on her way back to the tree. But there she saw—a caveman, with hair down to his waist and beard touching his chest, approaching. "Is that him?" she mumbled. Was this caveman with the long, dirty nails and ragged, dirty clothes indeed that handsome young man? Instead of going back to her carriage and possessions, she went back in the river.

The young man shouted, saying: "Why are you running away? Come out of the water so that I can see your figure again!"

"No way," shouted Dilnaz. "Your hair is ragged, your beard is tangled. Look at your garment, torn in pieces, covered with animal bloodstains. Until you clip your nails, have

*your hair cut and beard shaved, before you cleanse yourself, I will not show my face.” The young man begged and implored, but to no avail. She dug her heels in. Grasping that there was no other solution, he got on his horse and headed for the hamam in the nearest town, where he threw his bloody garment off, had his hair cut and beard shaved, and returned to the river spotless. Upon his return he noticed the woman was still sitting by the water with her transparent undergarment showing her sweet curves. When she saw him, she smiled delightedly and lowered her gaze. The young man had gotten off his horse and was walking towards her in haste as she covered herself behind the carriage next to her. “Not here,” she shouted. “I am going home. You’ll come if you wish to see me.” She gave the directions, and told the young man: “Now turn your back, I’ll get dressed.”*

*The young man was furious. “Damn you” he said, and rode his horse back into the woods. But his thoughts were still on the woman. He saw beautiful gazelles and just passed them by, he heard lions roaring at the gazelles, but he kept his bow in its quiver. Finally realizing he could not forget her, he got on his horse and returned.*

*From the house rose appetizing smells and mesmerizing vapors. The young man entered, sensed well-cooked beef stew and endlessly flavorful wines. Later Dilnaz offered her hand, and the young man discovered the woman more enticing than the most enticing prey. She gave him more pleasure than he got flying on the back of his horse. He thought, his chase from one prey to another had led him to his union with her. He reared up, he overflowed, he poured all his potency into the woman. The next day, right before he set off for the forest, the woman opened herself to him once again with all her femininity, all her coquetry. The young man forgot about the forest, his passion for hunting, his chase with the wild animals. Neither did he want to ever leave the house, nor did he wish to get back on the horse looking forward to his return in the horse barn. Eternally attached to her apron strings, he grew stronger with her delicious cooking and grew exhausted in her bed; the only thing he did was leave the house to while away the time at the market in town and then come back home right away to go to bed with*

her. But the woman had begun to tire of his attention and idleness. Dilnaz had begun to complain about his laziness, and while watching him at a distance his mother started to worry about her son. In this land where a virgin girl could meet a virgin boy only after a spectacular wedding ceremony, the mother, seeking to end this relationship that overthrew tradition, made her way back to the wise man.

“I know,” said the wise man. “I told you, man is weak, and his feebleness stems from his desire to touch. He has to see other women, other lives, so that he learns his dependence is not the work of a single woman, of his own being. Above all else, your son must remember his former hunter’s nature. In that city on the other side of the forest live people with different customs than ours, with an abundance of joy and women. Send your son to the other side. You will find he will soon rediscover his hunter nature and get to know other women in the city.”

“Well said,” said the woman, “but when he doesn’t even ride his beloved horse, how do I send him over there?”

“This is in your power as women,” said the wise man. “You say your son is a wondrous hunter... In the city I mentioned, there are people who enjoy hunting animals. Convince the boy, he will go back to his craft of hunting, and learn to rid himself of his current prey.”

The woman contemplated a moment. She thought only Dilnaz can solve this problem so she knocked at Dilnaz’s door one day, when her son was out sauntering in the market.

“Look, are you happy with a lazy man tied to your apron strings?” she said to the young woman.

“No, I loved the young man who wouldn’t get off his horse, who made hearts tremble as he passed by windows.” said Dilnaz.

“Then convince him, Let him leave, let him hunt at the other side of the forest. But this time, let him learn how to make money from his prey. Have him break a sweat, struggle, and come back to you as a real man!”

*Dilnaz thought about it, and finding no other way, she convinced the young man to do these things. At first the young man was sad, but seeing the insistence of his beloved, and indeed long deprived as he was of her former tenderness, he got on his horse and rode away. The horse and his owner reconciled, and the horse first took him through the cool breezes, then raced against the wind, overtook the hills, and swam through rivers. He remembered how beautiful it was, flying off on his wildly loyal horse, how mesmerizing it was inhaling the pure smell of the forest, how enticing it was watching gazelles hop, bears roar, lions—tense and agile—jump on their prey... There he explored his former life in the forest. But when the night came, the weather chilled down, and the night spread its dark cover over, he missed his warm and soft bed, Dilnaz's scent. But alas, he could not return. His heart broken, all on his own, he set off for the city on the other side of the forest.*

*This was a very green, fair-aired and rich city. Beautiful women walked nonchalantly and informally with their hands in young men's hands, occasionally stopping to ooh and ahh. How different from his land, how intertwined were love and life. There in the yard of a house, a beautiful woman who reminded him of Dilnaz stood out to him. The woman looked at the young man, the young man at the woman. But when she saw the bloody gazelle on his saddle, she turned her head.*

*The young man at once found the market, sold the gazelles, got rid of his bloody garment, cleansed himself, and returned to the house where he'd seen the beautiful woman. In the yard, a group of men and women including the woman he liked, were having dinner, merrily having a good time. They invited him to their table. But when he realized the woman could turn away from his face and delightedly smile at other men while talking to him, he decided he had to be strong and pleasantly chatty, telling delightful stories. So he told about his adventures, elaborate stories about animals. In the end he won the host woman's heart, and found himself in her bed when everyone else had scattered in the night. The young man woke up very early in the morning but found the bed too comfortable, the smells around too*

*delightful and enticing, and the woman very eager. This reminded him of his life with Dilnaz. If he stayed one more day, he would stay another, and the days would pile up. He would find himself impotent and go to seed, and this woman, too, would complain like Dilnaz, passionless. He got up at once. A couple days later, he met another woman on the other side of town. There he told her his fine words. His stories of hunting and the forest were so delightful that the woman thought this handsome fellow had come all the way just to meet her.*

*The young man was about to fall asleep next to the woman when a fear fell into his heart. The clean and soft bed he is lying down in, the beautiful smells from the kitchen... He left the house before the dawn. Running from one house to another, from one woman to another—three years passed according to your count and five to mine—and suddenly his own land came to his mind. Longing for Dilnaz, for his mother, he became disconcerted. He hopped on his horse, and got back on the road.*

*Opening the window in the morning, his mother saw a horseman at full gallop. She felt a cheer, thinking that is my son, but neither the horse looked like the sleek, white-covered horse, nor did the rider resemble her young son. When the horseman approached, his lines sharpened and hardened, she found her son had a wider body and black-circled eyes. The woman was happy, thinking ‘Finally my son has matured and returned home.’ Then she became curious about his old horse.*

*“He was pretty slow,” said her son. “I sold him in one of the villages beyond the hill on my way here. I bought a younger horse.”*

*“But you loved your horse so much, how could you leave him?”*

*“To hell with it!” said the son. “Isn’t he just a horse? I just need them to do the work.”*

*Surprised, the woman had no reply. Regardless, her son didn’t stay long at home, running at once to Dilnaz. This is a fairy tale, after all. Dilnaz was expecting him. Indeed she liked this man better, as he spoke less and knew what he wanted. Yet regardless of her*

*liking, she couldn't find the young, passionate man who used to give himself to her with all his soul.*

*The man suddenly woke up in the middle of night in Dilnaz's bed, with a fear coiling up his heart. There he saw the woman's legs as a two-headed serpent twining around his body, her hair a thorny bush wrapping around his chest. His mouth was dry, he stiffened in the bed, but regained his composure ultimately. He set his legs free off the dormant serpent, wriggled out of the thorny bush, and made his way out, just barely. No matter what Dilnaz would do after that, he would never see her. The woman learned later on that the man she loved was in a deep malaise, so strangely foreign to himself that he could no longer love the same woman two days in a row.*

*It is rumored that the man has left a streak of fear in the hearts of any woman he has touched since, and a streak of emptiness in his own heart that no one else could ever again. His infamy kept away the women who knew, and those who did know never opened themselves to him entirely. And yet it is rumored that the horse of the young man had escaped his barn that same night. But since the horse had already forgotten the young man's land, he found himself again in their last destination, the city on the other side of the hill. The horse was either caned by one of the women his master spent one night with or barely survived the dogs of another. In the end, lost in deserted meadows, he became a savage.*