

EXCERPT FROM MY NOVEL IN PROGRESS, THE PEOPLE OF MADRA & THE GEESE OF IDA

FROM PART 1: THE PEOPLE OF MADRA

CHAPTER 3

A VISIT TO DEVLET

The *Kaftanlular* met at Elif's house. She was newly married, didn't yet have kids, and her husband was a construction worker —sending him away from home to other villages and towns for several days or even several weeks. This way, the *Kaftanlular* could have meetings there, undisturbed.

For the *Kaftanlular*, the recent events in their village called for extra attention and work. It had been about ten days since Dilek and Azrail had disappeared and since Havva's death, but the mystery was still unresolved and people's comments about the issues were inconsistent. For this reason, the team gathered twice a day: in the late morning for after-breakfast-coffee and in the late afternoon for tea. The rest of the day, they spent doing fieldwork and collecting data.

Sitting together around the small *fiskos*, or “rumor table,” creating suspicion by squinting their eyes at just the right moments while analyzing data or detecting anomalies; these were important elements of the *Kaftanlular*'s professional demeanor. They always ended their sessions with fortune-telling from the grounds at the bottom of their coffee cups. This proved to be a great source of team-building. Thanks to this activity, they were able to learn about the deep, dark corners of each other's souls; their fears, expectations, and hopes. They each developed an instinct for saying the right thing at the right time to make their teammates feel a certain way. After all, the *Kaftanlular*'s methodology depended largely on culturally constructed emotions and gut feelings.

One major problem was that they could never manage to keep drinking from the same cup for the duration of their meetings. Especially when the discussion was heated and exciting, they got confused about who was using which cup. This time was no exception.

The host, Elif, boiled Turkish coffee for four in a small copper pot. She poured the coffee into small cups and served them to her teammates on a silver tray. Then, taking the last cup for herself, she joined them around the *fiskos* table. All four slurped the foam from the tops of their cups, then placed them back onto the small saucers at the same time. They eyed each other for a sign of when to start the proceedings, but before anyone could say a word, there was a knock at the door. In the few seconds before Elif turned from the window to the door, they all looked at each other and confirmed that they weren't expecting anyone.

"It is Gün," said Elif. Each of the *Kaftanlular*'s eyes shone with curiosity. Hayriye, Mukaddes, and Ayşe all took their cups into the kitchen and poured their coffee down the drain. Hayriye quickly rinsed the cups and pot. Mukaddes dried everything with a small, clean cloth napkin. Ayşe took a packet of coffee and a box of sugar from the wooden kitchen cupboard and placed them on the counter. As the three walked back to the *fiskos* table, Elif opened the door and invited Gün in.

"You know what they say when you walk in a place where people are about to eat or drink something. Your mother-in-law must love you very much," Elif said with a huge smile on her face as she led Gün to the living room.

"Are you cooking something?" asked Gün.

"I was just about to make some coffee. Can I serve you one?"

"Yes," Gün said. "I will drink coffee, but only if Mukaddes will read my fortune." By the time Gün finished her sentence she was already in the living room.

"Aniiii, of course, of course I will," said Mukaddes with great enthusiasm.

Gün took Elif's chair at the *fiskos* table when she went off into the kitchen to make coffee. The other three greeted Gün warmly. They knew from experience that sweet words could convince even a snake to come out of its hole and they were sure that there was something Gün was hiding from the villagers.

"Welcome dear, nice to see you," said Hayriye.

"You look tired. Did you eat breakfast?" asked Mukaddes.

“Yes,” answered Gün.

Elif was slow in the kitchen, giving her teammates time to subtly interrogate Gün.

After the usual exchange of *how are you`*s, before they asked “the” question, the *Kaftanlılar*'s took the proper length of silence (equal to the time it took crows to fly back to the crops after being shooed away). Hayriye actually imagined some crows flying from a field and returning before she asked:

“So, no news yet from Dilek or Azrail?”

“No, not a word. It’s as if they evaporated.”

“What do the police say? Ibrahim went to the police, right?”

“Yes, the police don't know anything. Nobody knows anything.”

“Oh! That means she is still a virgin. If Azrail doesn't come back, she can easily find another husband. I mean, if she is not raped or something,” said Mukaddes.

“Noooo! Noooo!” cried Ayşe “You know they say bad news spreads quickly. Ignore what Mukaddes says. Let’s pray Dilek is fine.”

“The police checked all the records in this area and searched the forest with dogs,” said Gün with tears in her eyes and a tremble in her voice.

“We heard Ibrahim has already collected piles of newspapers at home,” said Elif as she served the coffee. “Nothing useful in them?”

Gün didn't say a word, just shook her head. Hayriye smiled at Elif to show her appreciation of the well-considered question she had posed.

They all sipped their coffees then placed the cups back on one another`s saucers. It was more difficult to manage the cups when there were five people at the table.

“What about sacrificing a sheep in the name of God and feeding it to the poor? God helps those who help the weak, right?” This was Hayriye.

“Uh-huh,” the other women affirmed.

“But it should be sacrificed the right way. The imam should perform two *rakahs* of *salaat* and say the sacrifice prayer out loud three times before chopping up the animal.”

“What is the sacrifice prayer?” asked Gün, who considered herself religious despite never having heard of this prayer. She was often surprised how some people could assert themselves as more religious than others.

“An authentic sacrifice butcher will know it, don't worry,” replied Mukaddes, “You also need to make sure that no one in your family eats any of the meat—not even a little bit. Among the people eating, there should be a poor shepherd, a motherless child, an old man without his left hand, and a widow.”

Gün repeated this, whilst counting on her fingers: *a poor shepherd, a man without a left hand, a motherless child, and a widow.*

“Why left hand?” she asked, but her question was either ignored or not heard.

“Although nowadays,” said Ayşe. “It is not easy to find an appropriately poor person. To me, it looks like everyone has more than enough. I guess it would be ok to share with the neighbors.” She sounded critical—almost concerned that there weren't enough poor people around.

“Yes, the Qur'an is open to modern interpretations,” said Elif.

“OK,” said Gün. “I will mention this to my husband.”

They all took their second sip from one another's coffees. None of them knew that the cups were not in their original saucers.

“You know what?” said Hayriye, putting her cup down onto Ayşe’s saucer. She frowned then narrowed her eyes; her lips curled into a vicious half-smile. They all moved their chairs closer, sitting head to head around the small *fiskos* table. Hayriye spoke slowly, almost in a whisper:

“We should go visit Devlet Hodja. People say he knows everything from the location of lost or stolen money to what people ate last night for dinner.”

“No,” Gün said sharply. “Ibrahim doesn't let me visit those *haji, hodja* people. After hearing Israfil’s stories, he says Devlet Hodja is a trickster. Also, I don’t care what people ate last night.”

“Devlet Hodja is a real mystic,” said Mukaddes. “He doesn't charge any money, you know...” She nodded her head reassuringly, her hand on Gün’s.

“Let’s not keep on at poor Gün,” said Ayşe. “If she decides to go, we’ll take her.” She slurped the last bit of Elif’s coffee then cleared her throat to make her final comment:

“No offense Gün, but I don’t understand why your husband trusts the police dogs more than he trusts the Hodja. He’s been on a pilgrimage to Mecca three times. I hope God grants the same opportunity to everyone.”

“Amen,” they all said. The *Kaftanlılar* looked to Gün for a response but she was now focused on preparing for the fortune-telling. She put her cup upside down on the saucer, and the remains of the coffee grounds bled out. She took her ring off and put it on top of the cup so that the contents would cool faster, becoming ready for the fortune-telling.

A few minutes later, Mukaddes touched the bottom of the cup with her index finger and decided that it was cold enough. She pulled the cup up carefully as it was now stuck to the saucer.

“Aniiiiiii!!” cried Mukaddes. “Your life is flooded with kismet.” Mukaddes didn’t realize it was actually her own cup she was reading.

“What else do you see? Tell us more, tell us more...” Ayşe and Elif coaxed. Gün was silent and anxious. Elif prevented another nose-picking attempt with a slap to Ayşe’s hand.

“I see the number Three here,” said Mukaddes. “Look! Look! It's right here. Do you see it?” She showed the inside of the cup to the other women, pointing at a particular spot.

“Oooh! Yes! Yes! I see it!” cheered Ayşe and Elif. To her surprise, Gün saw it too.

“Maybe in three days, maybe in three weeks, maybe in three months you will hear some news. But not about your daughter. This news is about a man in your family. He is very close to you. Maybe your husband, maybe your brother...”

“I don't have a brother,” said Gün.

“Maybe your brother-in-law...I can't know that much...but this man is going far away and probably not coming back for a long while. Eventually, you will also go where he goes.”

“Interesting...” said Gün. She tried very hard to put this information together to make it mean that she would hear news of Dilek's whereabouts or that Ibrahim would go and get her daughter. It didn't quite work.

Mukaddes was going to say more but when the clock on the table struck twelve and the chicks and chickens inside it started clucking, Gün sprang to her feet, thanked the *Kaftanlular* for the conversation and fortune-telling, then stormed out, leaving the four women confused. Gün had to get home as soon as possible; Ibrahim usually returned around twelve-thirty, either from work or the coffee house, and liked to see his lunch ready.

As soon as Gün was gone, the self-critiquing of the *Kaftanlular* began:

“It would be smarter if you'd seen a tree on top of a hill with a woman making wishes, rather than a man traveling a far distance.” As Hayriye said this to Mukaddes, her eyes became googly with anger.

“But I saw a man in the cup, not a tree,” replied Mukaddes.

“Butididseamannot-a-treeeee...” said Hayriye, mocking Mukaddes's cicada-like reverberating voice and her naive defensiveness.

Mukaddes hunched over in silence. Her mouth curled down like a crescent hanging at the wrong angle on a face as vast as the sky.

Mukaddes' readings came true: three days after the fortune-telling, her own husband went to that far away place where everyone eventually ends up; he had a heart attack, dropped to the floor in the coffee house, and died. The other members of the team were very annoyed by the situation. Now, they not only had to join the after-death prayers but also help Mukaddes take care of the people who came for the funeral. Funerals weren't the appropriate social occasion for gossiping. Now, for the next two weeks, people would talk about heart attacks and how short and full of unexpectedness life was, instead of talking about Dilek and Azrail; the Kaftanlılar had no doubts about that. It wasn't very difficult to change the agenda in the village.

In the meantime, Gün told Ibrahim about the idea of sacrificing a ram and splitting the meat among a poor shepherd, a motherless child, a man without a left hand, and Mukaddes (who had just become a widow), to bring better luck in their search for Dilek. When Ibrahim refused—because it was superstition—everyone accused him of being an infidel. “His father and grandfather were infidels too,” they said, “They were all ironsmiths, bending iron like it was nothing.” It was surprising that even the invention of radio and television hadn't been enough to change the definition of the infidel.

Eventually, Ibrahim gave his consent, since, after all, feeding the poor was a good deed. However, he had picked up on one small detail of Gün's plan. In all of Madra, there was only one person missing his left hand: Devlet Hodja. Ibrahim found everything about this man fishy, including his name, which meant: *government*. Devlet, although common elsewhere, wasn't a common name in the region. From his weekly market visits in the town, Ibrahim also knew that no one had ever heard anything about the Hodja's relatives. It was as if he had dropped from the sky. Instead of changing his mind and denying Gün her sacrifice, Ibrahim decided to take this opportunity to go and see the Hodja with his own eyes.

One early chilly October morning, Ibrahim, Gün, Hayriye, Ayşe, Elif, and Yavuz all set off on the road, borrowing Azrail's abandoned car, still parked in front of Havva's house. Mukaddes didn't join them because on the seventh day of his death, she had to prepare pilav and chickpea as an offering in memory of her husband.

Gün sat next to Ibrahim, and the *Kaftanlılar* and Yavuz sat in the back. Yavuz was squeezed between Elif and the door. His complaints were ignored because Elif had to be in the car—being the only one who knew the way to Devlet Hodja’s house. She was very animated and elbowed Yavuz each time she declared her opinion on topics she herself had brought up:

“The best time for the morning prayer is three minutes after the Azan. That’s when the Azan reaches all the cells in your brain.”

And:

“Every woman who mothers a child is guaranteed to go to Heaven.”

And:

“Education is a must. Our kids should learn Arabic at school. They can’t even read the gravestones in our village cemetery.”

As Yavuz was trying to protect himself from Elif’s unpredictably hostile elbow, he discovered she had a big belly.

“Is there a baby in your belly?” he asked, with a big smile on his face. “So that you will go to Heaven?!”

Elif’s face gradually went from pink to red.

“Look at this smart ass!” she said. Then raising her voice, “How do you know where babies come from? Ibrahim Efendi! Ibrahim Efendi! Is this how you teach your kids?”

Since beginning the trip, Ibrahim had been annoyed by each of the topics brought up by the *Kaftanlılar*; He’d kept silent the whole time because he didn’t have anything kind to say. However, this last comment of young Elif’s was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

The moment Ibrahim opened his mouth, Gün bit her lip, sensing that a blast of anger was about to break. Elif's eyes caught Ibrahim's in the mirror. They were like two cowboys about to duel with words instead of guns.

Luckily, the duel ended before it could even start. The car hit a big stone Ibrahim had failed to see—being blinded by his anger—and everyone was hurled from right to left, then left to right. The prayer beads flew from Hayriye's hand. Hayriye, Ayşe, Elif, and Yavuz all leaned from one side to the other, like a field of barley ruffled in the wind. Ayşe started to recite an Arabic prayer out loud. As Elif caught Hayriye's beads, she looked out of the window for the first time in a long while and realized they were heading in the wrong direction.

In the sweetest possible tone of voice, she said: "Ibrahim Efendi, I'm afraid we have come too far; we need to go back."

Ibrahim realized he was actually proud of Dilek for doing things her own way. He took a few deep breaths before turning the car around. This time they drove in silence, which gave Yavuz a chance to watch the trees and clouds as they passed by, and enjoy the excitement of going somewhere new without being disturbed by an elbow.

When they arrived at an intersection they had passed a while back, Elif asked Ibrahim to stop the car because she wasn't sure which road to take. They all got out, to stretch their legs and consider the route. They discovered that when Elif had visited the Hodja's village some years ago, only one of these roads was asphalted; that being the one to the Hodja's house. Now both roads were asphalted and there were no road signs.

While the adults were busy finding their direction, Yavuz had no difficulty figuring out his own route. He saw an animal poke its head out of the bushes by the road. "I gotta pee," he announced and ran off towards the forest.

On the other side of the bushes, Yavuz saw two foxes making their way through the woods. Their orange heads and tails appeared and disappeared among the thick vegetation. Yavuz ran quickly to catch up.

There was no path, but the foxes' strides and twists and turns they took were confident. Following them, Yavuz's hands and face were scratched by briars.

The foxes arrived at a large, opening surrounded by a fortress of tall, thorny bushes and thick, dead tree trunks; some of which were carved into shelves and filled with books, like in a library. There were about ten foxes busy reading. It looked more like they were studying than reading for pleasure. Sometimes they called to one another to point out something in a book. When one fox stood up on two feet and stretched her arms and legs, her human face and body appeared momentarily.

The longer Yavuz stood there, the more glimpses he caught of the human parts of the foxes—as they reached for a book on an upper shelf or a pencil rolling out from between some pages. None of the foxes were boys. He walked around the area, peeking through the bushes. The foxes were either concentrating too hard to notice Yavuz, or they just didn't mind his presence. He wasn't scared, but as an intruder, he didn't want to get caught.

When he walked to a spot closer to the bookshelves, he could read the titles written in large letters. Most of the books were about how to prepare for the nationwide university exam. There were also a few preparation books for the high school graduation exam. Yavuz wondered if they had storybooks and coloring books, too?

A fox passed by looking Yavuz right in the eye. She took a few steps then stopped, looked at Yavuz then she looked into the forest and kept walking. Yavuz understood she was asking him to follow her. So he did. They hadn't walked that far when Yavuz lost sight of the fox. Without even thinking, he yelled his sister's name:

"Dileeeeeekkk!... Dileeeeeekkk!"

"Shhh..." said Dilek, as she came out from behind a tree in her human form. "I am here."

They gave each other a big hug. Dilek and Yavuz had always hugged each other when saying "happy Bayram," "happy New Year," or "happy birthday," but no hug had ever felt this genuine.

"Everybody is looking for you and mum cries all the time," said Yavuz.

“I think mum and dad know where I am. Mum cries because she is worried about me.”

“If they know where you are, why don't they come find you?”

“Because if they find me, I can't continue doing what I am doing.”

Yavuz was young but he knew exactly what Dilek was talking about. There were unwritten rules and instructions to guide people in almost everything they did—from which foot to step into the bathroom with, to how to drink water. You didn't need to talk about things when you did them by the book because what you were doing was obvious to everyone. Then again, you couldn't speak about things when you didn't go by the book because it wasn't appropriate.

“What about Azrail?” said Yavuz.

“What about him? Did you talk to him?”

“Nobody knows where he is.”

Dilek looked totally blank.

“Yavuuuuuuzzz!” Ibrahim yelled. “Come here! Time to goooo!”

The next moment Dilek was a fox again, ready to show Yavuz the way out of the forest and back to the intersection. The two siblings hopped up to avoid puddles and ducked down to avoid branches and thorny bushes.

“Don't run, don't run... No need to rush,” said Ibrahim as soon as he saw Yavuz coming. Everybody was back in the car, ready to go. Yavuz noticed there was a man sitting in Gün's seat and that Gün was now in the back seat with the three *Kaftanlılar*. The man was from Devlet Hodja's village and knew where he lived. He had agreed to guide them to the Hodja's place in return for a lift.

Yavuz sat on his mother's lap. As they drove up the hill on a meandering path, he firmly gripped the driver's headrest in order not to fall onto Elif. For the rest of the drive he looked out the window, bewitched by the beauty of the autumn colors, just like the other passengers.

On one side of the road was a very thick pine forest with horse chestnut trees here and there. The other side was rocky cliff with coniferous bushes bursting out of the earth at places where the big, gray rocks allowed. At the bottom of the cliff flowed a narrow stream. The cliff wasn't very high. Yavuz could see village women doing laundry and some children pointing at the car and waving. Yavuz waved back at the children cheerfully.

The wishing tree, Yavuz could see on Maya, also attracted his attention. Not only Yavuz, but everybody in the car looked at the tree, their eyes wide, admiring its grandeur and beauty as the wish jars swayed in the wind. Thanks to the colorful strings used to tie the jars to the branches, it looked like the tree was wrapped in a rainbow.

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EXCERPT FROM THE SECOND PART: THE GEESE OF IDA

CHAPTER 6: THE ROOSTER-MAN

All Yavuz Demir wanted to tell his friends and colleagues at university was that he was a rooster-man; but it wasn't as cool as saying "I am Batman," or "I am Spiderman." Besides, this wasn't only a change of costume. It was like wearing himself inside out – more like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles characters: Rocksteady and Bebop. But he wasn't a teenager any more and the technology used to make Ninja Turtles movies were now better than the mysterious science that turned them into turtles in the first place.

It wasn't that he didn't try, but he failed miserably each time he attempted to reveal his true identity.

He took some selfies at the moment he turned into a rooster and posted them on Facebook, hoping his friends would figure it out or at least suspect his secret identity. However, he only attracted the attention of graphic designers and animators who were wondering which computer program he had used to make the photo. One of his old college teachers took it as a very creative criticism of how people take selfies every fifteen minutes, and praised Yavuz's sharp wit..

“The shallow life of a rooster on social media,” commented the teacher under Yavuz’s picture. He didn't forget to put a smiley face instead of a period at the end of the sentence.

During conversations over dinner or lunch at the university’s cafeteria, Yavuz claimed that animals weren't treated equally in literature; roosters, for example, were either uncool characters or weren't characters at all. His friends didn't take him seriously. “Yavuz is an MA student, specializing in rooster rights,” they teased, “is this your secret language to talk about human rights – which is not very easy to talk about in our country?”

One night at Taksim Square, during the Gezi Park protests, he went completely rooster before everyone’s eyes. He had been trying to run away from a randomly whacking police baton and that red, mystical, almost fairytale-like tear gas. This didn't work either; the photos of rooster-Yavuz were all over social media and even in some independent newspapers. “A great, humorous criticism,” wrote one writer in her article, “of the mainstream media which broadcasted a documentary about penguins on the night of the protests, because they were too scared to depict and comment on the protesting youth.” Many others celebrated the bravery and sense of humor of this unknown hero with the rooster.

Each time his friends forced him to confess that he was the one who had brought the rooster to the protests, Yavuz—an awkward smile on his face—insisted that he hadn’t, which his friends didn't believe. He even told them the story of the first time he had transformed into a rooster—with all the details he could remember—but they took it to be a coming-of-age metaphor.

“Haven’t you ever become anything else in your lives?” Yavuz asked his friends.

“No one is only one thing,” replied the one with the most philosophical mind, stroking his beard. “And people are like flowing rivers. We change each and every second.”

As a response, Yavuz just sighed in frustration, which his friend interpreted as a sign of nostalgia for his old self from a second ago. Yavuz knew that that river of change didn’t flow at the same speed for everyone.

After all this, Yavuz arrived at the conclusion that his friends were irreversible intellectuals, and the intellectual thought came with some side effects: everything was over-read in order to miss the truth. Or sometimes pure truth was too naked for the rational mind, so they decorated it until it became more like something they wanted to see. The king was never naked.

Yavuz, however, was determined not to give up so easily. He decided to discuss the matter with his family. *If Dilek doesn't understand me, no one will*, he thought. He couldn't tell why he never talked about this matter with her before. So that year for spring break, he went back to his family home in Yeşilçam with more enthusiasm than usual.

Each time he visited Yeşilçam, Yavuz would sit and answer villagers' questions about life in Istanbul; the food served on long bus-rides, the eye and hair colors of all the foreign professors at school, the exquisite beauty of the Bosphorus River, and so on. When returning home from some place neighbors rarely went, it was normal to be the one answering questions rather than asking them. However, this time he was determined to be as sneaky as lovers in a village on Madra Mountains, and direct the conversations himself. He was going to be like Super Mario hitting his head on bricks; making the points that would lead him to his big revelation. He was very ready to smile and jump over all the thorny comments and questions he was sure to get: *Aren't you too old for school? When are you getting married? You know people your age have three children. Do you miss it here?*

It was hard to say whether it was Yeşilçam that Yavuz missed when he longed for nature, his family, and healthy food. He often thought it was a sign of weak character to depend on a place to be happy or more satisfied; everywhere should be the same for a happy, strong soul.

Even so, when he had to say no to the road trip south arranged by his friends just one day before spring break, Yavuz couldn't help feeling it was Yeşilçam's responsibility to make his visit worthwhile. As he packed his bags on the last Friday evening before break, his thick, brown eyebrows sank over his eyes like dark clouds over a lake, making the green of his irises look one shade darker. The truth was, when his friends announced the trip, Yavuz didn't even have a bus ticket home; but he was the type to grow grumpy rather than change his original plan.

That irritable feeling, nurtured by the idea: “I’m missing all the fun,” didn't last long. As soon as he was out of his tiny apartment—located on the third floor of a former slum-house—and dragging his luggage up the road to the bus stop, the image of Madra Mountains with its spring flowers, the smell of pines and fresh-baked village bread filled his mind.

The rattling wheels of his medium-sized, black suitcase made him think of his grandma Bahar’s story about Madra Mountains. According to the tale, Madra Mountains had ended up by the Aegean Sea while running away from the violence of wars. These big muscles of soil moved a lot in Asia. However, when they hit the sea, they refused to go any further. They preferred to remain loyal to their essence: they stayed mountains instead of becoming islands. For this very reason, Bahar Nine believed that every Madraian would end up in Madra again no matter where they went or what they became. Yavuz loved this story, but there had been times when he pictured throwing this very idea of remaining loyal to your essence into the river of change his friend had talked about.

As Yavuz walked through the side streets towards the main road where the bus stop was, the buildings rose taller and prouder. Many of the balconies were hidden behind either soundproof glass or slatted shutters to keep the dust and traffic noise out. The first floors of many of these buildings were shops, bakeries, cafes, and restaurants - much fancier than the back allies where Yavuz’s apartment was located. Among his neighbors were a shabby repair shop, a laundry and dry-cleaning store, a small, almost village-like *bakkal*, and a discrete sex shop with an empty window where “shop” blinked in red neon lights.

The loud, annoying noises of the main road combined with the rattling wheels of his suitcase to create a soundtrack for Yavuz’s imagination as he pictured Madra Mountains moving through Anatolia, leaving river beds and lakes behind, and squeezing passed a few cities and towns. He imagined little hills and huts in fields that elbowed each other for space, like people on the subway during rush hour.

From the public bus to the long distance bus terminal to the ferry terminal just outside of Istanbul, the soundtrack continued to play in Yavuz’s head with a few minor variations and occasional surprises from the engine of a big truck or disco music from a too-small-to-dance-in sports car. It wasn’t until after the ferry ride, on the Yalova side of the Marmara Sea (when the roads got lonelier), that the nervousness invading

Yavuz's chest congealed into thoughts. How was he going to start the conversation? In the kitchen or the garden? Was it a good idea to talk to his sister or mum first? After dinner or at the breakfast table?

Sleep came just as Bahar Nine's friends would have been appearing in the living room for their early morning, after-breakfast-coffee. Yavuz fell asleep while reading his book, knees up against the chair in front of him, his head resting on a pillow he wore around his neck. He didn't wake up until the bus made a sharp turn towards a service area by the side of the road. They made a thirty-minute stopover. With small, lazy movements, he pulled himself up from the chair and collected his book and phone from the floor.

"Son, I think your phone rang a few times..." said a voice from across the aisle. Because of the wall of people lined up in the corridor to get out of the bus as soon as the doors opened, Yavuz couldn't be sure the voice was directed at him. But still he checked his phone and saw that his dad had called several times. He stood up and joined the line to follow the crowd out so he could call his dad while getting some fresh air.

"I bet it was your mum," said the voice again.

"Pardon?" said Yavuz. He was the last person in the line and was now pretty sure that the voice was addressing to him.

"The person who called you... I bet it was your mother. Nowadays all young people have phones, but no one uses them to call their parents. I have a son your age." It was an elderly lady with bushy hair, dyed blonde. There was a small, black handbag on her lap and her legs were covered by a brown, woolen shawl.

"It was my dad," Yavuz said and couldn't help feeling a little bit guilty. "I am now going out to call him back. Would you like me to get you something from the food court?" he asked.

"It is so very nice to see that there are still some young people that are considerate and polite. I am a teacher, you know. Though, I am retired now. But I had thousands of students. Very few of them were caring and humane. I am less worried about our country when I see young people like you."

"How nice," Yavuz said and repeated his question.

Oya teacher—that was her name—asked Yavuz for a bottle of water. But before she eventually let him go, she explained why she didn't like certain brands of bottled water and preferred others. She was sure water might be one reason that cancer was such a "popular" disease.

By the time he went to the bathroom, paid for a bottle of water, brought it to the teacher and exited the bus again, his dad had called two more times. There was no direct bus to Yeşilçam and the intersection out of town where Ibrahim drove to pick up Yavuz was a lonely place. Ibrahim called frequently to make sure he would arrive at the intersection before his son. And Yavuz tried to prevent his dad from arriving early for the same reason; he often lied about where he was and when he expected to arrive. Still, every time Yavuz got off the bus, he always found his dad waiting for him with his old white Renault 12 station wagon.

Although Yavuz didn't sleep for the rest of the trip and kept calling his dad every half hour to say he had a long way to go, his father still beat him to the intersection. Before the bus stopped, Yavuz was ready to get off at the middle door, standing on the stairs right behind the assistant driver. He saw his dad get out of the car in his coat, then rush towards the back of the bus. Ibrahim took Yavuz's luggage from the assistant driver and swiftly dragged it to the car. *Dad is much faster and louder at moving mountains*, Yavuz thought as he followed his dad.

Yavuz wanted to put his backpack in the back seat, but he couldn't open the door.

"That one doesn't open from the outside," said Ibrahim. "You always forget." He opened the front door then reached for the back door and opened it from the inside.

"Thank you," Yavuz said and placed his pack on the back seat.

"Move," Ibrahim said and pushed Yavuz out of his way. Then he took the backpack from the seat and put it down on the ground, fixing it between the back and front seats. "Otherwise, it might fall and your laptop could break," he said. "You worked till your back bent to get one of these, you know. We had better take care of it."

It was about 5.30 am; chilly but fresh on the outskirts of Madra Mountains. Son Demir was home after ten hours on the bus. His luggage was in the trunk of the car, his laptop was safe in his backpack, and Father

Demir was ready and impatient for a big hug. This was Yavuz's favorite moment that he stored in his mind and replayed again and again, especially when he felt sad and lonely in the city—feeling that his home was Yeşilçam, not Istanbul.

“Wasn't there an earlier bus, son?” Ibrahim asked as they drove—making zigzags to avoid the puddles on the old, paved road. He managed to squeeze in a complaint before Yavuz could answer his question. “This mukhtar doesn't do a good job. You see the road? Worse than it was thirty years ago.”

“No, dad, this was the only ticket I could find. Sorry.”

“I told you to hurry up, but you took your time...as always. But it is ok. You are here.”

“Who would do a better job?” asked Yavuz.

“Which job?”

“I mean as a mukhtar for the village?”

“Oh... I see...I would be a great mukhtar...but your mum won't let me be a candidate in the elections.”

“She doesn't want you to get into trouble.”

“You are always on her side.”

“Of course...we both care about you.” Yavuz said. This was the moment that would determine the fate of his visit. He knew if he couldn't make his father smile, for the next six days Ibrahim would keep accusing him of being on his mother's side and Yavuz wouldn't be able to say the things he had come to talk about.

“But I agree that you would make a great mukhtar,” he said after fifteen seconds of carefully assessing Ibrahim's mood. “You are right about the road, too. It feels like driving on the surface of the moon.”

Ibrahim gave one big, loud laugh. “The surface of the moon?” he repeated, then very proudly said: “I am glad I sent you to school.”

After about ninety seconds of silence, which felt a lot longer than that, Ibrahim demanded conversation:

“You should pay attention to your driver, son. You know, I didn't sleep much last night. I might fall asleep if you don't keep talking.”

“How is everything in the village? Anything new?” Yavuz asked, hoping Ibrahim's answer would be more creative than his own question.

“Nothing new... nothing new...except for the fact that every young man has a smartphone now.”

“Really?!”

“Yes, yes...it is like you don't have shoes, so you have yourself carried on a sedan chair, isn't it?”

“Interesting...maybe they use them to check the weather forecast before planting seeds or to sell their vegetables to the city?”

Ibrahim didn't know one could do all these things with a smartphone.

Ignoring Yavuz's question, he said: “What about your smartphone? How is it doing?” He said this as if he were asking after a person. Only then Yavuz understood his dad wasn't really talking about the young people in the village; he was trying to show his appreciation of his son's hard work. That was why he had given him a smartphone as a gift.

“It is ok,” said Yavuz, a little hesitant. “Although sometimes the screen freezes and I need to remove the battery and turn it on again.”

“Hmmm. So, I didn't do a good job of choosing one for you. We can get another one while you are here...?”

“No, no. No need for a new one. This one is ok. I can handle it. Really, no need for a new one.”

“Sounds like it has some character. The grumpy kind...like your grandma.”

Yavuz already knew his grandma gave his father a hard time, but he had never heard any complaints from Ibrahim before; only little implications of frustration. So he smiled both at his father's sincerity and the comparison of a smartphone to a grumpy grandma. He also took it as a sign that his big revelation wouldn't be as difficult as he'd thought.

"Is she giving you a hard time?" Yavuz asked, hoping to bond more as father and son.

Ibrahim just nodded and didn't say a word for the rest of the drive, but he didn't get sleepy either. His thoughts and worries about his mother kept him alert and awake while Yavuz watched the crop fields, olive groves, and the concrete irrigation channels that cut through the land. The green was overtaking the brown, and it was obviously great friends with the orange sunlight spilling onto the earth from the sky. He thought of Sarıkız of Ida Mountains combing the light of her hair from Zeus's altar onto Madra Mountains. He knew that Sarıkız was more than a stupid tale or a brand of local soda water.

When they arrived in the village, people were already up. Some were taking their animals to the trough and some were walking either to the mosque for the morning prayer or to their fields alongside donkeys loaded with their children and lunches. Yavuz saw two of the *Kaftanlılar*, Ayşe and Elif. Each stuck a hand out of their kaftans and waved at him.

Ibrahim stopped in front of the iron gate and honked. A second later, Gün came running out and opened it. After the car came through, she closed it.

"Your father can take your luggage," she said as she gave Yavuz a big hug. "Welcome home."

"*Hosbuldum*, mum."

"Are you hungry? Would you like to have breakfast or sleep first?"

"I am hungry," Ibrahim said, as he passed mother and son, dragging Yavuz's luggage through the courtyard and into the house.

"I asked my son. Not you," said Gün, frowning. Ibrahim groaned something in response, but neither Gün nor Yavuz understood what he said.

“Let’s have breakfast,” said Yavuz to his mum, smiling. “A hungry father is an angry father.” Yavuz knew he wouldn’t be able to get much sleep that day, but he didn’t mind.

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Münire Bozdemir

