

8th Edition · 2015

A SEA of words

The future we want demands
sustainable development

Short stories by 17 young writers

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2015 edition - 8th year

**The future we want demands
sustainable development**

Short stories by 17 young writers

IEMed.
European Institute of the Mediterranean

 **Anna Lindh
Foundation**
— EUROMED —

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Contents

Foreword. Senén Florensa	6
Ο γλάρος. Γιώργος Αμπατζίδης. Ελλάδα	9
The Seagull. Georgios Ampatzidis. Greece	14
Plastic. Slavena Zaharieva. Bulgaria	18
Farkli aynılar. Halil Ecer. Türkiye	23
Dissimilar Similarities. Halil Ecer. Turkey	27
الموت أرحم لي من الحياة. سارة دباش. الجزائر	31
Better Dead than Alive. Sara Debbache. Algeria	37
2184. Damjan Krstanović. Hrvatska	43
2184. Damjan Krstanović. Croatia	48
Islands in the Sea of Time. Marija Nezirović. Croatia	53
المشي على الماء . بسمة العوفي . مصر	58
Walking on Water. Basma Eloufy. Egypt	63
Der gegen die Haie kämpft. Maria Tramountani. Deutschland	68
The One Who Fights Sharks. Maria Tramountani. Germany	72
Safe Journey. Christoforos Pavlakis. Greece	75
The Dancing Raindrop. Ilias Kolokouris. Greece	78
جنون مواطن! , عمر حسين العثمان , الأردن	83
A Citizen's Insanity. Omar Hussein Al Othman. Jordan	87
A Second Kind of Genesis. Giulia Privitelli. Malta	91
الرسالة الأخيرة. آية كمال رباح. فلسطين	95
The Last Message. Aya Kamel Rabah. Palestine	102

Czerwona Wenus. Kasia Nocuń. Polska	107
Red Venus. Kasia Nocuń. Poland	111
El descubrimiento del fuego. Yeray García Celades. España	115
The Discovery of Fire. Yeray García Celades. Spain	118
Kendi dađınıza tirmanin. Lara Bulut. Türkiye	121
Climb Your Own Mountain. Lara Bulut. Turkey	126
Kimin Ankara'sı? Murat Mercan. Türkiye	131
Whose Ankara? Murat Mercan. Turkey	137

Foreword

Senén Florensa Executive President,
European Institute of the Mediterranean

In 2015 we celebrate the 8th year of the project A Sea of Words, promoted jointly by the European Institute of the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Foundation. The objective of this contest throughout these eight years has been to help foster dialogue between the countries of Europe and the Mediterranean through the exchange of experiences and knowledge between youths. This year we wanted to support the EU initiative that has declared 2015 as the European Year for Development to open the door to the exciting and multifaceted world of development cooperation. This initiative has fostered projects of very different kinds, and has enabled the countries involved, both North and South, to share experiences of the issues that make up the broad concept of sustainable development. They are all available on the website <https://europa.eu/eyd2015/es>.

Yet another year, the European Institute of the Mediterranean wishes to promote this exchange of experiences and cultural dialogue through writing, in a contest aimed at young writers who have created stories about development. The chosen theme, “The future we want demands sustainable development”, and the reflection provided by writing can help raise awareness of the need to cooperate to achieve a future that is better, more sustainable, more connected to nature, and more hopeful for future generations. Young people can feel like repositories of our planet’s wealth, and they are the ones who must understand that development goes beyond borders and undeniably involves cooperation between countries.

We have received around 200 stories by youths who approached this highly versatile concept of development, and the possibilities of citizen collaboration and awareness-raising. There are stories that explore human development, some that tackle the theme of sustainability, and others that focus on warning the reader about the need to respect the environment in which we live. This diversity of themes and nationalities (the almost 200 youths are from 25 different countries) renews confidence in the idea that youths are aware of the possibilities of dialogue and cooperation, and of the responsibility involved in using the tools this gives us to create a better future, which means fairer wealth distribution. In total, since its creation, the contest A Sea of Words has had the participation of over 1,800 young writers from Euro-Mediterranean countries, of whom around 60% are female.

The richness that comes from the different cultures and traditions boasted by the Euro-Mediterranean area is worthy of being considered one of the most valuable sources of heritage around us. Therefore, the possibilities provided by development must be used to improve the everyday life of citizens, always respecting our fellow humans and nature. We must all take advantage of the opportunity offered by cooperation to understand others better, learn from them and their needs, and work together for sustainable and peaceful development. In this re-

spect, the winning stories of the contest seek to promote the teaching and dissemination of this cooperation and of the possibilities of sustainable development. Many of the stories received show young people's concern for their environment, which we hope will be reflected in the 21st Climate Change Conference to be held in Paris in December 2015.

The three young winners of this year's A Sea of Words have expressed the spirit we have tried to encourage at the IEMed very well. The story "The Seagull", by Georgios Ampatzidis, set in Athens, introduces a young writer at the height of the creative process working through the difficulty of writing – without being discouraged – about the crude reality of the inexorable march of pollution. The second winning story, "Plastic", by the Bulgarian Slavena Zaharieva, endeavours to call the attention of citizens and politicians to the damaging consequences of not taking care of the environment. The third award goes to the story "Different Similarities" by the Kurd Halil Ecer, who reminds us that development begins with a basic attitude: the willingness to listen to and learn from others, to see difference as a source of wealth that makes us grow and evolve.

Therefore, the 17 stories selected in this 8th year of A Sea of Words show the important need to ensure the acceptance of sustainable development, which abandons the logic of maximum profit and strengthens equal participation in prosperity and respect for the environment. That is why at the IEMed and the Anna Lindh Foundation we will go on working to this end, using all the instruments available to us to try to give young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region a future full of possibilities.



Award Ceremony of the 2015 Contest “A Sea of Words”

Ο γλάρος

Γιώργος Αμπατζίδης. Ελλάδα

Ξύπνησα με πρωινή στύση και την αίσθηση μιας καινούριας συγγραφικής ιδέας να τριγυρίζει στο κεφάλι μου. Δυσκολεύτηκα για μερικά λεπτά να κατουρήσω και να κουμαντάρω την διαφαινόμενη έμπνευση, αλλά οι δύο λειτουργίες ευνοήθηκαν δραστικά από το κρύο νερό του νιπτήρα. Έφτιαξα έναν φραπέ σκέτο με πέντε παγάκια και κάθισα μπροστά στην τηλεόραση με το σορτσάκι του ύπνου και γυμνός πάνω από τη μέση.

Πίνοντας τον καφέ άρχισα τη διαδικασία που ακολουθούσα σε τέτοιες περιπτώσεις. Οι πρωινές εμπνεύσεις δεν ήταν σπάνιες - μάλιστα ένιωθα πως όσο περνούσαν τα χρόνια, τόσο πιο συχνές γίνονταν (οι πρωινές στύσεις ακολουθούσαν ακριβώς αντίθετη πορεία). Το άτυπο τελετουργικό ξεκινούσε με μια αναδρομή των δραστηριοτήτων που θα μπορούσαν να έχουν οδηγήσει στον αξιμέρωτο οίστρο. Άνοιξα την τηλεόραση σε ένα αδιάφορο κανάλι και γύρισα γρήγορα το καλαμάκι στο ποτήρι αναγκάζοντας τα παγάκια να χτυπήσουν μεταξύ τους και στο γυαλί - ο θόρυβος βοηθούσε στην ενεργοποίηση της μνήμης μου.

Δεν δυσκολεύτηκα να καταλήξω στην αιτία. Το προηγούμενο απόγευμα η Τόνια παρακολούθησε ένα ντοκιμαντέρ στο σαλόνι μου. Εγώ καθόμουν δίπλα της προσπαθώντας να την αποπλανήσω. Δυστυχώς για την ερωτική μου διάθεση το ντοκιμαντέρ παρουσίαζε το οδοιπορικό ενός φωτογράφου σε χώρες του τρίτου κόσμου - φωτογραφία και φιλανθρωπία: τα ερωτικά μου θέλγητρα έρχονταν σε δεύτερη θέση. Τελικά πηδηχτήκαμε αργότερα, αλλά μέχρι να τελειώσει το ντοκιμαντέρ, το καλύτερο που είχα να κάνω ήταν να παρακολουθήσω με ενδιαφέρον τις περιπέτειες του γλάρου-πρωταγωνιστή.

«Ο γλάρος θα πεθάνει στο τέλος» είπα σε ανύποπτο χρόνο στην Τόνια.

«Πώς το ξέρεις;»

«Αυτό κάνω, γράφω ιστορίες».

Ο γλάρος του ντοκιμαντέρ πέθανε τελικά τρώγοντας ένα μολυσμένο ψάρι στη Σενεγάλη. Πριν ακόμα ξεψυχήσει το άτυχο πτηνό, η Τόνια πέρασε το πόδι της πάνω από το χυμένο στον καναπέ σώμα μου και με το βάρος της στο στήθος και την κοιλιά μου άρχισε να δαγκώνει-φιλάει τα χείλη μου. Κάποιες φορές σκέφτομαι πως το αίσθημα της φιλανθρωπίας την κρατάει κοντά σε έναν απένταρο, κατά δέκα χρόνια μεγαλύτερο, επίδοξο συγγραφέα και αυτή η καλλιτεχνική περιέργεια που αναπτύσσει όποιος ανακατεύεται με τις τέχνες - την φωτογραφία, στην περίπτωση της. Κάτι τέτοιες ατάκες της άρεσαν πολύ και μου το έδειχνε. Εκτός από τον γλάρο, πέθαναν και κάποιοι κορμοράνοι καλυμμένοι με πετρέλαιο λίγο αργότερα, όπως είδα κλεφτά όσο ήμασταν ακόμα στο σαλόνι.

Αφού είχα ξεκαθαρίσει την αιτία, το επόμενο βήμα ήταν να εστιάσω στο θέμα. Αυτό είναι πάντα το πιο δύσκολο κομμάτι, γιατί μοιάζει πολύ με τις σκιές που εμφανίζονται στο οπτικό πεδίο όταν κοιτάς ένα ανοιχτόχρωμο φόντο: όσο προσπαθείς να εστιάσεις, τόσο τα μυγάκια απομακρύνονται. Αυτό το σημείο απαιτούσε νικοτίνη και ήταν η δικαιολογία για να καπνίσω ένα από τα κομμένα στη μέση τσιγάρα της προχθεσινής υπόσχεσης να το κόψω. Προς εξυπηρέτηση του εθισμένου εαυτού μου, πετάω τα τσιγάρα στον κάδο με τα χαρτιά που αδειάζω μία

φορά την εβδομάδα, οπότε πάντα βρίσκω ακρωτηριασμένες προσπάθειες απεξάρτησης όταν τις χρειάζομαι. Για να καλοπιάσω ακόμα περισσότερο τον εξαρτημένο, εδώ και μερικούς μήνες καπνίζω φίλτρα ώστε να μην πάει χαμένο το μισό με το φίλτρο. Θυσία οι πνευμόνες μου στην καλλιτεχνική δημιουργία.

Μετά από τριάμισι τσιγάρα και έναν δεύτερο φραπέ με τρία μόνο παγάκια για να τελειώσει πιο γρήγορα κατέληξα περίπου στο πλαίσιο του νέου έργου μου. Στο τεχνικό του κομμάτι, θα ήταν διήγημα μέχρι 2500 χιλιάδες λέξεις ώστε να το έστελνα σε έναν διαγωνισμό στη Βαρκελώνη που ζητούσε κείμενα με θέμα παρόμοιο με το δικό μου. Η ιδέα ήταν να γράψω για την άδικη διανομή πλούτου και την άνιση οικονομική ανάπτυξη από μια παγκόσμια, άπληστη ελίτ που δημιουργεί φτώχεια και περιβαλλοντική καταστροφή. Κάπως έτσι. Το θέμα δεν μου ήταν άγνωστο: συχνά το ακουμπούσα έμμεσα στα κείμενά μου μέσα από τις προσωπικές ιστορίες των πρωταγωνιστών-θυμάτων αυτής της κατάστασης. Ακόμα, ένιωθα και εγώ θύμα της, περνώντας μήνες χωρίς δουλειά, με απλήρωτα νοίκια και την οικονομική στήριξη της Τόνιας. Θα ήταν πάντως η πρώτη φορά που θα επιχειρούσα να γράψω έχοντας τα αρνητικά του καπιταλισμού ως κεντρικό θέμα και στο μυαλό μου έρχονταν συνειρμικά σχετικά τσιτάτα των πολιτικοποιημένων, φοιτητικών μου χρόνων.

Επισκέφτηκα την Τόνια για να συζητήσουμε τις ιδέες μου. Εμπιστευόμουν την κρίση της καθώς μπορούσε να μεταφέρει αποτελεσματικά τη φωτογραφική της αντίληψη σε ένα συγγραφικό πλαίσιο. Όπως ήξερε πού θα έπρεπε να εστιάσει μια φωτογραφία της, έτσι μπορούσε να φανταστεί και την σκηνή ενός διηγήματος. Όσο την γνώριζα, πάντα συζητούσα μαζί της τις ιδέες μου, αρχίζοντας από την πρώτη γνωριμία μας ως φίλης της τότε κοπέλας μου. Οι δυο τους είχαν γνωριστεί σε ένα σεμινάριο φωτογραφίας και είχαμε βγει μαζί για καφέ μία φορά εγώ, η Τόνια και η Αγγελική, επίσης λάτρης της φωτογραφίας και μια σχέση μου που κράτησε 3 χρόνια. Εκείνο το απόγευμα πέρασα πολύ ωραία συζητώντας με την Τόνια σχετικά με ένα διήγημα που έγραφα και αγνοώντας (ακούσια) τις δολοφονικές ματιές της Αγγελικής που μας παρακολουθούσε χωρίς να λέει λέξη. Εννοείται πως η Αγγελική και η Τόνια δεν ξαναμίλησαν από εκείνη τη μέρα. Εννοείται πως η Αγγελική με ενημέρωσε πλήρως για το πώς με κοιτούσε όσο «σαλιάριζα» με την Τόνια και πώς κοιτούσα εγώ την, πρώην όπως μου εξήγησε, φίλη της. Κάπως έτσι χάθηκε η επαφή μας και, ακριβώς δυο μήνες μετά, οι δρόμοι μας έγιναν παράλληλοι και ως τέτοιοι δεν έχουν πια κανένα κοινό σημείο. Στην απόφαση της Αγγελικής να με αφήσει ίσως βοήθησε και το γεγονός πως το καινούριο μου διήγημα είχε πρωταγωνίστρια την Αινότ, μια νεαρή Γαλλίδα φωτογράφο που κλέβει την καρδιά του πρωταγωνιστή, ο οποίος μιλάει σε πρώτο πρόσωπο. Σε κάθε περίπτωση, η Αγγελική με παράτησε, και για έξι ολόκληρους μήνες έπινα, κάπνιζα, έτρωγα ελάχιστα και έγραφα ποιήματα με πρωταγωνιστές που αυτοκτονούσαν. Μετά γνώρισα ξανά την Τόνια. Συναντηθήκαμε τυχαία στον δρόμο και με αναγνώρισε παρά τα εμφανή σημάδια που έφερα στο πρόσωπο και υποδείκνυαν εγκατάλειψη από την Αγγελική και τον ίδιο μου τον εαυτό. Ουσιαστικά συστηθήκαμε από την αρχή, αφού οι ιδιότητες «φίλη της Αγγελικής» και «γκόμενος της Αγγελικής» δεν σήμαιναν τίποτα πια. Πρότεινε να πιούμε έναν καφέ και τηςμίλησα για τα ποιήματα που έγραφα για ανθρώπους που έκοβαν τις φλέβες τους. Μου είτε πως ανατρίχιασε και με παρότρυνε να «γράψω για κάτι μεγάλο, κάτι σημαντικό». Αναγνώρισα πως είχε δίκιο, αλλά συνέχισα για 1-2 εβδομάδες ακόμα να γράφω για εκείνους που δεν άντεξαν τις δυσκολίες της ζωής μέχρι να τα φτιάξουμε με την Τόνια και το γράψιμό μου να γίνει σχετικά πιο αισιόδοξο.

Χάρηκε με την έμπνευσή μου. Η ίδια εργαζόταν εθελοντικά για μια ΜΚΟ που πρόσφερε βοήθεια στα θύματα της οικονομικής κρίσης στην Ελλάδα. Γυρνούσε τους δρόμους της Αθήνας και φωτογράφιζε ανθρώπους σε ανάγκη, φτωχογειτονιές και παραπήγματα τα πρωινά που δεν είχε μαθήματα στη σχολή, και κάποια βράδια βοηθούσε στη διανομή συσσίτιου και φαρμάκων. Με σαφείς επιρροές από τη δράση της, στα κείμενά μου σιγά-σιγά άρχισαν να εμφανίζονται χαρακτήρες που είχαν οικονομικά προβλήματα, άνεργοι, κάτοικοι υποβαθμισμένων περιοχών ανώνυμων πόλεων - τα στοιχεία αυτά πλαισίωναν τους ήρωές μου, αλλά ποτέ δεν ήταν το βασικό τους χαρακτηριστικό. Η Τόνια επέμενε συνέχεια να γράψω για «κάτι μεγάλο», για «κάτι σημαντικό», να μιλήσω για «την αδικία», τη «φτώχεια», το «κυνήγι του κέρδους», την «υποβάθμιση του περιβάλλοντος» και μου θύμιζε κουβέντες που χρόνια πριν είχα απορρίψει στο μυαλό μου ως υποκριτικές. Θεωρούσα υποκριτικό να γράψω για την αδικία της κοινωνίας τη στιγμή που δεν έκανα κάτι ουσιαστικό για να την πολεμήσω. Εκείνη στεναχωριόταν όταν μιλούσα έτσι και επέμενε πως ακόμα και ένας άνθρωπος να ευαισθητοποιηθεί διαβάζοντας κάποιο κείμενό μου θα είναι κέρδος για τον κόσμο. Θεωρώντας πως επιτέλους με είχε πείσει χάρηκε πολύ όταν της ανέφερα τις πρωινές συγγραφικές μου ανησυχίες.

Της εξήγησα με κάθε ειλικρίνεια πως δεν είχα ξεπεράσει τις αναστολές μου περί υποκρισίας. Επηρεασμένος από την εικόνα των πετρελαιόβρεχτων κορμοράνων, ήθελα να γράψω για την υποβάθμιση του περιβάλλοντος που φέρνει το κυνήγι του κέρδους, αλλά είχα συνείδηση πως ένα τέτοιο διήγημα δεν θα είχε κάτι παραπάνω ούτε κάτι λιγότερο από ένα ποίημα για μια γυναίκα που κρεμάστηκε. Η Τόνια χαμογέλασε.

«Το τελευταίο ποίημα που μου διάβασες ήταν υπέροχο. Θα πρέπει να προσπαθήσεις πολύ για να είναι το καινούριο σου κείμενο το ίδιο καλό».

«Θα με βοηθήσεις;»

«Μπορώ να είμαι η πρωταγωνίστρια, αν θέλεις» είπε και έκανε μια στροφή γύρω από τον εαυτό της δήθεν για να την δω καλύτερα.

«Θα το σκεφτώ» απάντησα χωρίς να μπορώ να κάνω το ύφος μου όσο σοβαρό θα ήθελα.

Στεναχωρήθηκε. Μάλλον το έκανε στα ψέματα, αλλά δεν μπορούσα να καταλάβω με βεβαιότητα πότε προσποιούνταν. Από τα συναισθήματα μέχρι τους οργανισμούς της, είχε τη δυνατότητα να απλώνει μια πολύχρωμη κουρτίνα μπροστά της που δεν άφηνε τίποτα να περάσει, αν δεν την τραβούσε εκείνη συνειδητά λίγο στην άκρη.

«Σε πειράζω, καρδιά μου» την διαβεβαίωσα.

«Το ξέρω! Δεν θύμωσα στα αλήθεια, μωρό μου. Ξέρω πως είμαι η μόνη πρωταγωνίστρια των κειμένων σου».

Της είχα πει αρκετές φορές πως για μένα το γράψιμο και η ζωή ήταν δύο έντονα διακριτά πράγματα. Θα μπορούσα να γράψω για μια κοπέλα που θα δω τυχαία στον δρόμο ή θα γνωρίσω στη δουλειά, χωρίς αυτό να σημαίνει πως θέλω να την πηδήξω. Της είχα επισημάνει πως μετά την πρώτη μας συνάντηση και ενώ ακόμα ήμουν με την Αγγελική, έγραψα ένα διήγημα του οποίου η πρωταγωνίστρια τής έμοιαζε πολύ και το όνομά της ήταν ίδιο με το δικό της από την ανάποδη. Μου είχε δώσει να καταλάβω πως δεν της άρεσε να μαθαίνει τέτοιες πληροφορίες, οπότε δεν ανέφερα ξανά κάτι σχετικό. Τουλάχιστον δεν ζήτησε τις πρωταγωνίστριές μου που αυτοκτόνησαν.

«Μπορείς να μου δώσεις μερικές φωτογραφίες σου; Θυμάμαι είχες κάνει μια σειρά με θέμα τη ρύπανση. Θα με βοηθούσε, ακόμα, να μου υποδείξεις κάποια μέρη της Αθήνας με έντονα σημάδια υποβάθμισης. Εσύ ξέρεις την πόλη καλύτερα από εμένα».

Αμέσως ξεχώρισε μερικές φωτογραφίες από τους φακέλους της και μου τις έδωσε. Η λίστα με τα μέρη που ανέφερε ήταν τόσο μεγάλη που μετά τα πρώτα δέκα την σταμάτησα.

«Ας πάω πρώτα σε μερικά από αυτά και βλέπουμε».

«Θέλεις να πάμε μαζί;»

«Καλύτερα να κάνω πρώτα μερικές βόλτες μόνος μου. Το ξέρεις πως με βοηθάει».

Έγνεψε καταφατικά και με φίλησε για «τα λέμε το βράδυ». Φεύγοντας από το σπίτι της ήμουν ξανά αισιόδοξος. Ίσως αν επισκεπτόμουν ένα από τα μέρη που μου πρότεινε, αν μελετούσα τις φωτογραφίες της, αν προσπαθούσα να μπω στο μυαλό, την ψυχή, τη ζωή ενός καρχαρία της θάλασσας ή ενός καρχαρία των οικονομικών λόμπι, αν κατάφερα να αποδομήσω και να ανασυνθέσω την έννοια του κέρδους, ίσως να μπορούσα τελικά να γράψω κάτι πάνω στην αδιόρατη ιδέα που με ξύπνησε το πρωί. Όσο προσπαθούσα να τις κοιτάξω οι σκιές απομακρύνονταν, αλλά αυτό ποτέ δεν αλλάζει. Η πιο κοντινή τοποθεσία από αυτές που σκέφτηκε η Τόνια ήταν μια παρατημένη παραλία σε απόσταση μιας ώρας με το λεωφορείο από το σπίτι της.

Την είχα επισκεφτεί ξανά πριν χρόνια. Τότε η παραλία ήταν καθαρή και πολύ δημοφιλής ανάμεσα στους ανθρώπους που έψαχναν ένα μέρος για μπάνιο με εύκολη πρόσβαση. Σιγά-σιγά άρχισε να συγκεντρώνει μπάζα από κοντινά εργοτάξια, λύματα από κοντινές επιχειρήσεις, σκουπίδια που έριχναν περαστικοί οδηγοί και η ανοχή που γίνεται συνενοχή οδήγησε στη δημιουργία μιας παραλίας-χωματερής. Περπάτησα προσεκτικά ανάμεσα στα σκουπίδια και κάθισα σε έναν βράχο δίπλα στη θάλασσα. Η αίσθηση της ματαιότητας αυτού που ήθελα να κάνω επέστρεψε. Σε τι θα ωφελούσε το διήγημά μου; Θα έπειθε, μήπως, τον διπλανό ταβερνιάρη να μην ρίχνει στη θάλασσα τα σκουπίδια του; Θα έκανε τον φορτηγατζή να πετάξει τα μπάζα στη διπλάσια απόσταση αντί να τα φέρει εδώ μέσα στο σκοτάδι; Όσο έκανα αυτές τις σκέψεις έπιανα από κάτω κομμάτια πλαστικού και τα πετούσα με δύναμη προς τα πίσω.

Έβγαλα μερικές φωτογραφίες από το σακίδιό μου και τις κοιτάξα με τη σειρά. Οι φωτογραφίες που έβγαζε η Τόνια από τους δρόμους της Αθήνας χρησιμοποιούνταν για τη δημιουργία ονλάν και έντυπου υλικού ευαισθητοποίησης από την ΜΚΟ στην οποία δούλευε. Η προσπάθεια αυτή φαινόταν να αποδίδει, καθώς είχαν καταφέρει να οργανώσουν συσσίτια και διανομή φαρμάκων εξολοκλήρου από τις προσφορές απλών ανθρώπων, που τους στήριζαν με ό,τι τους περίσσευε και την εθελοντική εργασία τους. Ίσως, τελικά, να μην ήταν τόσο μάταιη η προσπάθεια. Η σκέψη με πήγαινε από τη ζέστη στο κρύο και μετά πάλι στη ζέστη και το ίδιο γινόταν με τον καιρό, που άλλαζε από ηλιοφάνεια σε συννεφιά και αέρα.

Άρχισα να το δουλεύω εκ νέου στο μυαλό μου και να κρατάω σημειώσεις. Η ιστορία μου θα είχε πρωταγωνιστές μερικούς γλάρους που ζούσαν σε μια παραλία σαν αυτή. Θα ζούσαν ωραία και ήσυχα τρώγοντας ψάρια από τη θάλασσα και κάνοντας τις βόλτες τους πάνω από τα κύματα. Μια μέρα θα χτιστεί ένα εργοστάσιο κοντά στην παραλία που θα ρίχνει απόβλητα στη θάλασσα. Οι γλάροι θα αποφασίσουν να αντιδράσουν. Θα επιτεθούν στους εργάτες με κουτσουλίες και ραμφίσματα. Θα νικήσουν και στη θέση του εργοστασίου θα γίνει ένα σχολείο.

Ήξερα πως έγραφα βλακείες. Μουτζούρωσα ό,τι είχα γράψει ως εκείνο το σημείο και σταμάτησα για λίγο. Μια κουτσουλιά προσγειώθηκε στο σημειωματάριό μου, είδα έναν γλάρο να πετάει πάνω από το κεφάλι μου και ασυναίσθητα πέταξα την πένα μου προς το μέρος του. Μετά από μερικές στιγμές ο γλάρος έπεσε μπροστά στα πόδια μου με την πένα καρφωμένη στην κοιλιά του.

Περιεργάστηκα το νεκρό πουλί. Τράβηξα την πένα από το σώμα του και αποκαλύφθηκε μια βαθιά πληγή λίγο μπροστά από την ουρά του. Μια παρόρμηση με έκανε να ξαναχώσω την

πένα στην κοιλιά του και με σταθερή κίνηση να την φέρω προς το λαιμό ανοίγοντας μια κακή, επιμήκη τομή στο πτηνό. Ήταν κάτι που δεν ήθελα να κάνω αλλά φαινόταν πως δεν μπορούσα να αποφύγω - σαν ένας ενοχλητικός λόξιγκας που δεν φεύγει όσο και αν κρατήσεις την αναπνοή σου. Κράτησα την ανάσα μου γιατί από το στομάχι του αναδύοταν μια έντονη μυρωδιά που μου θύμιζε την κουζίνα μου όταν καθάριζα ψάρια και πετούσα τα σκουπίδια μετά από τρεις μέρες. Έβγαλα από το στομάχι του τρία αγκίστρια, ένα κομμάτι κονσέρβας και ένα προφυλακτικό με ραβδώσεις. Τύλιξα την καπότα ανάμεσα στον δείκτη και τον μέσο γυρνώντας την γύρω από τα δύο δάκτυλα. Σκέφτηκα πως ο γλάρος θα πέθαινε ούτως ή άλλως καθώς η διατροφή του ολοφάνερα γαμούσε την υγεία του, παρά τις προφυλάξεις.

Ο γλάρος σκοτώθηκε από την πένα μου. Ακόμα και αν δεν τον σκότωνε η πένα μου θα πέθαινε από τα σκουπίδια που έτρωγε. Θα τον σκότωνε η κονσέρβα που λείπει από περιοχές που υποσιτίζονται. Θα τον σκότωνε η καύλα. Θα τον σκότωνε η παγίδα που είχε στηθεί για ένα ψάρι. Άλλοι έχουν πολλά, άλλοι δεν έχουν τίποτα και για μερικούς απομένουν μόνο σκουπίδια. Έσκισα τη σελίδα με τις σημειώσεις μου και κινήθηκα προς τη στάση του λεωφορείου που θα με πήγαινε πίσω. Μπορεί να έγραφα ένα ποίημα για κάποιον γλάρο που αυτοκτονεί ή έναν κορμοράνο που κόβει τις φλέβες του. Σίγουρα δεν θα έγραφα ένα διήγημα για να στείλω σε εκείνον τον διαγωνισμό στη Βαρκελώνη.

The Seagull

Georgios Ampatzidis. Greece

I woke up with a hard-on and the feeling of a new literary idea wandering through my head. I had to pee, and struggled with my looming inspiration for a few minutes; the cold water running in the sink dramatically improved my body's functions. I made a black coffee "frappe" with five ice cubes, and sat in front of the TV in just my shorts.

Drinking coffee was the way I initiated proceedings in such cases. Morning inspirations were not an unusual thing for me; as a matter of fact, I felt that as the years went by morning inspirations were becoming more and more frequent (while morning hard-ons followed the opposite course). The ritual begins with a review of which activities might have aroused this inspiration. I turned on the TV and switched it to a random channel while I clinked the ice cubes in the glass by stirring them with a straw (the noise helped me refresh my memory).

It wasn't hard to settle on a theme. The previous evening, Tonya had been watching a documentary in my living room while I sat next to her, trying to seduce her. Unfortunately for my libido, the documentary was about a photographer travelling through third-world countries doing photo shoots and charity work (my erotic seduction couldn't compete). Eventually we screwed, but right up to the end of the documentary I was obliged to watch the fascinating adventures of a seagull in its starring role.

"The seagull dies in the end," I told Tonya all of a sudden.

"How do you know?"

"It's what I do. I write stories."

The seagull appearing in the documentary died eventually from having eaten an infected fish in Senegal. Before the unfortunate bird died, Tonya crossed her leg over my supine body, and while pushing herself across my chest and belly, she began biting and kissing my lips. Sometimes I think that she hangs out with me – a broke, aspiring writer who's ten years older than she is – out of charitable feelings and an artistic curiosity, the kind you develop if you're interested in the arts (photography, in her case). She really appreciated my little aphorisms, and she let me know as much. Some oil-slick cormorants died along with the seagull. I peeked while we were still in the living room.

Once I had a theme to work with, the next step was to focus on the subject. This is always the most difficult part. Like a shadow that appears in your field of vision when you're looking into a bright background, the more you try to focus on some flies, the more distant they seem. This stage required nicotine, and was a perfect excuse to smoke the rest of a cigarette I had cut in half and left the day before yesterday, when I swore I would quit smoking. In service to my addiction, I throw my cigarettes in the bin, which I empty once a week, so I'm always finding slashed rehabilitation attempts whenever I need them. In order to tease the addiction even more, I've been smoking unfiltered cigarettes for the past few months, so as to not waste the other filtered halves. My lungs are being sacrificed for the sake of artistic creation.

After three and a half cigarettes, and a second "frappe" with only three ice cubes so

I could finish it faster, I outlined my new story. In technical terms, it would be a 2500-word narrative to send to a themed competition in Barcelona. My idea was to write about the unjust distribution of wealth and unequal economic development caused by a worldwide, greedy elite that left poverty and disastrous environmental conditions in its wake. Something along those lines. The subject was not unfamiliar to me: I often referred to it in texts that included testimonies from victims of this situation. I felt victimized by this situation myself, having spent months without a job, unable to pay the rent and depending on the financial support of Tonya. Yet it would be the first time I'd try writing on the negative aspects of capitalism as a main subject. Through association, I recalled many aphorisms from my politicized student years.

I went to see Tonya to discuss my ideas. I trusted her judgment because she was able to apply her photographer's point of view to a literary framework. With her knowledge of a photograph's focal point, she was able to imagine the scenes of a narrative. I'd been discussing my ideas with her ever since we first met, when she still was a friend of the girlfriend I'd been with for three years. The two of them had met at a photography seminar, and the three of us went for a coffee once: me, Tonya, and Aggeliki, who loved photography as well. I had a good time that evening talking with Tonya about a story I was writing and (unintentionally) ignoring killer glares from Aggeliki, who was watching us without saying a word. Aggeliki never spoke to Tonya again after that day, and she let me know that she'd been glaring at me for "drooling" over and ogling her now "ex-friend" Tonya. We broke up exactly two months later. A factor that probably contributed to Aggeliki's decision to leave me was the appearance in my new story of a young

French photographer named Aynot, who stole the author's heart. In any case, for six whole months after Aggeliki left me, I was drinking, smoking, barely eating, and writing poems about people who committed suicide.

Then I ran into Tonya again. We met by chance on the street and she recognized me, despite the signs of Aggeliki's abandonment being evident on my face. We literally introduced ourselves all over again, since associations such as "Aggeliki's friend" or "Aggeliki's boyfriend" meant nothing anymore. She suggested we go for a coffee, and I told her that I was writing poems about people who cut their veins. She shuddered and urged me to write about "something big, something important". I told her she was right, then kept on writing about people who couldn't bear life's hardships. This lasted for a couple of weeks, until I started an affair with her, when my writing became more optimistic.

Tonya was pleased to have inspired me. She worked as a volunteer for an NGO assisting victims of the economic crisis in Greece. On mornings when she didn't have class, she wandered around the streets of Athens taking photographs of people in need, people living in slums, and some evenings she helped distribute food and medicine. My texts began to reflect her influence, and gradually characters with financial difficulties began to appear in them: people who were unemployed or were living in impoverished regions and forgotten towns. Still, this was merely a part of my writing, and not the main subject. Tonya constantly insisted that I write about "something big", "something important"; that I deal with "injustice", "poverty", "the pursuit of profit", and "environmental degradation". She reminded me of aphorisms that I had renounced years ago because I'd regarded them as hypocritical. I considered it hypocritical to write about societal injustice while doing

nothing to fight against it. She got upset when I talked to her like that, and insisted that even if it was only one person who was made more aware after reading one of my texts, it would be the world's gain. Believing that she had finally persuaded me, she was pleased when I told her about my literary concerns from that morning.

I was sincere in explaining to her that I hadn't overcome my reticence regarding hypocrisy. Inspired by the cormorants covered in oil, I thought I might like to write about environmental degradation being a consequence of the pursuit of profit, but I realized that a story like that wouldn't make as much of an impact as a poem about a woman who hanged herself. Tonya smiled.

"The last poem you read to me was wonderful. You have to do your best to make your new text is as good as that poem."

"Will you help me?"

"I could be the main character, if you'd like," she said, and spun around.

"I'll think about it," I answered, trying to look as serious as I could.

She looked sad. I guessed she was pretending, but I was never sure whether she was or not. When it came to her feelings, and her orgasms as well, she had the ability to draw a colorful curtain across herself and not let anything pass through, unless she tugged at the edges herself.

"I'm teasing you, my love," I assured her.

"I know! I'm not really upset, baby. I know that I'm the only character starring in your texts."

I had told her several times that, for me, writing and life were two completely separate things. I could write about some random girl I'd seen on the street or met at work, but that didn't mean I wanted to fuck her. I pointed out that after our first meeting and while

I was still involved with Aggeliki, I'd written a story whose main character very much resembled her, and that I'd given the girl in my story Tonya's name, written in reverse. She let me know that she didn't like to be told those kinds of things, so I never told her anything like that again. At least she didn't get jealous of any female protagonists who committed suicide.

"Could I have some of your photos? I remember you did a series on pollution. It would also be helpful if you could show me some places in Athens with signs of major degradation. You know the city better than I do."

Right then she took some photos from her folders and gave them to me. The list of places she started to name was so long that I stopped her after the first ten.

"Let me visit some of these places first and then we will see."

"Would you like me to go along with you?"

"It would be better if I went for a few walks by myself. You know it helps me."

She nodded in agreement and gave me a see-you-in-the-evening kiss. When I left her house, I felt optimistic again. Maybe if I visited some of the places she suggested, if I studied her photos, if I tried to get inside the mind, soul or life of a shark – the kind that swim or the financial kind –, if I managed to deconstruct and reshape the perception of profit, maybe then I could write something related to the idea that had woken me up in the morning. As I tried to look at them, the shadows began drawing away, but this is something that will never change.

The closest place Tonya suggested I visit was an abandoned beach I could get to in an hour by bus. I'd been there once, years before, when it had been a clean beach, one that had been very popular with people wanting a

place to swim that was easy to get to. Since then, debris from nearby construction sites, wastewater from nearby businesses, and trash tossed by passers-by had accumulated and, because tolerance turns into complicity, it led to the creation of a beach-dump. I picked my way past the trash and sat on a rock by the sea. A sense of futility in regard to my own efforts returned. How could my story help? Would it persuade an innkeeper to stop emptying his garbage into the sea? Would it persuade a truck driver to journey double the distance to throw his trash elsewhere? As these thoughts went through my head, I kept picking up pieces of plastic from below and hurling them back.

I took some photos out of my backpack and looked through them. The shots Tonya took in the streets of Athens were used by the NGO she was working for to raise people's awareness. The effort seemed to be paying off, since they'd managed to organize the distribution of food and medicine solely through the volunteer work of ordinary people. Maybe these efforts weren't in vain after all. My thoughts went from warm to cold and back again, right along with the weather, which switched constantly between warm and sunny to cold and windy.

I started outlining the story in my mind, taking notes. My main characters would be seagulls living on a beach like this one. They would live quiet, pleasant lives, eating fish from the sea and soaring above the waves. One day a factory would be built next to the beach, and its debris would be dumped in the sea. The seagulls would decide to do something about it by attacking the construction workers, pecking them and assailing them with droppings. The seagulls would win and, instead of the factory, a school would be built.

I knew I was writing nonsense. I crossed out everything I'd written and stopped for a while. A dropping landed on my notebook; I saw a seagull flying over my head and without thinking I threw my pen at it. The seagull fell in front of me a moment later, the pen sticking out of its belly.

I examined the dead bird, pulling my pen out to reveal a deep wound by its tail. A sudden impulse made me stick my pen back into its belly and drag it towards its neck, making a ragged incision in the bird. It was something I hadn't mean to do but couldn't help, like an annoying hiccup that won't stop even when you hold your breath. I did hold my breath because of the intense stink that emerged from seagull's stomach, reminding me of my kitchen after I'd cleaned fish and left the garbage for three days. From its stomach I extracted three hooks, a piece of a can and a ribbed condom. I rolled the condom over two of my fingers and turned them around. I figured the seagull would have died anyway, since its diet was obviously screwing with its health.

The seagull was killed by my pen. Even if it hadn't been killed by my pen, it would have died from the trash it'd been eating. It could've been killed by the can, something that many starving regions lack. It could've died from sexual stimulation. It could've been killed by a trap set for a fish. Some people have too many things; some don't have anything; and for others, all that is left is trash. I tore out my page of notes and headed towards the bus stop to get back. I might write a poem about a seagull that committed suicide, or a cormorant that cut its veins. Surely I wouldn't write a story to send to the competition in Barcelona.

Plastic

Slavena Zaharieva. Bulgaria

Anna opened her eyes and smiled. She was wide awake at sunrise, even before the alarm clock had rung, because she was happy. Stretching under the soft linen sheets, she smiled again before she sat up. The sun's first rays had already filled the room with the soft light of early summer mornings. Chirping from an enthusiastic bird floated through the open window, sounding like a song about the kind of happiness that has no particular source or reason.

Anna's big, black, white-pawed cat sat on the window sill with her ears raised, trying to determine the source of the birdsong. When Anna got up, Kitty barely glanced at her with an air of disinterest, and went back to listening to the distant prey. Anna went around the room, turning on her computer and making coffee. Kitty sighed. The bird had stopped chirping, and the cat began to lick her left front paw with meticulous precision. She stopped for a moment only when Anna filled her plastic bowl with cat food. Then she continued with the right paw.

After a first hot gulp of coffee, Anna looked at the poster on the wall and smiled again. The big poster with her picture on it read "Anna Spring, your candidate for Senator. Thinking with you, about you, like you". Although it was a bit narcissistic of her to keep the poster in her bedroom, she had decided she was entitled to a little narcissism. After all, she was one of the youngest women ever to be elected to the Blue Megapolis Senate. Even now, a few days after the elections, she still had moments of disbelief in her own success, when she had to look at the poster to remind herself she was now Madam Senator.

She was sipping her coffee in front of the poster when the computer made the clicking sound of a new e-mail from administrative services. It read, "Ms. Spring, you are expected in the Prime Minister's office for breakfast this morning."

The PM was a big man whose thin squeaky voice made Anna jump whenever she heard it unexpectedly. She wasn't very fond of the man, even though they were from the same party, and she was especially not fond of the fact that he accompanied his breakfast with a cigar. She coughed attentively while he talked behind a veil of blueish smoke.

"I'm very proud of you, Anna, and very happy to help with your new duties. We have a great number of tasks ahead of us. There are the new entertainment regulations to pass, then tax reform and education guidelines to draft. We have our hands full."

She smiled her official smile while he talked, and when he started to repeat himself, she concentrated on her hard-boiled egg, still smiling as if she were listening to him. Thank God the coffee's good, she thought. It makes breakfast tolerable.

"Oh, and there's one more thing. Today you and I are going on a little trip."

Anna started listening again.

"A trip?"

"Yes. To the outside."

"Outside?"

“Outside Blue Megapolis.”

Anna’s eyes opened wide and she put her coffee cup down with a sharp clink of porcelain. She looked at him for a few seconds without speaking while he explained.

“See, I know this is new to you, but so is being a Senator. Ordinary people don’t go out, but you are no longer ordinary.”

Anna had never felt ordinary but she decided not to go into details, instead continued listening in silence.

“The government has decided that every acting politician must be aware of what’s out there. So we’re going on a trip.”

“But... What is out there? I thought it was just empty fields and wilderness. Why would I need to see it?”

“Well, I personally agree with you but... Regulations. We have to go. I’ll send some clothes for you and we’ll leave at 11.”

“Clothes, sir?”

“You’ll see.”

After this most peculiar breakfast came an even more peculiar package from the PM. It contained knee-high rubber boots and clothes made of a thick wool-like material. They looked like they would last a thousand years, a fact that made her feel strangely uncomfortable.

Anna had always wanted to be a politician. Even when she was little, she’d imagined herself in a formal suit, her short hair combed back, her face open to the world. She wanted to do good and she wanted to work in a suit. It was a strange mix of virtue and vanity which had begun at school, where she’d joined debate clubs and helped with campaigns and elections. Then, at university, her career had started to take off and her suits had started to pile up, until she had to get a bigger closet. In all those years, she’d almost never given a thought to the outside.

For the past century, life in Blue Megapolis had gone on exclusively within its walls (there were actual walls) and people seemed to have forgotten there even was an “outside”. There were, of course, other megapolises, but one got there by plane and had no need to see what was below the clouds. There was just barren land – they were briefly taught at school – a void between megapolises, a blank space. A nothingness that for some reason the PM wanted her to see.

She put on the clothes and boots under Kitty’s slightly-less-bored gaze. Then, once the cat finally decided that the plastic bowl of food deserved her attention, Anna left the flat and got in the black government limousine that was waiting outside her building. It took Anna and the PM to a military airbase on the outskirts of Blue Megapolis. Anna had only been to such a place once or twice before. It was full of grim men in camouflage who nodded their formal greeting to her and the PM. One of the grim men escorted them to a helicopter while another climbed into the pilot’s seat.

“Fasten your seat belts.” He raised his voice over the noise of the propellers at takeoff.

At first, all Anna could see below were the low buildings of the airbase. Then there was a field of prematurely yellow grass which went on for some time, empty and lonely. Only the color of the grass changed, becoming more and more yellow. (Wasn’t it early for yellow grass? It was only June...) Images went by as if from a film, one after another, like in a movie theater. Then they were at the walls of Blue Megapolis.

And then nothing.

Anna wondered again what they were doing there, flying over barren fields, but she couldn't ask the PM over the noise of the machine. As they continued flying, she noticed the land became more grey than yellow, and it was all flat, without a single tree, or river, or anything. For a moment, she thought it looked like another planet, one where vegetation didn't yet exist.

Her eyes had begun to grow tired from the monotonous view when suddenly she saw it. In the distance, almost on the horizon, there was a big pile she couldn't identify at first. It was like a mountain, but the texture was different. As they came closer, she noticed other, smaller piles around the first one.

"What is that?" she yelled.

"Trash," the MP yelled back.

Anna bent forward, trying to see more clearly. At first she couldn't make out anything in particular, but as the helicopter flew over the piles, she began to see it. Trash. And a lot of it. Huge piles of plastic bottles, containers of all shapes and sizes, clothes, shoes, automobile tires, broken glass, crooked metal parts, smashed radios and old TVs, and more and more plastic.

Anna looked without moving, unable to speak. The piles went on and on and seemed to become bigger and bigger. As the helicopter banked slightly to the right, she noticed something so strange that she was almost shaken out of her speechlessness. There were no flies clouding the air. No birds. No animals at all.

It was all dead piles of plastic.

The helicopter was now heading in a different direction and the piles were fewer and fewer, finally being replaced by the same grey land they had first seen. Anna looked on unblinking as they neared a cluster of low buildings surrounded by a fence. The helicopter descended, landing on a spot between the buildings. The propellers slowed to a full stop. Anna still wasn't talking or moving.

"Not a pretty sight, I admit," the MP said in a low voice.

"No," Anna replied dryly. "Is it... Is it ours?"

"Some of it. Some of it is our great-grandparents'. Our inheritance, so to speak."

His attempt at a joke fell flat as Anna looked at the buildings around them.

"What's all this?"

"Monitoring base. We have to keep an eye on what's happening here. On the piles."

"How does it end up here? The trash?"

"We fly it in."

"We?"

"Yes... Let's go in."

Before Anna could say anything else, the pilot handed them a pair of gas masks.

"What's this for?" she asked.

"Just in case. The air's not so good around here," the pilot said.

As they put on the gas masks and left the helicopter, Anna thought she would faint. They trotted across dry, grey land with the remains of yellow grass scattered over its cracked surface. Anna took a deep, artificial breath through the gas mask and looked up. The sky was also grey and the sun was barely visible behind a veil of smoky clouds. The light was muted, and it felt like it could be any time of day. Time didn't seem to exist in its natural form here.

Anna and the PM entered one of the buildings. They took off their masks in a semi-furnished lounge. Almost bare, it had only one table, a few chairs, and a kitchenette.

“Coffee?” asked the PM. “They purify the water here,” he quickly added.

“No.”

Anna sat down, beginning to gather her wits about her.

“What about Blue Megapolis? What’s the water like there?”

“Also purified. For some more than for others.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, let’s just say you’ll be drinking better water now that you’re a senator, when you go live in you new quarters.”

Anna nodded.

“I’m not saying it’s fair. It’s not. But there’s really nothing we can do about it.”

“Nothing?”

“All this – the waste – has been accumulating for generations. We’ve never really managed to, well, manage it. Garbage is fine, because it’s managed in Blue Megapolis. But plastic... It takes more than 400 years for a plastic bottle to biodegrade. Some of it is managed, but there’s simply too much.”

“So we just dump it here? There’s no better way?”

“We haven’t found one.”

“Have you tried?”

The PM sighed.

“Look, Anna, it’s not all black and white. We... after a certain point we weren’t able to...”

He continued to talk and his words began running together until they formed a pile of trash. At least, that’s what Anna imagined. She wasn’t sure how long he’d been talking when she interrupted him.

“And people don’t know anything?”

“Of course not. Can you imagine what would happen if they knew? It would be chaos.”

“We’d lose power, you mean. Us politicians.”

“Yes. And it would be chaos. We may govern poorly but it’s better than having no government at all.”

“And nobody asks any questions?”

“Very few people do. After all, one of the government’s tasks in recent years has been to encourage pop culture. Mass entertainment. None of this ridiculous diversity business – that’s too complex. Pure mass culture full of popcorn. People don’t ask questions when they’ve got enough entertainment. And popcorn.”

“Is it the same in other megapolises?”

“Pretty much, yes. Look. I brought you here because you need to know all this now that you’re in the Senate. And you need to keep it quiet.”

Anna nodded mechanically. After that, everything she did was mechanical. Leaving the monitoring building with the gas mask, getting in the helicopter, taking the mask off, looking out the window at the grey field with the piles of trash that grew smaller and smaller as they flew away.

She returned home in a daze. Kitty came to her in a rare display of affection, but Anna didn’t notice. She went to sleep, remaining awake until morning.

Then, at dawn, she picked up the phone and dialed the number of her publicist.

“Yes, Annie?” Sarah’s sleepy voice answered.

“I need you. I want to issue a press release.”

“Now? Can’t it wait?”

“Not really, no.”

Sarah sighed, and Anna heard the rustling of paper. Then the short search for a pen.

“A press release about what?”

“Plastic.”

Farkli aynilar

Halil Ecer. Türkiye

Eylül hazin bir ay olduğu kadar sevincin, coşkunun, yeni heyecanların başlangıcıdır çünkü eylül de okullar açılır ve bu öğrenciler için çok büyük bir sevinçtir. O yaz Elazığ da inşaat ta çalışıyordu Azad okul için harçlık toplamak ve bir nebze de babasının sırtında ki o kocaman ekonomik sıkıntıya el atmak istiyordu ve yine o yaz üniversite tercihlerini yapmıştı. Güneşin el sallamasıyla apar topar kalkıp kahvaltı yapacağı şantiye çadırına ilerlerken on sekiz yaşında hayatın belki en zevkli dönemlerini yaşaması gerekirken yaşam koşulların bu kadar ağır ve insan canının kıymetsiz olduğu dünyanın bekasının taşeron ağalarının cebinin şişkinliğiyle paralel olduğu bu kuş uçmaz kervan geçmez sıcaklığın beyin hücrelerine kadar işleyip işlevsiz hale bırakan bu garip şantiyede ne işi vardı akranları tatil köylerinde yazın keyfini çıkartırken o amelelik yapıp akşam mesaisine kadar kaç defa terleyen vücudunun kurummasını izliyordu ve kaç defa isyan ediyordu bahtına. Suçu Allaha atmamak için o kadar direnmesine rağmen bir türlü kurtaramıyordu kendini ruhsal boşluktan.

Kahvaltı sırasına girip bekledi öndeki insanları birer birer yemeklerini alıp binanın temellerinden artan tahtalarla yapılmış ve şekilleri ucubeyi andıran beş bazılarının ise altı ayaklı olduğu masalara diziliyorlardı boğazlarına takılan ekme lokmalarının farkında bile değillerdi korkuyla yenilen bir yemekten ne kadar lezzet alınabilirse o kadar alıyorlardı korkularının sebebi birazdan gelip en iğrenç hayvanın bile çıkartamayacağı bir sesle ‘haydi iş başı’ diyecek olan iğrenç ustabaşıydı taşerona yaranmak için işçileri bozuk para gibi harcayan ustabaşı.

Azad yemeğini alıp usulca ucube masada oturan elli beş yaşını çoktan aşmış saçları meleksi bir beyazlığa bürünmüş sıra dağlar gibi engebeli olan dişleriyle bayat ekmeği zar zor çiğneyen adamın yanına oturdu adam bir an önce yemeği bitirip kalkmak istiyordu yemek yerken çıkardığı sestenden kendisi bile rahatsız oluyordu diş kalmayınca ağızda mide aç kalırmış. Azad yemeğini yerken hayallerden kendini alamıyordu üniversite tercihlerine bu gün yarın açıklanacak ve bu lanet yerden kurtulacaktı ama okul hayatını parasız ezik geçirmek istemiyordu bu yüzden daha çok çalışması gerekiyordu akşam beşten sonra herkes gelip duşunu alırken o iki saat fazla mesai yapıyordu biraz daha dayan diyordu kendi kendine ve bazen de yaşlı gözlerle tamamlıyordu o hiç sonu gelmeyecekmiş gibi olan iki saati mesai dönüşü şükürden uzak isyana girmeden koğuşa geliyordu şantiyede ki işçi yatakhanelerine de koğuş deniliyor hapisten bir farkı yoktu sadece burada özgürlüğün içinde esirdi insanlar. Bu gün yirmi sekizinci günü ve artık bıkkınlık gelmişti.

Akşam yemeğini yedikten sonra hırpalanan bedenini yatağa bıraktı ve yarını düşünecek takati yoktu direk derin ve yorgun bir uykuya daldı. Yirmi dokuzuncu gün pek farksız değildi sadece öğle molasında çok özlediği annesinin sesini duymak için yalnızca yüksek yerlerde çeken telefonun şebekesini yakalamak için tepeler arasında mekik dokumaya başladı nihayet yakaladı annesinin cennet çıkışlı sesini duyduğu anda boğazı düğümlendi sadece iyiyim diyebildi.

Diyarbakırlı olan Azad Türkçeyi tam anlamıyla konuşamıyordu ve bu yüzden Türkçe konuşulan yerlerde pek sesini duyamazdı etrafındakiler Kürtçe bölücülüğü temsil ediyordu bu

ülkede belki de içe kapanıklığın sebebi buydu dokuz ay boyunca türk kültürünün yaşandığı okullarda üç ay kürt kültürünün yaşandığı kendi coğrafyasında kültür zehirlenmesine çokça maruz kalıyordu bu yüzden her iki tarafa karşı da sessizliği tercih etmişti.

Mesai sonrası biraz dinlenmek ve birazda gökyüzüne yakın olmak için inşaatında çalıştığı binanın sekizinci katına çıktı. Kitap yaprağına sardığı ve çalışma harareti sırasında terleyen vücuduyla ıslanmış olan tütünü çıkartıp parmak kalınlığında okkalı bir sigara sardı elini rüzgara siper ederek umutları gibi tükendi tükenecek ateşle yaktı ve derin bir nefes çekerek bedenini intihara hazırlayan katil gibi acı çektirdi yüreğine dumanını tam dışarı bırakmamışken telefonu çaldı. En büyük abisi aramıştı mutluluk ve şaşkınlık arasında ki o şok halini aştıktan sonra konuşabildi, abisi üniversite tercihlerinin açıklandığını ve Malatya'yı kazandığını söylemişti. Bu haber sıradan bi haber değildi. Kürtçe de azad özgürlük demektir belki de Azad için ilk defa ismi anlam bulmuştu. Bu lanet yerden kurtulacağına sevindi ilk önce daha sonra üniversite kazandığı için babasının oğlum adam olacak sesini işitir gibi olduğu için. Mutluluğu tarif etmek zor değildi Azad için o hayatın da ki acı limitini tüketmişti artık mutlu olması gerekiyordu ve bunu iliklerin de hissediyordu hemen koğuşa koşup inşaatın bu kötü hayatında beyinleri körleşen arkadaşlarına müjdeyi verdi. Koğuşa şenlik havası yayıldı yaşamı bırakanlar azadın bu haberiyle umutlarının filizlendiğini gördüler çünkü Azad henüz on sekiz yaşında ve inşaat hayatı onu çok çabuk eritecekti kurtulmasına sevindiler en çokta.

Hemen gidip eşyalarını topladı yarın memleketi Diyarbakır a geçip ondan sonra üniversiteye yol alacaktı beyninde hayal fırtınaları yaşıyordu. Diyarbakır a geçtikten iki gün sonra ailesinin hayır dualarıyla Malatya ya uğurlandı Diyarbakır Malatya yolu onun için kutsal olmaya başladı yol uzadıkça tavaf süresi artıyordu çünkü bir Müslüman için kabe ne ise onun için o olmaya başladı Malatya. Kilise cami ve havra gibi kutsalliyet kazanmaya başlıyordu kurtuluşun yeri, dirilmenin ve yeşermenin yeri üniversite Azad için.

Okulun ilk günü elli beş kişilik kocaman sınıflar gördü okuduğu okullarda yirmi kişilik sınıflara sığdırılan elli kişilik sınıflar vardı fakat bu büyüklükte değildi sadece sınıfın büyüklüğüne bakıp üniversitenin güzel olduğuna kanaat getirdi. Farklı insanlar türkiyenin hemen hemen her yerinden gelmişti ve hepsi bir yerde toplanmıştı iki kültür arasında ki zehirlenme yetmiyor muş gibi bide ülke dışından gelen öğrenciler de vardı bu Azad için müthiş bir ruh bozukluğu demektir. Okulun ilk haftaları yavaş yavaş geride kalmaya başlıyordu yeni arkadaşlıklar yeni ilişkiler derken yavaş yavaş alışıyordu ortamına hiç değilse inşaat hayatını özlemiyordu.

Derslerde arka taraflarda oturup ders sonuna kadar hiç konuşmuyor herkes eğlenirken Azad için sıkıcı olmaya başladı. Türk sistem içerisinde Kürtlüğünü arıyordu fakat bulamıyordu. Arka sıralarda geçmeye başlıyordu hayatı. Böyle devam ederken isminin Azat olduğunu öğrendiği çocuk da Azad gibi kendi kabuğuna çekilmiş ve dünyayla arasında ki bağı koparan bir arkadaş vardı. Tuhaf giyimli farklı tarzda hareketleri olan diğer öğrencilerden farklı hatta Azad a göre de biraz değişik olan bu çocuk Türkmenistan dan gelmiş Türkiye ye. Azadın aklına takılan sınıfta ki duruşu ve isimlerinin benzerliği sadece sonda ki harf farklıydı ve bu Azat ı müthiş derecede çekici kılıyordu Azad a.

Arapça kökenli olan bu isimler aynı manaya geliyordu ikisi de özgürlükle ilintiliydi. Azad arka sırada bu benzerlikleri ve ikisinin de sınıfta ki sessizliği üzerine kafa yormaya başladı ve belki biraz empatinin iyi olacağını düşünerek Azat ı düşünmeye başladı. Azad bu ülkenin vatan-dışı fakat Türk sisteminin verdiği ezilmeyle kendi ülkesinde mülteci konumunda veyahut üvey

evlat muamelesi ile yaşama tutunmaya çalışırken bu kadar acı çekiyorsa Azat farklı bir ülkenin vatandaşı olarak Türkiye de nasıl tutunacak umut dalma.

Günler geçtikçe Azad ile Azat birbirleriyle dolaşmaya başladı Azadın bozuk Türkçesi Azatın Türkçesinin yanında biraz daha iyiydi yalnız bir espri yapıldığı da azadın bunu Azat a açıklaması gerekiyordu çünkü farklı ülkelerin en çokta güldüğü şeyler farklı olur Azat ta bu esprileri anlayabilmek için Azad tan yardım istiyordu.

Cuma günü öğrencilik için güzel bir gündür haftanın yorgunluğunu atabilmek için hafta sonları öğrencilerin bayramı niteliğindedir Azad Türkiye kültürünü tanıtmaya çalışıyordu aynı şekilde Azat ta ona Türkmenistan kültürünü. Bazen çok garip şeyler ortaya çıkıyordu aile kavramlarının farklı olduğu hayat tarzlarının farklı olduğu noktalar eğlenceli hale gelmeye başlamıştı. Bir keresinde Azad bir kızdı hoşlanmıştı fakat kıza açılmak çok zor geliyordu Azat bu durum karşısında baya şaşırıldı Türkmenistan da böyle bir zorluk yokmuş isteyen rahatlıkla gidip isteyenle konuşabiliyormuş. Azad kendi içinde keşke şimdi Türkmenistan da olsaydım diye geçirdi. Türkiye de bu işler bu kadar kolay değil Türkiye'nin biraz muhafazakar oluşu bu rahatlığın önüne geçiyor. Türkmenistan'ın 1991 de Sovyetlerden ayrılması sadece sınırların oluşmasını sağladı kültürler Rusya da kine çok yakın ve gerçekten Türkiye'ye oranla çok rahatlar. Azad için bu biraz daha zor tabi ki Türkiye de ki yaşam muhafazakar fakat Diyarbakır da bu biraz daha keskin çizgilerle ayrılmış Azad Türkiye'de ki iki farklı kültürü yaşarken Azat ın Türkmenistan ve Rusya karışımı hayatıyla parçalardan oluşan yeni bir kültürün pençesine girmeye başladı.

İkisi birlikte öğrenci evine çıkmaya karar verdiler zaten okulda yan yanayız evdede beraber oluruz diye teklifte bulunan azat oldu bu Azad için de iyi bir şeydi ve kararlaşıp eve çıktılar.

Azad Azatın Türkçesine yardım ederek hem kendi Türkçesini hem de onun Türkçesini düzeltmeye çalışıyordu ilk günkü dilden eser kalmamıştı artık daha hakim ve daha özgüvenle konuşuyorlardı hatta Azad Kürtçe öğretmeye başlamıştı, azat da Türkmenceyi yavaş yavaş öğretiyordu azada.

Hayat bu hiçbir zaman anlayamazsın birbirine benzeyen iki isim, iki hayat ve kader. Bunların birleşiminde ortaya çıkan yepyeni bambaşka bir hayat. Bazı durumlar insanın elinde olmak cinsiyetin mesela, doğduğu yer, ırkın, ailen bunlar insan üstü gücün elindedir. Buna sen veya ben karar veremeyiz ve bunlar yüzünden ayrımcılığa maruz kalmamalıyız eğer dilimi sorgulayacak biri varsa önce Allah ı sorgulamalı bir suç varsa onundur. Bu farklılığın başka bir boyutu vardır oda armağandır. Bize verilen bunca farklılık ve bunca benzerlik zenginlikten başka hiçbir şey değildir diyerek Azatın yüzüne bakıp iyi ki karşılaştık kardeşim iyi ki seni tanıdım yoksa bu kadar zengin olamazdım dedi o parmak kalınlığında ki sarma sigarasın dan tıpkı inşaat hayatın da ki nefesten çekti ciğerlerine.

Okul haziranda bitiyordu azat Türkmenistan a gidecek, Azad Diyarbakır a biri farklı bir ülke olan Türkmenistan a diğeri bir iç ülkeden başka bir iç ülkeye gidecekti. Eski kültürlerine tekrar kavuşacaklardı bu iyi mi kötü mü bilemeyiz yan yanayken özlemlerinden söz ederlerdi özlemleri dinecek mi yoksa yepyeni bir özleme mi yelken açacaklardı. Azat Türkmenistan a gitmek için erkenden uçak biletini almıştı ailesine kavuşacak diye mutluydu fakat kardeşim dediği Azad tan uzaklaşacak diye hüznüydü aynı şey azadın dünyasına da hakim di isimlerinden dolayı olsa gerek hüznün ve sevinç arasında ki ince çizgilerde geçiyordu yaşamları. Azat ın gitme vakti gelmişti havaalanına kadar beraber yürüdüler kalkış saatine dakikalar vardı kimlik kontro-

lü için gitmesi gerekiyordu. Belki de hayatta ki en zor durum kalanların ve gidenlerin ayrılış anları hangisi üzgün kalan mı giden mi? ... Hangisi daha fazla acı çeker yaşamın geri kalanını da? Farklı yaşam tarzları, farklı kültürleri nasıl da kardeşlik temelinde sorunsuzca yaşadılar acaba dünyada ki bütün insanlar azat ve azad gibi yaşasalardı şu an yer yüzünde savaşlar olur muydu?

Birbirleriyle sarıldıktan sonra azat uçağa doğru yürümeye başladı Azad uzun uzun baktıktan sonra eve döndü eskimiş ve başka bir insanın ağırlığını kaldıramayacak durumunda olan kanepeye oturup cebinden çıkardığı tütün tabakasından kalın bir sigara sarıp yaktı bir nefes çektikten sonra yaşanmışlıkları ve bundan sonrasını düşünmeye başladı.

Duman boğazında takılı kalıp gözleri yaşarmaya başladı. Her şeyden önce dilden, dinden, ırktan önce gelen insanlığın ne mükemmel olduğunu düşündü bu kadar farklılıktan nasıl güzel bir dostluğun can bulduğuna tanıklık etmişti belki de bundan sonrasında karşılaşmayacaktı fakat o güzelliği yaşadığını yüzünde ki tebessümle dile getirdi.

Sigarası bitmek üzereyken kalktı ayağa ve önceden topladığı valizini alıp otogara gitmeye hazırlandı yine farklıydılar biri uçakla diğeri otobüsle ayrıldı Malatya dan ve yine aynıydılar ikisi de uzaklaştı can buldukları yerden canan bulacakları yerlere...

Dissimilar Similarities

Halil Ecer. Turkey

September is not just a month of melancholy; it is also the beginning of joy and excitement because school opens again, which means great happiness for students. Azad, who had made his university selections that month, was working at a construction site in Elazığ over the summer to save some money for school and to ease his dad's huge economic burden. He woke up at first light and hurried to the construction-site tent where he would have his breakfast. As he did so, he wondered what he was doing at that strange site in the middle of nowhere, where the heat penetrated his skull to short-circuit his brain cells. In a world as vast as the wallets of subcontractor bosses, where the living conditions were severe and human life was cheap, what was he doing here? He was supposed to be having the time of his life as a boy of eighteen, like his classmates, enjoying the summer holiday. Countless times he felt his sweating body dry as he toiled into the evening shift, and countless times he cursed his fate. No matter how much he resisted the urge to put the blame on Allah, he couldn't help falling into a spiritual abyss.

He stood in the breakfast line and waited. One by one, people took their food and sat around the misshapen five- or six-legged tables made from surplus wood from the building's foundation. They weren't even aware of the way the lumps of bread got stuck in their throats; they enjoyed eating as much as anyone could enjoy eating in fear. The reason for their fear was the terrible foreman who would soon arrive and yell "off to work" in a voice that had no rival, even in the most ferocious

animal. This foreman had no qualms about walking all over the workers just to earn the subcontractor's favor.

Azad took his food and sat quietly next to a man sitting at the misshapen table. The man, who was well past the age of fifty and had angelic white hair, could barely chew the stale bread because his teeth were as uneven as a mountain range. The man wanted to finish his food and leave as soon as possible, since the sounds he made while eating were disturbing even to himself. A mouth with no teeth guaranteed a stomach with no food.

Azad couldn't help daydreaming while he ate. University selections would soon be announced, and he would be rid of this damned place. Yet, if he didn't want to be penniless and sad during his school years, he had to work harder. While everyone else took their showers at five in the afternoon, he stayed to put in more than two hours of overtime. He forced himself to hang in there a little while longer, and sometimes he spent those endless two hours with tears in his eyes. When his shift was over, he would quietly walk to the barracks, which is what the construction-site dormitories were called. They were no different than prisons, except here people were enslaved despite their freedom. This was his twenty-eighth day, and he was absolutely sick of it.

After dinner, his body completely drained, he collapsed on the bed. Too tired to think about the next day, he drifted into a deep and exhausted sleep. The twenty-ninth day wasn't really much different, except he wandered through the hills during lunch break try-

ing to get a signal on his phone, which had no reception on low ground, so that he could hear the voice of his long-missed mother. He finally got a signal, as well as a lump in his throat the moment he heard his mother's heavenly voice. "I'm fine," was all he could say.

Azad, who was from Diyarbakır, didn't speak Turkish well, and so he usually remained quiet on occasions when Turkish was spoken, well aware that Kurdish was understood to stand for separatism in Turkey. He was exposed to the same kind of cultural brainwashing during the nine months he spent at schools under the reign of Turkish culture as he experienced over the three months he spent at home under the reign of Kurdish culture. This was the reason he chose silence in both cases.

After his shift, he climbed to the eighth floor of the unfinished building, both to get some rest and to be closer to the sky. He took out the tobacco he had wrapped up in a page torn from a book. The tobacco was damp from his toiling body's sweat. He rolled himself a whopping, finger-thick cigarette and lit it, cupping his hands for protection against the wind. The light was as short-lived as his hopes. He took a deep drag, inflicting such a murderous assault on his lungs that he might have been preparing his body for suicide. Before he could exhale, his phone rang. It was his oldest brother. He was able to speak only after overcoming the shock – a state between happiness and astonishment – of hearing his brother tell him that the student lists had been announced, and he'd been accepted at university in Malatya. This was no ordinary news. His name, Azad, meant freedom in Kurdish, and now, for the first time in his life, this meant something to him. He was delighted because he'd finally be rid of this damned place, but also at the thought of hearing his father say "my son

will be a success" because he'd passed the university exam. Happiness was not a difficult thing for Azad to describe; he had gone beyond the limits of pain in his life and now, deep inside, he felt he deserved to be happy. He ran to the barracks to give his friends the good news, knowing how dulled their minds were by their awful lives at the construction site. A festive mood overtook the barracks, his news renewing the hopes of those who had given up on life. Azad, at only eighteen, was now liberated from a life at the site that would have swiftly consumed him.

He went to pack up. First thing next day, he would go to his hometown and then on to university. His mind was bombarded with daydreams. He stayed in Diyarbakır for two days, then bid farewell to his family. The road from Diyarbakır to Malatya began to seem holy to him. The longer the journey, the longer the circumambulation. Malatya was as holy to him as Kabba was to Muslims now; as sacred as a church, a mosque or a synagogue, because it was a place of salvation. University was a place of resurrection and renewal for Azad.

On the first day of school, he marvelled at the immense classrooms that easily held fifty-five students. In the schools he had gone to before, classrooms that had been built for twenty people were crammed with fifty students. The size of the classrooms alone was enough for him to conclude that university was good. Here different people from all corners of Turkey were gathered in one place. As if the imposition of two cultures weren't enough, students now came from foreign countries as well, which was a great source of distress for Azad. In the first weeks of school, he fell behind a bit, but as he built new relationships and friendships, he slowly grew accustomed to his surroundings and never missed life at the construction site.

Azad sat in the back, and never spoke until the end of each class. He grew bored with university, while everyone else was having fun. Unable to find his Kurdish identity within a Turkish system, he began to watch life pass him by. Meanwhile, there was another boy named Azat who seemed to be as isolated and detached from the world as Azad was. This boy dressed and behaved unusually; he was different from other students, and also a bit peculiar in Azad's opinion. He had come to Turkey from Turkmenistan. Azad was intrigued by their similar demeanor in class and the similarity of their names – only the last letters were different – and these similarities drew Azad to Azat.

Both names had Arabic origins as well as the same meaning: freedom. Azad began pondering these similarities, as well as their shared silence in the classroom, then felt himself begin to empathize with Azat. Considering the pain Azad had experienced in his life – first being treated like a step-child, then like an immigrant oppressed by the Turkish regime, despite being a citizen of this country – how in the world would Azat, who was a citizen of another country, keep hope alive in Turkey?

As the days went by, Azad and Azat started to spend time together. Azad's broken Turkish was a little better than Azat's, and when someone told a joke, Azad had to explain it to Azat. Because of the different nuances of humor between their countries, Azat asked for Azad's help in understanding the jokes.

Friday was a fine day for students, as the weekend lay ahead: a time for festivities or to get some rest. Azad tried to familiarize Azat with Turkish culture, while Azat introduced Azad to the culture of Turkmenistan. Sometimes they discovered very peculiar aspects of the cultures, and the differences be-

tween notions of family and lifestyles had begun to entertain them. One time, when Azad liked a girl but found it difficult to talk to her, Azad was quite surprised because no one experienced this difficulty in Turkmenistan, where everyone could easily talk to whomever they pleased. Azad wished he was in Turkmenistan. Such things weren't so easy in Turkey, which was a little on the conservative side. The separation of Turkmenistan from the Soviet Federation in 1991 separated only their borders; its culture remained very similar to Russian culture and was much more open than Turkey. Of course, it was a little more difficult for Azad. If life in Turkey was conservative, Diyarbakır was even moreso. Azad, who was already living in two different cultures within Turkey, began to be influenced by a new culture, one that combined the cultures of Turkmenistan and Russia.

Azad and Azat decided to move in together, figuring that since they were already spending so much time together at school, they might as well share an apartment. The suggestion was made by Azat, but Azad also thought it was a good idea, so they went ahead with the plan.

Azad tried to help Azat with his Turkish, so that they could both become more fluent. The Turkish they now spoke had nothing to do with what they had spoken on the first day of school; they were more competent and spoke with more confidence. Azad also started to teach Azat a bit of Kurdish, while Azat started to teach Azad a little Turkmen.

"Life is so full of surprises," said Azad. "It brings together two similar names, two similar lives and fates. The two combined create a whole new life. Certain situations are out of our control, such as where we are born, our gender, race or family. Since we have no power to decide these things, we shouldn't be discriminated against because of them; if

someone is going to question my language, he should question Allah first as he is the one who's responsible, if anyone is. There is another aspect to our differences, which is a gift. All the many differences and similarities between us are nothing but wealth." He looked at Azat. "I'm glad we met, brother. I'm glad I got to know you. Otherwise, I wouldn't be so rich now." He took a long drag from the finger-thick cigarette he'd rolled, just as he'd done that day on the construction site.

School ended in June. Azat would go to Turkmenistan and Azad to Diyarbakır. One of them was going to a different country, Turkmenistan, while the other was going to a different country-within-a-country. They would each rejoin their own cultures, neither sure of whether this would be a good thing or a bad one. When they were together, they always talked about how much they missed their homes. Would they finally satisfy their longing, or would they embark on new adventures? Azat, who had bought his plane ticket to Turkmenistan in advance, was happy to be rejoining his family, but he was also sad to be separated from Azad, whom he now felt was a brother. Azad shared these feelings too: they lived their lives on a fine line between sadness and joy, which might have had something to do with their names.

They walked to the airport together when it was time for Azat to go. With only minutes to spare until his departure, he had to go through passport control. Separation is probably the most difficult thing in life. Who

is the saddest: the one who leaves, or the one left behind? Who suffers more for the rest of his life? The two friends had embraced different lifestyles and different cultures with no problem, as brothers. Would there be war in the world if everyone lived like Azat and Azad?

They hugged each other and Azat walked towards the plane. Azad watched for a while, then went back home. Sitting down on the worn couch that could barely hold one person's weight, he took the tobacco tin from his pocket, rolled a fat cigarette, took a deep drag and started to think about all the things he had experienced, and the things still to come.

The smoke burned his throat, and his eyes started to water. He thought first about humanity's perfection, which went beyond language, religion and race. He had witnessed how a beautiful friendship could be born from so many differences. Although it was possible he wouldn't experience such a thing ever again, the smile on his face showed how content he was to have experienced it. As he reached the end of his cigarette, he stood up and prepared to go to the bus station with the suitcase he'd already packed. The difference was there again; one of them left Malatya by bus and the other by plane. Yet there were similarities again as well. They were both leaving the place where they'd started a new life, and were heading to places where they both hoped to find the loves of their lives.

الموت أرحم لي من الحياة

سارة دباش, الجزائر

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أعشق ثلاثة رجال في العالم :أبي, ظلّه و انعكاسه في المرآة, جملة رُحْتُ أرددها في شفاهي, أتمنّم بها محاولة منع انفجار الدموع من عينيّ لكن ما عسى يمكنني فعله؟ أنا أنثى و لا يمكن أن أكون كالذكر, الكل يعرف بأننا عاطفيات , لماذا تطالبنني بحبس دموعي؟ احمر وجهي و انتفخت عيناى و أنا أرى وجه أبي العزيز مصفر, مرهق و متعب, ليس بإمكانى فعل شيء سوى الدعاء له, لقد حاولت جاهدة أن أريه انه قام بتربية شاب وليس صبية , كما كان دائما يقول : "لم يرزقني الله بذكر لكنه رزقني اثنين ذكر و أنثى في نفس الوقت " . حاولت أن أكون صلبة كالحجر لكن لم استطع فأنا لم أعتد على رويته على هذا الشكل.

حاول أحدها بدء الحوار لكننا تبادلنا النظرات أولاً , للأسف لم استطع التفكير سوى في موضوع الموت والحياة و بينما أنا في تانهة في أحلام اليقظة أتفلسف في سنة هذه الحياة نطق أبي و الابتسامة مرتسمة على وجهه : " إذا لقد اخترت فرع الطب في الجامعة ؟؟؟ جيد جدا, لكن تذكرى أنك ستداوينني مجاناً إن أختجت إليك". فأجبتّه "نعم حتى أنه بالدخل الأول لي سأخذك إلى لندن و سنزور جامعتك" لكن لم أستطع إكمال الحوار, خرجت مسرعة من غرفته متجهة إلى فناء المنزل, و قلبي يصرخ بأعلى صوت "لماذا تكذب علي فانا لم اعد طفلة , أحس إنني سأزور لندن بمفردي, أمي هجرتنا و الآن أنت تفعل نفس الشيء معنا" وإذا بشخص يشد مرفقي , أه إنها العجوز الشمطاء, ماذا تريد الآن ؟ اقصد زوجة جدي فراحت تقول لي : " عن أي جامعة تتحدثون ؟؟ لا لن تستطيعي الذهاب, عليك أن تتزوجي * سعيد * سيسترك أنت و أختاك لماذا لا تفهمين هذا ؟؟؟", أجبتها : " أي سعيد هذا؟؟؟ انسي الموضوع فقد قلت لك ألف مرة لن أتزوج سأكمل دراستي في الجامعة و سأخرج إن شاء الله و أعمل" فردت علي : "انسي هذا الحلم السخيف نحن في هذه القرية المرأة للمنزل فقط, لن تخزقي هذه العادات أيتها المراهقة , من سيتكفل بكن بعد وفاة أبيكن من سيصرف عليك ؟؟؟ أنت تعلمين أننا أنفقتا كل ما نملك لعلاجّه إنه يخضّر الآن , لذا لا حل لك سوى قبول عرض الزواج", قاطعتها قائلةً "نعم هذه نظرتكن الوحيدة للحياة, الزواج, الحمل و الموت لا شيء آخر لا لن يحول أي احد بيني و بين حلمي " فردت علي: "لن تغادري القرية , لن يسمح لك أهلها من سيرعى أختاك ؟؟ أظن أنني أفكر بتزوجهما أيضاً " , " أنا من سيتزوج , * فاطمة* أنت متفوقة في دراستك لن أقف عائقاً في طريق نجاحك أنا سأتزوج *سعيد* فعلى أية حال نتائج امتحاناتي دائماً ضعيفة, نعم لقد اتخذتُ قراري" كان هذا كلام أختي الصغرى أرادت أن تضحي من أجلي و من أجل توأمها, لا لن اقبل بهذا فهي مازلت قاصراً ولا يحق لهم تزويجها ما هذا العالم المتخلف ؟؟؟؟ جريت بسرعة إلى غرفتي استلقيت على سريري علي أن أنام, اعشق الأحلام حتى لو أنها غير حقيقية فهي أفضل من هذا الكابوس الواقعي, أهرب إليها, أغلق

عيناى، أقوم بتذكير نفسي بكل الذكريات السعيدة فأشعر بالراحة القصوى، نشوة لا مثيل لها في حياتي الواقعية.

نمت نوما عميقا أحلم بكلام العجوز ، أختاي مقبلتان على شهادة البكالوريا وتحتاجان الرعاية التامة، لذا علينا العودة إلى عاصمة البلاد، فهذا الصيف شارف على الانتهاء ، لا يمكنني أن أظل في هذه القرية دقيقة واحدة يجب أن نعود إلى مدينتنا والى منزلنا وإلا فسنتجز فيها طوال حياتنا، آه على الأقل *سعيد* يملك منزلا هناك و اعلم انه لن يقبل أن أكمل دراستي و لكن على الأقل أختاي ستفعلان ،استيقظت فيما بعد و أنا أتخيل، أتذكر حالة أبي، اتجهت لتلك العجوز ، أردت أن أختم حياتي و أودع أحلامي فلا مجال للهروب من هذا الواقع ، وفتت أمامها فصعب علي أن أظن الكلمة، كلمة نعم ،نعم،أنا موافقة على هذا الزواج ، لكن نطقها و بصوت منخفض ،شعرت ، بالمهانة والذل كل الكلمات التي تنتمي إلى الحقل المعجمي لكلمة لا كرامة، اعتلت على وجهها الإبتسامة وقالت " هكذا أريدك انظري إلى بنات عماتك (حفيداتها) كلهن تزوجن و هن يافعات، أما أنت فكنت تغسین، لم يحطم أحد رقماً قياسياً في العمر الذي أنت مقبلة عليه للزواج ". لم استطع تحمل تلك الوضعية، لبست عباءتي و رحلت لآتسوق، علي تغيير الجو الخائق في المنزل.

و بينما أنا في الطريق لمحت امرأة من بعيد ، كانت تشبه أمي تماما، كان وضعاً غريباً جداً، سبحان الله إنه يخلق من الشبه أربعين . بقيت أهدق فيها، أتلذذ بهذه النظرة فلقد اشتقت رؤية وجهها العزيز، انتابني التوتر ، الضيق ، الرعب تماما كما حدث عند جنازتها(سبب موتها كان التفجير الذي قام به أصحاب المذهب الديني الآخر في مسجدنا. أمي ضحية لصراع المذاهب). توجهت المرأة صوبي ، مسكت يدي، كانت يدها ناعمتان كيد والدي تماما ، بقينا نمشي و من شدة الذهول كنت انظر لها و أنا عاجزة عن الكلام ، عاجزة عن السؤال أو التفكير، أصبت بشلل كلي.إنها أمي !!! ؟ دخلنا إلى قاعة محكمة ما، كانت مليئة إلى آخرها بأناس غربيي الأطور، كانوا ينتظرون محاكمة ما، جلست معها صامتة ، أستمتع فقط ، كان المتهمان شخصان أحدهما يدعى * لوم دي سيد* (كان الرجل أسمر البشرة، أسود الشعر) و الآخر* لوم دي نور*(كان رجلا ذو بشرة بيضاء و شعر أشقر). حسبما فهمت هما إخوة، رغم اختلاف مظهرهما !، كان الكلام يعم أرجاء القاعة و إذا بالقاضية تمسك مطرقتها و تعلن عن بداية المحاكمة. كانت ضحية المتهمين الأولى امرأة كهلة ، سمينة، أعراض المرض واضحة عليها، جسدها منهك و الكدمات تملئ وجهها ، صرحت أن حرارة جسمها جد مرتفعة تدعى *تيرا* أرتنا صورتها في شبابها، بدت امرأة جذابة جداً و في كامل عافيتها. فقالت أن هذه الصورة قبل كبر إبنيها *لوم دي نور* و * لوم دي سيد* و قبيل ممارستهما أعمالهما فهما سبب مرضها و ذبولها، هما ابنان عاقان و عاصيان لها، لظالما ضرباها، استنزفا ثروتها و استعمالها بشكل سلبي، لذا فتصرفيها هم سبب مرضها. و لم يتوقفا عند هذا بل تمادى في طغيانها ليشملا أخواتها.*اربر* واحدة منهم (كانت الضحية الثانية امرأة سمراء مع شعر أخضر) طرداها من منزلها و أرضها فاستعملاه لإقامة مشاريعهما و قتل بناتها. أما *بيتر* (رجل أسود ،من أشرف القوم) اشتكى عليهما قانلا أنهما قاما باستغلاله اشد استغلال، حيث قاما بمعاملته كالعبد، وويل له إذ لم يحسن عمله أو لم يقدم مردود أفضل، فكانا يلومونه و خاصة* لوم دي سيد*، فهو يسبب له التوتر، الضغط و يحمله كل المسؤولية. أما* لوم دي نور* فقد وظيفه ليعود على نفسه بالمنفعة.

أما ضحيتها الرابعة كانت عبارة عن جيرانهما *انيمو* واحد منهم، صرح إنهما قام بتشريده هو و عائلته فأصبحوا لاجئين، لا منزل لهم، فبعض من عائلته ماتوا جراء عدم توفر المأوى، أما البعض الآخر فقتلهم المتهمان دون رحمة. أما *أقري* كانت امرأة تتذمر بشأن *لوم دي سيد* فهي غاضبة و حاقدة عليه، لأنه أهملها و لم يعطه حقها، رغم أنها كانت رفيقته منذ القدم، فهو لم يعطها أهمية بقدر الأهمية التي يولها لبيتر، بطبع فهي على الأرجح ليست بدرجة غناه، لذا* فلوم دي سيد* كان يوكل كل أعماله لبيتر دون سواه، أما *لوم دي نور* كان يأبه لها و يثق فيها. و يوظفها لضغط على *لوم دي سيد* مطلقا عليها اسم "السلاح الأخضر".

يوجد شهود آخرون أفادوا أن المتهمين لم يسلموا حتى من شر بعضيهما، فكل واحد يكيد للآخر، مثلا عندما يقوى أحدهما يستعمل نفوذه سلبا ليضغط على الآخر، فيضطر الضعيف أن يتبع القوي وبالأخص إذا تدين الواحد من الآخر فيفرض صاحب الدين شروط و فوائد على المتدين، فهما يتسابقان نحو التسلح النووي و كل يريد السيطرة و احتلال الآخر.

كانت هذه اغلب التهم الموجهة للمتهمين، كنت أتابع هذه القضية باهتمام و شغف غريب كأنها تعنيني بقدر ما تعني المظلومين، فجأة استدعوني لمنصة الحكم لأشهد، مشيت في رواق المحكمة، شعرت بمغص شديد في معدتي فكاد يصيبني الدوار، التفت الكل لي ثم صار الحضور يهمسون لبعضهم البعض " يظهر أنها من أقرباء *لوم دي سيد*، فيا ترى هل ستشهد لصالحه أم ضده؟؟؟؟". و قفت أمام الحاضرين، شعرت بتوتر، قلبي يخفق بشدة و كأنني أعاني رهاب المسرح، سألتني القاضية حول شهادتي فقلت "اعرف *لوم دي سيد* حق المعرفة لأنني من أقربائه، فنحن عائلة *دي سيد* نعاني من عدم التوازن الجهوي و التخلف، إنني أشهد بصحة شهادة كل من *أقري*، *بيتر*، *تيرا* و *انيمو*، أعتذر نيابة عن عائلة *دي سيد* منهم، حتى نحن لم نسلم من تصرفاته، و أفضل مثال يتمثل في أن الكثير من فتيات العائلة يمنعن من متابعة دراستهن و يغصبن على الزواج و أنا أحدهن، فهو يهمش المرأة و عقلها فيجرمها من حقها في التعلم رغم أن الواقع يؤكد احتلال المرأة في عصرنا كافة مجالات العمل بجميع ميادينها، إننا نعاني من الفقر المدقع، الجهل و الأمية ثم إن شبابنا يعاني من البطالة المجحفة، هذا لان *لوم دي سيد* يجبر بيتر لطبيعة عمله بتوظيف عدد ضئيل من العمال. بالإضافة إلى أن عائلتنا ينزح من الأرياف للمدن لعدم توفر مختلف الخدمات الاجتماعية، و اجتياح الفساد، البيروقراطية للإدارات و الملام هنا هو السيد دي سيد با الدرجة الأولى". أتممت كلامي.

شهد أناس آخرون ضد *لوم دي نور* فهو الآخر كان مذنبا بقدر أخوه تماما أو أكثر. صار الحاضرون يهتفون "العدالة، العدالة"، فقالت القاضية " أصدرت المحكمة في حق المتهمين السيد *لوم دي نور* و السيد *لوم دي سيد* العقوبات التي تتمثل في اهتمام المذنبين بالسيدة *تيرا* مدى الحياة معالجة مرضها و توعية عائلاتهم حول مرضها ويكمن هذا من خلال إدراج قضيتها في المناهج التربوية التعليمية، و في وسائل الإعلام، التعويض لعائلة *انيمو* قدره بناء مأوى و محميات له مع سن قوانين في دستور عائلات *لوم* يقتضي عقوبات في حق كل من يتعدى على *تيرا* أو *انيمو*، فيما يخص *بيتر* فعليهما عدم الاعتماد الكلي عليه، لذا فعليهما باستغلاله استغلالا عقلائي. و توظيف السيدة *لاقري* و كل من الأنسات : *توريزم*، *الطاقة الشمسية* و *طاقة الرياح* بنفس درجة منصب *بيتر* لتنوع من الدخل القومي، تشغيل للشباب، استثمارا في العنصر البشري و تشجيعا

للمبادرات الفردية , المنافسة و الإبداع .بالإضافة إلى دعم الأسر الفقيرة من خلال نشاط الجمعيات".
و أمرت القاضية على عائلة *لوم دي سيد* تحديد النسل, محاولة تحقيق الاستقرار الأمني و الديمقراطية, الاهتمام بالبنية التحتية, فا تعزيز مكانة المرأة اقتصاديا و اجتماعيا . أما بالنسبة لعلاقة الأخوين ب بعضهما البعض ,تفرض عليهما المحكمة إلغاء الحواجز الجمركية , إقامة نظام اقتصادي عادل ,إعادة توزيع ثروة *تيرا* على العائلات وأخيرا الدمج بين النظامين الرأسمالي و الاشتراكي.و بهذا انتهت الجلسة.

لشدة تركيزي على القضية غابت أمني عن عيني, همت أبحث عنها لكن لكثرة الحشود المتظاهرة خارج المحكمة لم استطع إيجادها, كان المتظاهرون يتذمرون بشأن الحكم ويصفونه بلا عادل ,لان هذه العقوبات لن تحيي ضحايا المتهمين . صادفت هناك كل من *مارتن لوثر كينغ* , *غاندي* و* شي غيفارا* , أصابتنى الدهشة رحت أقرص نفسي لعلي في حلم لكن بدون جدوى ,فثلاثتهم مثلي الأعلى و قدوتي في هذه الحياة. رحت أشق صفوف المتظاهرين صوبهم ,إلا أنني التقيت الفتاة الباكستانية المرشحة لجائزة نوبل للسلام * ملالا يوسف زاي* ,تداولنا فأبدت إعجابي الشديد بشجاعته, فهي تحدث سيد *لوم دي سيد* , تمردت عليه, فا ما كان جزائها إلا تلقي رصاصه من* طالبان* , خاطرت بحياتها من أجل حصول فتيات بلادها على التعليم.أفصحت لها عن مشكلتي في المنزل, نصحتني بعدم الخضوع والاستسلام ثم ودعتني و فارقنتني متمنيةً لي المستقبل الزاهر.

لمحت والدتي من بعيد ,ناديتها ,جريت نحوها ,إلا أنني كلما حاولت الاقتراب منها زاد البعد بيني و بينها ,صرت ابكي(كانت الدموع تتهاطل بغزارة من عيني) رحت اصرخ باسمها : "أمني ,أمني.....بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ,كان مجرد كابوس أم يجب علي أن أسميه حلم".

بعدها استفتت من هذا الحلم كانت العزيمة تغمرني, إرادة التصدي لهذا الوضع الصعب تملئ نفسي, و تسقيني بشتى أفكار التمرد فكانت نفسي تردد:

**"I will never say never, I will fight, i will fight it for ever, make it right;
whenever you knock me down ,I will not stay on the ground"**

كان هذا كل ما حفظته من أغنية *جاستن بيبير* ,لن اسمح لناس بتحديد مستقبلي ولا بالتحكم في حياتي, مهما كانوا,لن يلجمني احد.أنا الجرينة اللبوة التي لا تروض.من هم لكي يحرمني حقي, حق التعلم؟؟. هذا المجتمع يخاف على بناته من الدنيا و لا يخشى على أبنائه الآخرة(القيامة أو اليوم الآخر) لماذا الفتى و إن كان غيبا تجدهم يدفعونه للتعلم بما أوتوا من قوة, يشجعونه على الدراسة؟. أنا فعلا احسد الذكور فا أهلهم يبذلون كل ما بوسعهم ليضمنوا لهم مستقبلا زاهر بينما الفتيات فرغم عبقريتهن و ذكائهن الساطع يحرمن من التعلم و يعرضن للزواج ,لأنهن حسب العادات يشكلن العار إن عسن و بقين عازبات , لذا فالفتيات في نظرهن مجردة آلة إنجاب و أعمال المنزلية تطيع الزوج؟؟؟؟ نحن في القرن 21 و مازالوا يحتقرون المرأة رغم ما أعطاه الإسلام لها من حقوق عظيمة تساوي بينها و بين الرجل؟؟ لماذا لا يفقهون أن المرأة نصف المجتمع ,تربي النصف الآخر فكما

يقال: إن علمت رجلا فأنت قد ثققت فردا أما إذا علمت امرأة فأنت قد قمت بتثقيف جيلٍ بأكمله. بينما كان قلبي و عقلي يتحاوران فجأة سمعت صراخ أختي و نحيبها, كان قد آن الأوان لنظمر جسد أبي في التراب و آن معه الأوان لي كي أطمر أحلامي معه , لأبني عرش الزوجية فوقه حسب التوقيت الزمني لمجتمعي , لأسجن في القفص الذهبي - الزواج كما يدعوه مجتمعي-.

كانت وفاة أبي بمثابة هزة أرضية أصابت قلبي, أدخلتني غيبوبة الاكتئاب ,فكما كان يقال: "الصدمة التي لا تضعفك تقويك." لكن للأسف هذه الصدمة أضعفتني وقامت برسم مستقبلي ,لأفترن ب* سعيد* للأسف لم استطع أن أتكيف عاطفيا معه , فكنت أتعرض لضغوط نفسية ناجمة عن الحياة الزوجية و المسؤوليات الجمة تجاهه و اتجاه أهله,أنجبت فيما بعد فتاة, رميت على عاتقي مسؤولية مستقبلها, لم أرد بشدة أن تمر بالتجارب الأليمة التي مرت بها' تحديت العالم ,زوجي و حماتي , متحملة شتى أنواع الإهانة و التجاوزات الخطيرة من أبيها ضدي ,لتعيش صغيرتي في رفاهية تامة ولتحقق أحلامها أو بالأحرى أحلامي.

شتاء 2029, عاصمة البلاد

كان* سعيد * يشتهي امتلاك ابن يحمل اسمه و اسم عائلته, هذا الذي لم أتمكن من منحه إياه , فتزوج مرة ثانية تحت إصرار أمه , أشبه الرجال بالصور الدالة الرياضية (أف ل اكس -يمكن أن يكون لهم عدد كبير من السوابق(النساء) - اكس- ,بينما اكس,السابقة(المرأة) يجب أن يكون لديه صورة واحدة(الرجل) لا غير). كنت أعلى مستوى ثقافي منه, فأنا اجتزت البكالوريا بمعدل ممتاز أتاح لي فرع الطب في الجامعة بينما هو فلم يتعدى السنة الأولى ثانوي , مما ولد لديه التوتر و الشعور بالنقص و عدم التوازن فكان يحاول تعويض هذا النقص باحثا عن مناسبات يقتنصها ليستصغرني بالشتم و الإهانة و حتى الضرب .

كان يعلم ظروفي جيدا فأنا يتيمة , لا مكان لأقصده , و لا شخصا أبوح له (التوأمين في قرينتنا و لا أحبذ أن أعكر مزاجهم أو أصبح بمثابة هم لهما) ثم لا يوجد رجل يحميني, لا أملك لا أخا و لا عم (أبي لديه أخوات فقط أما أمي وحيدة أبويها) لذا فثائرتة تثار لأبسط الأمور و لاتفه الأسباب, فكان لا يتردد في إهدائي جروح و كدمات في فترات متقاربة ,كان عصبي المزاج, يمثل جبروت و تسلط العنصر الرجالي أو الذكوري على الأنثى.

لكن لم أكتف لهذا فالعذاب الجسدي ينتهي بمجرد انتهاء الألم لكن العذاب النفسي الذي أترعره هو ما جعل حياتي جحيم لا يطاق. تساهلت معه و تنازلت عن كافة حقوقي في خاطر ابنتي , لم أرد أن تصاب بعقد نفسية ,كل ما أردته هو أن أراها طبيبة كشقيقتاي يحترمهم أهل القرية خاصة و العالم عامة ,لذا لا بد لمركب الحياة الزوجية أن يسير, لكن للأسف ماذا جنيت من هذا؟؟؟؟ ابنتي الجامحة, المتهوره, التي ضحيت و تحملت من أجلها, حملت أخطائها عنها و منحتها الحرية التامة في التعلم, التصرف,سلحتها بالعلم لتحقيق الاستقلالية و النضوج, لتجعلني فخورة بها ,ولكي أري أقربائي أن

الفتاة المثقفة فتاة تعرف مصطلحاتها و مصلحة العالم. هتكت عرضها, و باعت شرفها لشباب سافل فباتت أعراض الحمل تظهر عليها, فقد *سعيد* صوابه بعدما اكتشف المصيبة , انهال علي بالضرب بحجة أنني لم أحسن تربيته, فراح يقتلها بدم بارد هي وجنينها,اعتقل و حكم عليه بالمؤبد. أما أنا فا لم أعد سوى جثة خاملة لا خدش يؤثر بي فعلى أية حال لا مكان له في جسدي المشوه المشوم بخريطة الجروح . صار شبعا أُمي و أبي يونسني و حبل الشنق الذي أضعه في رقبتني بات مثل عقد ذهبي لم يمنحه إلي زوجي يوما , بات هذا الحبل صديقي,منقذي الذي سيستأصل أُمي , هذا الورم الخبيث الذي يعذبني, سامحني يا* بيتر* – مختصر لاسم بيترول, pétrole-, آسفة يا :*لاقري*-. الزراعة, La agriculture -, * تيرا*-, la Terre, الأرض-,*اربر*-,الأشجار, Les arbres-, *أنيمو*-. الحيوانات, Les animaux-,*توريزم*-. السياحة, Le tourisme-, لا يمكنني مساعدتكم ,ليس بمقدوري حمايتكم, إنقاذكم,إفادتكم بشيء فأننا مجرد كانن مرفوض اجتماعياً,فإذا كان *لوم دي سيد * الأثاني لم يتقبل فكرة وجودي فكيف له أن يتقبل فكرة وجودكم ؟؟؟ لا يمكنني أن أعددكم بالاهتمام سواء ب التنمية المستدامة,أو البيئة. اكتفيت من* لوم دي سيد* –شعب العالم الثالث, L’homme de sud-, و*لوم دي نور*-. شعب عالم الشمال, L’homme de nord – و هذا العالم , ليس لدي الرغبة في البقاء و التواجد أكثر فالانتحار و الموت ارحم لي.....

Better Dead than Alive

Sara Debbache. Algeria

Summer 2013, in the village

“I am in love with three men: my father, his shadow and his reflection in the mirror.” That was the sentence I was repeating and whispering to myself while holding back my tears, but what else can I do? I am a female and I will never be a male. We women are well-known as being more sensitive; why are you asking me to hold back my tears? My face was red and my eyes were charged while I was looking at my father’s pale face. He looked exhausted. I couldn’t do anything for him except pray. I did my best to show him that he had raised a boy not a girl because he used to say that “God didn’t give me a boy; he gave me a boy and a girl in the same person.” I tried my best to look as solid as a rock but I failed.

We attempted to start a discussion but we just looked at each other instead. I couldn’t think about anything other than the subject of life and death. While I was lost in my thoughts and personal opinions, my father started talking to me with a smile on his face.

“So you chose to study medicine at university! Good, very good. Remember that when I need you, you will have to examine me for free.”

“Sure dad, I will. I will even take you to London with my first salary to visit your university.”

I couldn’t carry on the discussion. I ran outside the room heading to the lobby and I was screaming inside my head: “Why are you lying to me? I am no longer a child. I have the feeling that I will visit London alone. My mother left us and now you are doing the same.” Suddenly I

felt a hand grasping me from my arm. That was the evil old woman. What does she want from me now? She was my grandfather’s wife.

“What university are you talking about? You can’t go to university; you have to get married to Said. Your father will be gone and he will leave you and your two sisters alone, do you understand that?”

“Who the hell is this Said? Forget it. I told you many times I will not get engaged. I will carry on my studies and I will graduate from university, then I will look for a job.”

“You have to forget about this stupid dream. In our village the women stay at home. You are no exception to these traditions, you stupid teenager! Who will take care of you after your father’s dead? You are well aware that we spent all the money we have on his treatment; he is dying now. You have no choice but to get engaged.”

“Yes, this is your unique vision of life: marriage, getting pregnant, then to the grave and nothing else. No one will stand between me and my dream.”

“You will not leave the village. Its residents will not allow that. Who will take care of your sisters? I am thinking of marrying them off too.”

“I am the one who will get married,” said my sister Fatima: “You are doing well with your studies and I will not be an obstacle on your way to success. I will marry Said; I was never that good in school after all. I made my decision.”

Those were the words of my little sister. She wanted to sacrifice herself for me and for her twin sister. No, I will not accept this. She

is still underage. How can they marry her off? What a stupid world!

I ran to my room. I lay down on my bed. I needed to sleep. I love dreaming because even if the dreams are not real they are far better than this nightmare I am living. I take refuge in dreams by closing my eyes; I try to remember all the good memories and that makes me feel really good. It's a pleasure with nothing to be compared to in my real life.

It was a sound sleep. I dreamt about the old woman's words. My two little sisters will take their high school exams and they need to be taken care of. We need to go back to the capital. This summer is almost gone. I can't stay another minute in this village. We have to go back to our city, to our home; otherwise we will be prisoners forever. At least Said has a house there. I know for a fact that he will not allow me to carry on with my studies, but my sisters can do so.

I woke up still remembering my father's situation. I went to meet with that old woman determined to put an end to my life and my dreams. There is no hope of escaping this reality. I stood in front of her. It was so difficult to pronounce the word (the Yes word). Yes, I agree to marry him.

I whispered the word; I felt humiliated, while she was smiling.

"This is how I like you! Look at your cousins (her granddaughters), they all married at an early age. You almost remained unmarried. No has remained unmarried till your age, you set a record."

I couldn't bear the situation, so I dressed and went shopping. I had to run from that oppressive atmosphere.

While I was walking, I saw a woman who looked exactly like my mother. It was a strange moment. I told myself: "Oh my Lord! How can two different people look exactly the same?" I kept staring at her and enjoying it.

I really missed looking at my mother's face. I felt stressed and terrified exactly in the same way I felt during her funeral. She was killed by the blast of a bomb made by the people of the other faith in our mosque. My mother was a victim of the conflict between faiths.

The woman came towards me. She took my hand with her soft hands. They felt exactly like my mother's. We were walking and I was so impressed that I was staring at her without finding the courage to address her or ask her or even think. I was paralysed; she was my mother!

We entered a courtroom full of strange people. They were all waiting for a trial. I sat with her. I was silent and paying attention. The defendants were two men: one named *L'homme du sud* (he was a man with brown skin and black hair) and the other *L'homme du nord* (he was a man with white skin and fair hair). I guess they were brothers despite the difference in their appearance. The people in the audience were chatting when we heard "Stand up". The court was in session.

The first victim of the two accused men was a woman. She was fat and not in good shape at all. Her body was tired and covered in injuries. She said that she had a high temperature. Her name was *Tierra*. She had a picture of herself when she was younger. She looked very attractive and healthy then. She declared that this picture was taken before her two children *L'homme du nord* and *L'homme du sud* had grown up, and started causing her illness. They are bad children. They used to beat her. They are ungrateful.

They badly misspent her fortune and by acting like this they hurt her. That wasn't all they did; they even hurt their sister *Arbre* (she was not the first one, before her they had hurt a brunette with green hair). They kicked her out of her land, used it for their projects and killed her children.

Pétrole was a noble man (with black skin) who accused them of exploiting him. He said that they treated him like a slave. If he didn't do his work correctly or if his productivity was low then they would blame him, especially *L'homme du sud*, who caused him a lot of stress and pressure by blaming him all the time. *L'homme du nord* hired him for his own profit.

The fourth victim was their neighbours. *Animaux* was one of them. He declared that they made him and his family homeless. They are now refugees without homes. Some of the members of his family were dead because they couldn't find shelter; the others were killed by the defendants without mercy.

Agri was an angry woman. She was complaining about *L'homme du sud* because he ignored her and he didn't take care of her although she had been so kind to him since he was young. He cared more about *Pétrole* than about her. Of course she was not as rich as *Pétrole*; that explains why *L'homme du sud* gave him, and not anyone else, control of his business. *L'homme du nord* took care of her and trusted her. He used her to put pressure on *L'homme du sud*. He even called her "the green weapon."

There were other witnesses who declared that the defendants were even bad to each other. Each plotted against the other. When one of them was strong he used his strength to put pressure on the other. The weaker was then forced to follow the stronger, especially when he borrowed money from him. The lending rates were high and the conditions very harsh. Both of them were trying to obtain a nuclear weapon, and each was seeking to take control of the other. These were the major accusations against the defendants.

I was following this case with the greatest interest. That was strange because I felt

that this case concerned me as well as all the oppressed ones. Then out of nowhere I was asked to come to the bar as a witness. I stood up and walked towards the bar. I felt butterflies in my stomach and I almost fainted. Everyone in the audience looked in my direction and then started whispering. "It looks like she is a relative of *L'homme du sud*. Is she going to testify against him?" they asked. I stood in front of the judge; my heart was beating so fast that I thought maybe I was suffering from a type of phobia. The honourable judge asked me if I knew *L'homme du sud* and I answered, yes, I knew him very well since I was one of his relatives. We are one family, the family *du sud*. We all suffer from regional destabilisation and from underdevelopment. I here bare witness that the declarations given by *Agri*, *Pétrole*, *Tierra* and *Animaux* are all correct, and I apologise to them on behalf of the *du sud* family. Even we did not escape their harm. A lot of our girls were not allowed to carry on their studies. They were forced to get married, and I am one of them. Women are marginalised and they are denied their right to learn even if in our times women work in all types of jobs. We are suffering from extreme poverty and ignorance. Our youths are jobless. Nowadays *L'homme du sud* exploits *Pétrole* to do his job by using a low number of workers. And our families are fleeing the countryside to the cities due to lack of social services, corruption and bureaucracy. The one to blame here is *L'homme du sud*. That's all I had to say.

Other people after me testified against *L'homme du nord*; he was as guilty as his brother or even more so. Everyone in the audience were shouting "Justice! Justice! Justice!" The honourable judge pronounced the verdict: Mr. *L'homme du sud* and Mr. *L'homme du nord* are found guilty as charged. You are sentenced to take care of

Ms. *Tierra* for life, to treat her illness and to make the members of your families aware of her illness by including her case in the school books and the media. You are sentenced to pay damages to the *Animaux* family so they can build a shelter. You must make new laws in the *L'homme* family to punish anyone who harms *Tierra* or *Animaux*. Regarding *Pétrole* you must not rely completely on him, that's why you must use him in a better way. You are sentenced to find a job for Ms. *Agri* and for all the other ladies: *Tourisme*, *énergie solaire* and *énergie éolienne*, with the same rank as *Pétrole* in order to share the national income, to find jobs for youths, to invest in the human factor, to encourage individual initiatives, competition and innovation. You are sentenced to help poor families through the activities of the associations.

The judge also sentenced the *L'homme du sud* family to take control of birth rates, to work for security and democracy, to take care of the infrastructure and to ensure the presence of women in the economic and social sectors. Regarding the relationship between the two brothers, the court obliged them to have customs duties, to have a fair economic system, to redistribute the wealth of *Tierra* to the families, and finally devise a mix between the two economic systems of capitalism and socialism. That concluded the case.

I was so focused on the case that I forgot about my mother. I looked for her outside the courtroom; unfortunately, there were many people that made it impossible to see her. They were not happy with the verdict. They thought it was unfair and this verdict will certainly not bring back the dead victims.

There outside the courtroom I ran into Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi and Che Guevara. I was astonished. I thought it was a dream but it wasn't. The three of them were my idols and my inspiration in this world. I

went towards them through the crowds and on my way I met the Pakistani girl nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, Malala Yousafzai. We chatted for a moment and I was so impressed by her courage. She stood in the face of *L'homme du sud* and she was rewarded by a bullet from the Taliban. She risked her life to allow the girls of her country to go to school. I told her about my problem at home and she advised me to never surrender. She wished me a brighter future and then she said goodbye.

I saw my mother far away from me. I called her, and then I ran towards her. Each time I tried to reach her, the distance between us became greater. I started crying and shouting her name "Mum! Mum!" ... and then I woke up. That was just a dream, or should I say a nightmare.

After realising that it was only a nightmare, I was determined to face this difficult situation. I have to confess that I felt rebellious inside and heard this song in my head: "I will never say never, I will fight, I will fight it forever, make it right; whenever you knock me down, I will not stay on the ground," the lyrics sung by Justin Bieber. I will never let other people define my future, nor will I allow them to take control of it, whoever they are. No one will tame me because I am a free lioness. Who are they anyway to deny my right to go to school? This society cares more about the life of girls in this world, but doesn't care about the life of boys in the world after this life. Why are even stupid boys encouraged to go to school and study? I really envy them, because their parents do their best to guarantee a bright future for them, while even if girls are smart enough, they are not allowed to go to school and they are married to their husbands instead. These are the traditions that see an unmarried girl as a source of total shame. Their job is to get pregnant, to do the

chores at home and to obey their husbands. We are in the 21st century and women are still despised regardless of the fact that Islam gave them the same rights as men. Why don't they understand that women are the better half of society? That they are in charge of educating the other half? If you educate a man you only have one educated person; if you educate a woman you will have an entire educated generation.

While my head and my heart were having a discussion, I suddenly heard my sister crying. It was time to bury my father and to bury my dreams with him, and to build on their ruins my new conjugal house with my new husband according to my society. This is the golden cage, how my society describes marriage.

The death of my father was an earthquake that depressed me. There is a saying "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger", but unfortunately this terrible shock made me weak and shaped my future by marrying Said. My feelings were not in harmony with him, so I lived under pressure caused by the conjugal life and my duties towards him and his family. After getting pregnant, I had a girl and I made a promise to myself that I would take care of her future and never let her live the painful experiences I lived. I stood in the face of my mother-in-law and my husband and I had to face the consequences just to let my little girl live a good life and to live her dreams, or rather my dreams.

Winter of 2029, in the capital

Said wanted to have a boy to bear his name and the name of his family, but I could not have a boy so he married a second wife, which his mother insisted on. Men in our society are allowed to marry many women; however, a woman doesn't even have the opportunity to choose. I had a better education than my

husband. I graduated from high school with good grades that allowed me to enrol to study medicine at university, while he didn't even pass the second year of secondary school. This can explain why he always felt anxious and inferior, so he tried to balance this situation by looking for opportunities to humiliate me and even to hit me. He was well aware of my situation. I was an orphan with no place to go and no one to tell my secrets. (My two twin sisters are with us in the village and I don't want to involve them in this.) There was no man to protect me, no brother and no uncle (my father only had sisters and my mother was an only child). My husband was abusive, hitting me from time to time, and I had to live with this.

The physical pain quickly disappears but the spiritual pain lingers and that made my life hell. I made a lot of sacrifices to protect my daughter. I didn't want her to be sad; I wanted her to be a doctor like my twin sisters, who are respected by everyone in village. But the show must go on and what did I gain from this? My teenage daughter for whom I made a lot of sacrifices, the one I gave total freedom to act and to attend school to be wise and mature, the one I wanted to prove that an educated woman is a woman aware of her own interests and the interests of the world, sinned with a stupid boy and now she is pregnant. Her father almost lost his mind when he first heard about this scandal. He started hitting me and blaming me for this because I didn't know how to raise his daughter. He killed her in cold blood. He killed them both: his daughter and her baby inside of her. He was later sentenced to life in prison. I was just a body without a soul. I had no feelings and nothing could harm me anymore. I then enjoyed the company of my father's and mother's ghosts. The rope that I put around my neck to commit suicide was like a golden

necklace that I never had from my husband. This rope was my friend, the one who would rescue me from my pains. Forgive me *Pétrole* (i.e. oil), I am so sorry *Agri* (i.e. Agriculture), *Tierra* (i.e. Earth), *Arbre* (i.e. Tree); *Animaux* (i.e. Animals) and *Tourisme* (i.e. Tourism), I can't help you. I can't protect you or save you. I am just a rejected person from society, and if *L'homme du sud* the egoist didn't

accept the idea of my existence, how can he accept the idea of your existence? I can't promise you that I will take care of ecology or sustainable development. I had more than enough with the accusations of *L'homme du sud* (the Man of the South, the third world) and *L'homme du nord* (the Man of the North). I have no desire to remain in this world any longer because I am better dead than alive.

2184

Damjan Krstanović. Hrvatska

Karavana je stajala ulogorena između šume i rijeke. Bili smo tu već 3 mjeseca okreta. Nije bilo puno komaraca i paukova, pa smo mogli štedjeti na feromonskim mastima. Jako mi se sviđalo biti na ovom mjestu. Navečer nije bilo jako hladno, a preko dana sam mogao trčati po šumi i tražiti tragove životinja od prošle noći. Otac je rekao da će me za moj rodni dan voditi u lov. Ne znam koliko točno ima do onda, ali mislim da nije više od četiri mjeseca okreta. Inače moje ime je Malik. Rođen sam 134 godine nakon Pada u godini Pauka. Godina Pauka je bila izrazito teška, i puno je novorođenih umrlo od ugriza. Ja sam imao sreću da nisam. Moja mama Zija, čuvala me svaku noć, sve dok sunce nije zasjalo, a tek onda bi išla spavati. Po danu su me čuvala starije sestre Frija i Kira. Ponekad mi one idu na živce, ali puno pomažu mami svaki dan i znam da me vole, a moj tata Rašid, vođa je naše karavane. On kaže gdje ćemo biti i koliko. Jednog dana volio bih biti kao moj tata. On uvijek zna koju životinju uloviti, koju biljku jesti, koju ne dirati, od čega pobjeći. Svi u našoj karavani ga jako poštuju, jer je jako star i mudar. On me naučio čitati i pisati. Jedan sam od rijetkih, koji to znaju, ali se moram skrivati dok to radim. To mi nije jasno zašto.

Događaji koje sam ovdje zapisao po mnogočemu su mi izmijenili pogled na život. Zbili su se prošle noći, dok smo imali slavlje zbog dobrog ulova.

Bila je to topla noć i upravo pred sumrak tata i desetorica drugih muškaraca iz karavane vratili su se iz šume sa sobom noseći dva golema jelena. Cijela ih je karavana dočekala kao heroje. Žene su odmah počele raditi oko mesa, a mi muški smo sjeli oko vatre da čujemo priču iz lova.

Da me nisi omeo imali bi sad izvrsno mlado meso, a ne ova žilava sranja. – rekao je Čupavi, gledajući u mog tatu.

Hrana je hrana.

To uvijek kažeš. Jesu ti se usta toliko osušila da si zaboravio ukus dobrog mesa?

Ne, nisu. A jesi li ti toliko oglupio da si zaboravio na posljedice lova na alfa ženke? Što bi onda bilo sa mladima, ha? Poremetili bi cijeli sustav i morali bi ići dalje.

Tako je. – složiše se svi. Dobro ne svi, ali velika većina, od kojih su neki čak i stariji od moga tate.

Ma ti uvijek pričaš o sustavu kao da znaš točno koliko ih ima. Ne vjerujem ja u to.

Nitko te ne zadržava da budeš ovdje. Idi u drugu karavanu ako ti ne odgovara, pa ćeš biti na putu previše da bi razmišljao o tome jesi li gladan ili ne.

Moram priznati da mi ta rasprava nije puno govorila. Ja sam nekako bio na strani Čupavog, jer je jedan od jelena kojeg su donijeli imao neke rane po nogama, baš se vidjelo da je jako star. Zamišljao sam okus mladog mesa u ustima. Nisam znao kakav je to okus, ali zamišljao sam ga kao mekan i sočan. Onako kao kada uberete zreli plod, koji tata kaže da smijete i sve vam se topi u ustima i sok se cijedi niz bradu dok jedete. Samo što to nikako nisam smio reći tati, jer bi se jako naljutio na mene i poslao me u naš šator na spavanje. Cijeli mjesec okret jeli smo

biljke i kaše i krv, tako da sam jedva čekao pojesti malo mesa. Čupavi i tata su se još neko vrijeme prepirali, a onda je on otišao brundajući sebi nešto u bradu.

I gdje ste ih našli, kako je bilo? – upita stari čika Jovan, koji je bio najstariji i nije više mogao ići u lov.

Par milja odavde uz rijeku. Morali smo proći kroz jedno napušteno naselje, ali tamo na sreću ničega nije bilo.

Aha. – uzvratiti stari Jovan, kao da potpuno razumije sve. Svi su zamišljeno zurili u pod neko vrijeme i pili vodu iz svojih čutura. To je bila jedna od onih situacija koje ne razumijem baš. Stariji o tom nisu puno govorili, ali ta „naselja” su bila nešto opasno. Mene je zanimalo sve u vezi toga, ali uvijek bi mi rekli da sam premali, i da moram čekati da porastem. Nisam znao koliko još moram čekati. Mama mi kaže da sam imao devet rodnih dana, a kako je samo jedan svake godine, koja je jako duga, meni se čini da je to već jako puno čekanja. Ali što da radim, čekat ću i dalje, jer ništa drugo ne mogu.

Nakon nekog vremena tata je počeo sa pričom. Pošto ja ne znam to točno prepričati, reći ću vam ukratko. Kada su prošli kroz naselje, ušli su u gustu šumu. Punu šipražja, paprati, mahovine i drugog zelenila. Tamo je Grego prvi primijetio tragove, koje su onda slijedili. Morali su biti jako oprezni da ih jeleni ne namiršu. Zato je moj tata natjerao sve da se zamažu blatom i stoje niz vjetar. To se nitko drugi nije sjetio. Probijaše se oni tako kroz gustu šumu satima i satima, dok konačno nisu naišli na jelene. Bješe to golema skupina. Dvije ženke i četiri ili pet mladih. Čupavi je bio na jako dobrom mjestu, napeo je svoj luk i onda je moj tata dreknuo kao ptica, pa su jeleni pobjegli. To je bila situacija, zbog koje su sad vodili razgovor. Sljedećeg dana uhvatili su bolesnog jelena, a na putu kući imali su sreću da je drugi doslovno naletio na njih. I tako eto sad imamo dva jelena. Od kojih se kuha večera, koja već sad jako fino miriši. Tata je pričao dugo u noć, a nakon nekoliko sati, konačno je došlo vrijeme i za jelo. Obično smo mirni kada idemo jesti, i svako dobije svoju porciju. Danas je to bila vreva, buka, galama i guranje. Svi su htjeli što prije dobiti svoju posudu. Ja nisam bio gladan, jer dok sam nosio mami dodatna drva za vatru dala mi je krišom da malo probam.

Nakon što su svi uzeli svoje zdjele, posjedali smo oko vatre i počeli jesti. Dok sam jeo, cijelo vrijeme sam promatrao naše karavanaše. Svi do jednoga umakali su svoj krv u zdjelu i zadovoljno mljackali. Tako sam i ja radio, makar nisam volio mokat krv. Sada je došlo vrijeme da svi pohvale mamu i druge žene, što su spravile ovo jelo. One su se sve crvenile, i odmahivale rukom na pohvale, ali vidjelo se da im je bilo drago. Poslije večere, Grego i Felipe izvadili su svoje tambure i zapjevali.

Kada s tobom pođem ja

Crvena će ptica da cvrkuta

Sve će biti kao nekad,

Sve će biti to

Kako mi baš volimo

Sve će biti to

Kada pođemo

Cijela karavana je uživala i počeli su plesati pokraj logorske vatre, kada se pojavio on. Nitko ga nije očekivao i svi se uplašise kada su vidjeli crnu figuru u kapuljači kako stoji s druge

strane vatre. Bio je odjeven sav u crno. Crne čizme, crne hlače, crna jaka s kapuljačom, a na leđima je imao nekakvu nosiljku i kovčeg koji je izgledao kao tambura.

Oprostite. – reče stranac, na što je cijela karavana zaprepašteno stala s pjesmom i plesom, te se zagledala u njega.

Tko si ti? – istupi moj tata, kao šef karavane.

Oh. Samo putujući pustinjak.

Odakle dolaziš, kako si prošao pokraj straže?! – zapovjedi moj otac.

Pa, nisam ih primijetio, a izgleda ni oni mene. Valjda je zbog odjeće. – odgovori s smiješkom. Lice mu se nije moglo vidjeti ispod kapuljače, ali osmjeh se primijetio, jer je imao blistavo bijele zube. – Dolazim s juga, ne želim nikome zlo. – doda.

Dobro, i što želiš?

Pa, bio sam na putu ispod ovih blistavih zvijezda, kada sam čuo vašu glazbu i primijetio vatru u daljini, pa rekoh da vidim imali dobrih ljudi, koji će mi dopustiti da se ugrijem pokraj nje. Ponudio bih vam pjesmu u znak zahvalnosti, ali vidim da i toga imate.

Skini kapuljaču! – naredi moj tata.

I skinuo ju je. Lice stranca bilo je izrazito bijelo, sa nekoliko crvenkastih pjega po licu. Kosa mu bješe potpuno sijeda, još više nego u starog Jovana, a oči sitne plave i umorne. Imao je puno brazgotina po licu, kakve samo najstariji ljudi imaju, ali ukupni dojam koji je ostavljao bješe nekako bezazlen. Karavana je piljila u stranca zaprepašteno.

Ne brinite, nisam bolestan. To su staračke pjege. – uzvratil stranac mirno, kao da je odmah znao u što svi gledaju. Sigurno je jako mudar.

U redu, možeš sjesti s nama. Ja sam Rašid. – uzvratil moj tata i pruži ruku.

Tomaš. Drago mi je. – uzvratil stranac.

I što ima na jugu? – upita moj otac, nakon što smo se svi ponovo smjestili oko vatre. Sada je ama baš cijela karavana bila oko nje, pa čak i Čupavi, koji je prestao da se ljuti, jer je bio novi čovjek s nama. Svi su znatiželjno gledali u njega, skrivajući se iza drugih da stranac ne bi primijetio kako ga gledaju.

Grad. – uzvratil stranac, što se izazvalo pravo zaprepaštenje.

Veliki grad? – oprezno će moj tata.

Da.

Što znaš o njemu.

Što vas zanima?

Nakon njegovog pitanja, svi počеше glasno komentirati i postavljati pitanja. Jedne je zanimalo kako izgleda, druge što tamo ima. Stari Jovan reče da je jednom vidio golemu limenu pticu kako izlazi iz grada, pa je pitao da li je to istina. Netko je pitao, je li istina da hranu stvaraju iz zraka. Neke je zanimalo, koja je visina gradskih zidova, treće imali i tamo komaraca. Stari Tomaš, sjedio je nekako sjetno uz vatru i lagano se smiješio, kao da je uživao u komentarima. Moj tata je na kraju morao dići ruku, što je značilo da svi trebaju prestati s pričom.

Ti si bio u gradu. – kaže moj tata, nakon što je graja prestala.

Jesam, ja sam bio građanin. – odgovori stranac.

Što je to građanin? – upitam ja, dok sam se skrivao iza leđa oca, a nisam mogao izdržati da ne pitam, jer mi je ta riječ bila nova.

O. Koga imamo tamo? – stranac pogleda znatiželjno prema meni.

Ja sam Malik. – uzvratim hrabro i pružim ruku.

Drago mi je Maliče, ja sam Tomaš. – uzvrti stranac i nježno mi stisne ruku. – Dakle zanima te što znači građanin?

Nisam odgovorio, samo sam zaklimao potvrdno glavom.

Građanin znači biti pripadnikom grada, isto kao što si ti pripadnik ovog plemena.

A što znači pleme?

Misli na karavanu. – doda moj otac.

Tomaš je počeo pričati o gradu. Dok smo mi strpljivo slušali.

Gradovi su uređeni tako da održavaju sami sebe. Uspjeli smo stvoriti sustav gdje trošimo onoliko koliko nam je potrebno. Sav otpad se regenerira u nove stvari. Sve u gradovima je bijele boje i svi nose bijelu odjeću. Visina zidova gradova varira. Ona je između sedamdeset i stotinu trideset metara, to je bilo nužno zbog vode. Nije istina da stvaramo hranu iz zraka, već ju možemo printati. Međutim taj proces zahtjeva jako puno energije, zato ga koristimo samo u rijetkim slučajevima. Imamo vrtove za biljke i životinje, koje održavamo uvijek na prihvatljivom broju. Istina je da imamo i 'limene ptice', njih zovemo zrakoplovi.

Imao sam toliku gomilu pitanja za Tomaša, jer jezik kojim je govorio, iako mi jest poznat, sadržavao je hrpu riječi koje ne razumijem. Nisam znao što znači regenerirati, što je to energija, zašto imaju zidove zbog vode i naravno što znači to printati? No i drugi članovi karavane su imali hrpu pitanja, a ja kao najmlađi morao sam čekati. Tomaš je strpljivo odgovarao na sve njih, većina ljudi se čudila na njegove odgovore, a ja sam samo slušao još više riječi koje nisam razumio. Konačno došao je red i na mene.

Hajde pitaj, vidim da goriš od želje. – kaže mi on, a stomak mu je istovremeno jako zabrundao.

Izvolite. – ubaci se moja mama, koja je donijela jednu zdjelu čorbe i strancu.

Oh, najljepša vam hvala.

Koliko imate godina? – upitam ja nakraju, jer unatoč činjenici da nisam razumio printanje, deklaracije, elektroniku, satelite i Bog zna koliko još riječi, ovaj podatak mi je ipak bio od najveće važnosti.

Stotinu četrdeset. – uzvratil stranac mirno.

Cijela karavana, kao da se htjela pobuniti odmah. Počeli su žestoko prosvjedovati zbog toga. Nije mi bilo jasno zbog čega.

Moj tata ima trideset šest. Kako ste vi tako jako stari?

Genomski lijekovi su nam omogućili znatno produženje života. – uzvratil on mirno – A pošto već vidim da ćeš me odmah pitati što je sad to, dopustite da vam ispričam priču od Pada pa do danas. Samo bih prvo htio dovršiti ovaj divni gulaš, ako nemate ništa protiv. – doda on.

Svi su se složili i strpljivo čekali da stranac dovrši jelo, kako bi čuli priču. Uživao je u jelu i nekoliko puta pohvalio moju mamu, kako je to izvrsno. Kada je završio, počeo nam je pričati priču od Pada, do danas, kako je se on sjeća. Pričao je cijelu noć, dugo i polako, dok su zvijezde sjale iznad nas, a krijesnice letjele iz logorske vatre. Bila je to najzanimljivija noć mog života. Nekoliko puta se ispričavao zbog postupaka Grada. Dok je pričao priču, a u jednom trenutku i suza mu je potekla iz oka. Muškarci su na to gledali s podsmjehom, jer kod nas ako plačeš to znači da si slabić. Prvi put u životu dočekao sam jutro i bio sam ponosan na sebe zbog toga. Kada je stranac čuo od mog oca, da znam čitati poklonio mi je nekakvu tablu na kojoj su knjige.

Pokazao mi je kako da ju koristim i rekao da ako ikada prestane raditi, neka je samo stavim na sunce.

Kud ćete sada? – upita ga moj otac na rastanku.

Dalje. Vidjeti druge, vidjeti je li možemo promijeniti učinjeno. Znae, mi u gradovima stvorili smo održivi sustav i živimo dugo, ali da li zaista živimo? Ovu noć, koju sam proveo s vama čuvat ću do kraja života. Vi znate da ćemo svi mi umrijeti, ali zbog toga ste sretni. Vi shvaćate koliko je važno samo biti.

Rastali smo se s strancem tog jutra, a ja sam otišao u svoj šator spavati. Kada sam se probudio odmah sam uzeo tablu s knjigama. Nikada u životu nisam vidio toliko knjiga. Kako mi Ustav Europske Unije nije djelovalo zanimljivo, odlučio sam početi s Malim princem.

2184

Damjan Krstanović. Croatia

The caravan was camped between the woods and the river. We had been there for three turns of the moon already. There weren't many mosquitoes and spiders so we could save on the pheromone ointments. I very much liked being in this place. It wasn't very cold in the evening, and during the day I could run through the woods and look for animal tracks from the night before. Father said that he'd take me hunting for my birthday. I don't know how long there is until then, but I don't think it can be more than four turns of the moon. My name is Malik, by the way. I was born 134 years after the Fall in the year of the Spider. The year of the Spider was exceptionally hard, and many newborns died from bites. I was lucky enough not to be one of them. My mum Ziya watched over me every night, until the sunrise, and only then did she go to sleep. My older sisters Friya and Kira look after me during the day. Sometimes they get on my nerves, but they help our mum a lot every day and I know they love me, and my dad Rashid is the leader of our caravan. He says where we're staying and for how long. Someday I would like to be like my dad. He always knows what animal to catch, which plant to eat, which not to touch, what to run from. Everybody in our caravan respects him highly because he's very old and wise. He taught me to read and write. I am one of the few who know how, but I have to hide when I do it. Though I don't understand why.

The events I've written down here changed my view of life in many ways. They happened last night, while we were celebrating a good catch.

It was a warm night and just before sundown dad and ten other men from the caravan came back from the woods carrying two huge deer. The entire caravan welcomed them like heroes. The women immediately began to prepare the meat and we men sat around the fire to hear the story from the hunt.

"If you hadn't distracted me, we would have excellent young meat now, not this tough crap," said Shaggy, looking at my dad.

"Food is food."

"You always say that. Has your mouth gone so dry that you forgot the taste of good meat?"

"No, it hasn't. And have you become so stupid that you forgot the consequences of hunting an alpha female? What would happen to the fawns then, huh? We would disrupt the whole system and we'd have to move on."

"That's right," everybody agreed. Alright, not everybody, but a great majority, some of them even older than my dad.

"Ah, you always talk about the system as if you knew exactly how many of them there are. I don't believe in those things."

"Nobody's keeping you here. Go to another caravan if it doesn't suit you, and you'll be on the road for too long to still think about whether you're hungry or not."

I have to admit that this dispute didn't tell me much. I was somehow on Shaggy's side because one of the deer they brought with them had some kind of wounds on its legs; you could really tell it was very old. I imagined the taste of young meat in my mouth. I didn't know what kind of taste it was, but I imagined it to be soft and juicy.

Like when you pick a ripe fruit, which dad says you may, and it melts in your mouth, and the juice trickles down your chin while you eat. But there was no way I could say this to my dad because he would get very angry with me and send me to our tent to sleep. For a whole turn of the moon we had been eating plants and gruel and brea', so I couldn't wait to eat a bit of meat. Shaggy and dad argued for a while longer, and then Shaggy went away, muttering something to himself.

"So where did you find them, how was it?" asked old man Jovan, who was the oldest and couldn't go hunting any more.

"A couple of miles upriver from here. We had to pass through an abandoned settlement, but luckily there was nothing there."

"Right," responded old man Jovan, as if he completely understood everything. Everybody was deep in thought staring at the ground for some time, drinking water out of their canteens. It was one of those situations that I don't really understand. The elders didn't talk about it much, but those "settlements" were something dangerous. I was curious about it all, but they always told me that I was too small, that I had to wait until I've grown up. I didn't know how much more I had to wait. Mum tells me that I've had nine days of birth, and since there is only one each year, which is very long, it seems to me that it's been a long wait already. But what can I do, I'll keep waiting because there's nothing else I can do.

After a while dad began the story. Since I can't tell it right, I'll give you the short version. When they passed through the settlement, they entered thick woods. Filled with undergrowth, fern, moss and other vegetation. That's where Grego was the first to notice the tracks, which they then followed. They had to be very careful so the deer didn't catch their scent. So my dad made them all cover themselves in mud and stand down-

wind. Nobody else had thought of that. Thus they were making their way through the thick woods for hours and hours until they finally came across some deer. It was a huge group. Two does and four or five fawns. Shaggy, being in a very good spot, drew his bow and then my dad gave a loud screech like a bird and the deer fled. That was the situation that they were now talking about. The next day they caught a sick deer, and on the way home they were lucky enough to have the second one literally run into them. And so now we have two deer. That they're now making in-to dinner, which already smells really good. Dad told stories long into the night, and after a few hours it was finally time to eat. We're usually quiet at mealtime and everybody gets their share. Today there was a throng, and noise, shouting and pushing. Everybody wanted to get their bowl as soon as possible. I wasn't hungry, because when I was carrying extra firewood to Mum, furtively she let me taste a bit.

Once everybody had taken their bowls, we sat around the fire and started eating. While I was eating, I kept looking at the people from our caravan. Every last one of them dipped their brea' in the bowl and smacked their lips in satisfaction. I did the same, although I didn't like wet brea'. Now it was time for everybody to praise my mum and other women for making this meal. They were all blushing and brushing off these praises, but you could tell they were glad. After dinner, Grego and Felipe took out their tambouritzas and sang.

*When you and I go along
The red bird will sing its song
It will all be like it used to be,
It will all be
Just the right way, dear
It will all be so
When we go along*

The whole caravan was enjoying it and people started dancing by the campfire when he appeared. Nobody was expecting him and everybody was startled when they saw a black figure in a hood standing on the other side of the fire. He was dressed all in black. Black boots, black trousers, black jacket with a hood, and on his back he had some kind of a knapsack and a case that looked like a tambouritza.

“Excuse me,” said the stranger and the whole caravan, stupefied, stopped singing and dancing and stared at him.

“Who are you?” my dad stepped forward as the boss of the caravan.

“Oh. Just a travelling hermit.”

“Where did you come from, how did you walk past the guards?!” commanded my father.

“Well, I didn’t notice them, and it seems they didn’t notice me either. Must be the clothes,” he replied with a smile. His face was invisible under the hood, but you could notice his smile because he had sparkling white teeth. “I come from the south, I don’t wish anybody any harm,” he added.

“Alright, and what do you want?”

“Well, I was travelling under these shiny stars when I heard your music and noticed a fire in the distance so I told myself, why not go and see if there are good people who would let me warm myself beside it. I would offer you a song in return, but I can see you have that, too.”

“Take off your hood!” ordered my dad.

And he did. The face of the stranger was exceptionally white, with a couple of reddish spots on his face. His hair was completely white, more than old man Jovan’s, and his beady eyes blue and tired. He had many scars on his face, the kind only the eldest have, but gave the general impression of being somehow harmless. The caravan stared at the stranger in dismay.

“Don’t worry, I’m not sick. These are age spots,” said the stranger calmly, as if he knew right away what everybody was looking at. He must be very wise.

“Alright, you may sit with us. I am Rashid,” answered my dad and held out his hand.

“Tomash. Pleased to meet you,” replied the stranger.

“So what’s going on in the south?” asked my father after we resumed our seats around the fire. Now every last member of the caravan was around it, even Shaggy who stopped being angry because there was a new man with us. Everybody looked at him curiously, hiding behind others so the stranger wouldn’t notice them looking at him.

“A city,” replied the stranger, which caused genuine astonishment.

“A big city?” asked my dad carefully.

“Yes.”

“What do you know about it?”

“What do you want to know?”

After his question, everybody started commenting loudly and asking their own. Some wanted to know what it looked like, others wanted to know what was there. Old man Jovan said he once saw a giant tin bird come out of a city so he asked if that was true. Somebody asked if it was true that they made food out of air. Some wanted to know how high the city walls were, others if there were any mosquitoes there. Old Tomash sat by the fire, somehow pensive and smiling faintly, as if he was enjoying the comments. Eventually my dad had to raise his hand, which meant that everybody had to stop talking.

“You were in a city,” said my dad after the uproar stopped.

“Yes, I was a citizen,” replied the stranger.

“What is a citizen?” I asked, hiding behind my father’s back, but I couldn’t help asking, because that word was new to me.

“Oh. Who do we have here?” the stranger looked at me curiously.

“I am Malik,” I replied bravely and held out my hand.

“Pleased to meet you, Malik, I am Tomash,” replied the stranger and gently shook my hand. “So you want to know what a citizen is?”

I didn’t reply, but just nodded.

“To be a citizen means to belong to a city, the same way you now belong to this tribe.”

“And what is a tribe?”

“He means the caravan,” added my father.

Tomash started talking about the city, while we listened patiently.

“Cities are arranged to sustain themselves. We managed to create a system in which we spend only what we need. All waste is regenerated into new things. Everything in the cities is white and everybody wears white clothes. The height of the city walls varies. It’s between seventy and a hundred and thirty metres, which was necessary because of the water. It’s not true that we create food out of air, but we can print it. However, that process requires a great deal of energy, that’s why we only use it on rare occasions. We have gardens for plants and animals, which we always keep in acceptable numbers. It is true that we also have ‘tin birds’, we call them airplanes.”

I had such an awful lot of questions for Tomash because the language he spoke, although familiar to me, contained a bunch of words that I didn’t understand. I didn’t know what it meant to regenerate, what energy was, why they had walls because of water and of course, what it meant to print? But the other members of the caravan had a bunch of questions too, and I was the youngest so I had to wait. Tomash patiently answered all of the questions, most people were astonished by

his answers, and I just listened to more words I didn’t understand. Finally, it was my turn.

“Go on, ask, I can see you’re dying to ask me,” he told me, his stomach rumbling loudly at the same time.

“Here you go,” interrupted my mum, who brought a bowl of stew to the stranger.

“Oh, thank you so much.”

“How old are you?” I finally asked, despite the fact that I didn’t understand printing, declarations, electronics, satellites and God knows how many other words, but this piece of information was still of the utmost importance to me.

“One hundred and forty,” replied the stranger calmly.

The entire caravan wanted to revolt immediately. They started to protest strongly because of it. I didn’t understand why.

“My dad is thirty-six. How come you are so very old?”

“Genomic medicines enabled us to extend the lifespan significantly,” he replied calmly. “And since I can tell that you are about to ask me what that is all about, allow me to tell you the story from the Fall to this day. But first I would like to finish this wonderful stew, if you don’t mind,” he added.

Everyone agreed and waited patiently for the stranger to finish his food, so they could hear the story. He enjoyed the meal and a couple of times commended my mum, saying how excellent it was. When he was finished, he started telling us the story from the Fall until today, as he remembered it. He talked all through the night, long and slowly, while the stars shone above us and sparks flew from the campfire. It was the most interesting night of my life. A couple of times he apologised for the things the City did. While he was telling the story, at one point a tear fell from his eye. The men sneered at it because in our caravan, if you cry, it means you’re a

weakling. For the first time in my life I stayed up until the morning and I was proud of myself because of it. When the stranger heard from my father that I could read, he gave me some kind of a board with books on it. He showed me how to use it and told me to just put it in the sun if it ever stops working.

“Where are you off to now?” my father asked him as he was saying goodbye.

“Onwards. To see others, to see if we can change what has been done. You know, in the cities we have built a sustainable sys-

tem and we live long, but do we really live? I will treasure this night I spent with you for the rest of my life. You know that we will all die, but you are happy because of it. You understand how important it is to just be.”

We parted with the stranger that morning and I went to my tent to sleep. When I woke up, I grabbed the board with books immediately. Never in my life have I seen so many books. Since the Constitution of the European Union didn't seem interesting, I decided to start with the Little Prince.

Islands in the Sea of Time

Marija Nezirović. Croatia

Rijeka, 31 May 2015

Christos said that visiting the island of Santorini would make you fall in love with the person accompanying you there.

“It’s a place of powerful magic,” he went on in his characteristic English with a strong Greek accent, emphasising each word as if reciting a cautionary tale. “Romantic and intimate.”

Colette’s eyes widened with curiosity as she lowered her mug on the small concrete wall behind them.

The pair was reclining in the deckchairs of recycled fabric faded by the weather, in the direct sunlight – the youthful, pretty Colette and her slightly older colleague Christos – their bodies welcomed the unexpected outburst of heavenly warmth in early March. The sun brightened the skyline like a screen of gold. Enjoying a lunch break on the greened rooftop of an otherwise boring office building, they absorbed the act of nearing spring and the closing of the cold season. The sunflower-shaped solar utilities masked in the roof orchard had much to feed on.

Christos didn’t feel an urge to talk but, as the thought of going back inside clouded his bliss, words spring up inside him. Colette nodded at him in a careful motion. While she understood his intention and marvelled at the scenery of his words, it seemed to her nostalgia for your homeland acquired beauty only then when you crafted tales about it to your foreign friends. He had travelled to Santorini a few years back, in the company of a good friend.

“Did you fall in love with your friend?” Colette asked teasingly.

“Yes, I did!” Christos’ triumphant voice echoed through the air. Christos’ outright sincerity had often made Colette feel disarmed.

As the hands on the mechanical clock tower nearby had finally met after chasing each other, the two colleagues got up and, clutching their empty mugs, headed back to their shared office.

Feeling restless, Colette leaned back in her chair and stretched out her legs under the desk. While thinking about whom she would bring along to Santorini, she pictured the many ways she would fall in love with that person. Following the pull of fantasy, she looked up images of landscapes of the island on her computer to better envisage the setting of this hypothetical romance.

Picturesque images of houses anchored on cliffs, capped with cupolas the same colour as the bright sky, spread out in front of her. Except for the bulky wind and solar power engines and storage units, the island felt as if it were frozen in time, its surrounding body of liquid a sentimental reservoir for memories. The settlement resembled huddled birds’ nests hanging on the steep slopes descending into the submerged caldera below. Their painted facades appeared as brilliant as a friendly face, while the sea reflected an opaque blue with the poised harmony of a brush guided to form a painting. But she knew it was a sculpture; its pitted landscape had been violently moulded by a volcano and set to change again one day. It looked tranquil, she thought, so different from the unpredictable romance born between the undulated walls of the houses, on the stone verandas greeted by the midday sun.

“I still haven’t decided what to do in summer, after our contract is finished.” Colette suddenly broke the silence, leaving her book aside. Christos laid the book on his desk and turned his chair to meet her voice.

”I’d look for work first,” he said.

The girl chuckled. Work always comes first for him, mused Colette. She added: “I feel I could afford a little summer vacation with my savings, maybe my last one for a while.”

“I’m not bragging, but Santorini is an exquisite place by anyone’s standards.”

“I read a unique spirit resides there. Do you know why a Greek island has an Italian name?”

“The Greek name for the biggest island in the archipelago is Thira,” replied Christos automatically, “and Santorini is a Latin word. Originally it was known as Kalliste, ‘the most beautiful one’.”

“An island shaped like a crescent moon and embodying the spirit of a mesmerising nymph – lovely indeed!” said Colette.

“I read a pilot algae feedstock production is being developed there too,” added Christos.

So they returned to their tasks, their spirits lifted by a nymph.

Colette was incontestably French in many physical as well as spiritual aspects, a match for Hugo’s Cosette, with a prêt-a-porter effortless elegance. Her grandfather, though, was a native of the island of Korčula in Croatia. Perhaps inspired by his tales, her parents had bought a holiday house on Kočula at the time when the island was still a wilderness with the rumour of Marco Polo’s invented heritage. The dwelling was a small retreat on an isolated patch of land overlooking a pebbled beach. Her grandfather’s family house had been sold many years before, meaning there was no familiarity or memory of past lives in the new home.

Christos used to joke how the Adriatic blood gave her a streak of self-sufficient tautness that made her want to resonate with the pulse of sea. “Island people may seem coarse and defiant because life at sea is harsh, but it helps us live prudently and resiliently.”

She could even speak some Greek, which she picked up online. “Kalimera sas,” a greeting aimed at him as she entered the office in the morning.

“Kalimera sou, Colette,” he would reply, already at the desk.

A spell of words could span the distance of different nationalities and walks of life, yet it also brought them both a sense of friendly clarity. “Kala, kala,” a word he repeated many times when speaking to somebody in Greek over the phone. Colette had found a sense of transience in this trite colloquialism. It was an invisible step she had to lightly step over. The two of them started working together in September, as contractors for a government body.

It was after dark when Colette left the office. She bid farewell to Christos, who was busy on the phone again. A long river of lights from fashionable electronic cars greeted her on the evening street; despite the web of trains spanning the urban area, traffic congestion was inevitable at this hour. The stars and a silver moon – a crescent, perhaps – lit the world with a light that was just as foreign and distant as the people rushing around her. Shielded street lamps had given them back a starry sky but hardly anyone glanced at it. Still her body was too restless to go home or talk to friends and family online, a feeling of insecurity suddenly washing over her as she walked by herself. The purified indoor air had dried her lips. She wanted to down a cold beer, or run into a surprised acquaintance in a bustling pub.

In her mind she was in her house on Korčula, where commodities she took for granted could pose a challenge. In the absence of loud recycling stations or colossal 3D ads, the strongest presence was the untiring wings of wind turbines. She was on her own amidst the intimacy of the windy island surrounded by a marine fortress, and cut off from the reality of the continental life. The texture and colour of the sea were rough as the winds swivelled, whistling in the corners of the cliffs lining the southern shore.

Upon stepping into a bar, a female singing voice dispersed her illusion. A tall woman was singing *Pass This On* at the centre of the room with a warm and clear voice. Her beautiful face shone under the pastel glow of the biogas lamp, caught in the strings of the improvised act. Her vitality was swirling around her like a summer skirt lifted by the wind and her hands formed mysterious shapes around her waist. Everyone in the room had paused to look at her.

Colette observed her calmness reflecting on her, as she took a sip of her first beer. She realised how a human voice can wash away all worries, just like the overlapping sound of waves. The song slowly subsided, along with that glistening light above the woman. As a scale of applause played out, the woman smiled and leaned to get a glass of tonic from the bartender. Then, like a cat sighting its prey, she approached Colette with a shimmer in her eyes. “You look as if you’ve seen a ghost.”

“Your performance was wonderful, I’m really impressed,” Colette uttered formally to hide her confusion.

“It just hits me once in a while – the desire to sing for all these people.”

“I have no such desires.”

“You have your own desires,” the charming woman said.

Very naturally, she leaned closer to Colette, kissed the air next to her cheek, and then she moved on past her towards a full table. All she was left with was the scent of the woman’s perfume.

That night Colette had a vivid dream. She could not recall whether she witnessed fiction originated in her tired mind, or a fragment of her own memory rising like a tide in her. It wasn’t simply an event that she had forgotten about a long time ago. The dream held memories which must have been hers, but also other scenes which, she was sure, must have belonged to the woman with the stunning voice – the nymph Kalliste. The following day, she tried to retell her dream to Christos. To accommodate her strange topic, he became a child taking in a new fairy tale.

It was summer time in Korčula, began Colette. The young woman jumped off a high cliff into the waves hitting against the wall of land. A perfect arc headed straight for the aim. The strong sun dissipated on the waves in thousands of sparkling shreds. Meanwhile, the adolescent Colette was at her family’s sea residence. She was reading by the window facing the beach as their night-time electricity was limited. While turning a page, she lifted her small face to see a timid bird startled by her presence.

The adolescent girl and the woman had both been on the island at the same time. Colette was a callow school girl, discovering the world in books; the woman was a student, in love with a man accompanying her to Korčula. They had trekked the sign-posted paths, all the way to the northern tip of the island. The woman’s youthful energy and desire converged into a delicate jump, immortalised in a photograph.

“If I die before you,” she tells her boyfriend later as they sit over the cliffs cutting like knives into the sea, “I want our ashes thrown here, in this sea.” He dismissed her sudden seriousness for a lover’s ardour, yet she remained firm as if a sea god were commanding her.

Christos tilts his head. “It’s just a dream.”

“I know. But I believe it showed our intersected past.”

“How do you know?”

“It felt too familiar, that’s how!”

Then another dream followed from the darkness.

This time the woman was with her dog, a retriever with a tongue hanging from its mouth like a caught fish. She opened the trunk of her hatchback, gently pushing him in. The dog obeyed with zeal. It was a crisp spring morning, the air filled with freshness.

Her hand adjusted the rear-view mirror so she could see herself in it. She pressed the palm of her hand on her forehead, the fingers shielding her from the sun. A strand of hair came loose and she placed it behind her ear. Observing her casual movement in the small mirror, Colette thought how objects were closer than they appeared in the mirror.

Another car was coming from the opposite direction, driving towards them in the same lane. The other car collided with the woman’s car at a speed that reduced both life and mirrors to shreds. The union of life and death was framed by the mirror a second before it disappeared, just the way distinct islands of the same archipelago may be seen as linked.

Colette woke abruptly up from her nightmare, unsure of her whereabouts. She could see it was still dark outside. Coming out of shock, Colette felt a relief at realising it was a dream. Still, sadness at having witnessed such an accident prevailed, settling inside of her. Road accidents had become a rare event.

It was April when Colette learnt of the woman’s death from a local newsfeed. A young woman had died in a car crash, and her picture was attached under the title. No personal information, only her deep eyes reflected the presence of life, reminding Colette of that dark evening. Christos noticed something was wrong for she wouldn’t talk to him. Death was a dot on a complex map, revealed only when you trace all the roads to the centre, and nobody knew how to unravel it.

With the beginning of summer, the woman’s ashes, according to her wish, were scattered over the Adriatic, and further into the Mediterranean Sea from the edge of Korčula, not far from Colette’s house. Colette wrote on her digital pad, inspired by her dream: “There is a wind found only around islands like Korčula, which instils in you passionate promises and thrilling realities beyond ours. May you enter the house of sea and become one with it. You sing now with that wind, merging with the surf; you are yet another nymph from legends.”

On the same day, Colette flew to Santorini in the east. She hoped to meet Christos again one day. Looking out of the window while her ICT device ran a routine health check-up, she thought of the colour of the sea in Korčula – a rich, saturated mélange of green and blue. An irregular succession of events which elude the regular timeline can appear out of it. For instance, a dream can resurface from the dark waters of the subconscious, mixing the past and the future.

That day the surface of the sea was calm as a palm pressed against a blanket. On the terraced rock, the buildings covered in solar panels were protecting the human birds. Below, the past dwelled in the shape of sea. After checking into her room, Colette descended to the volcanic beach. By the time the surf touched her white ankles, the woman's ashes had already reached the coast of Africa and the Strait of Gibraltar, a monumental door where once the world had ended. Yet the particles were also carried back to the Cycladic past in the Aegean Sea. Now she was part of the sea, living in between the islands.

Colette lay on her back, squinting to protect her eyes from the intense afternoon sun. She imagined the water lapping against her ears to be an ancient alphabet, whispering an ancient charm she could understand: "The most beautiful one is right here." And she knew, as the currents pulled her back, that the nymph had become a star above the central sea, connecting the past to the present.

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المشي على الماء

بسمه العوفي، مصر

"انتبه.. أنت ترى الأشياء أكبر من حجمها الحقيقي" كان ذلك مكتوب على مرآة سيارة، ما تذكرته عندما نام أخيراً.. في حضني. وكانت هذه الفكرة هي التي أرغب في إقناعه بها، لم أنطق بها، ربما لأن الأشياء الأصعب ترفض أن تجد طريقاً لها بالكلام.

فكرت في ذلك أثناء إعداد القهوة للصباح، أول أيام عيد الفطر، الأطفال والصبية يلعبون في الشارع وينزعون زينة شهر رمضان المعلقة على الجدران، ضحكاتهم تصل إلى الشرفة، وأضواء المفرقات شموس صغيرة في السماء. جهزت فنجانين من القهوة وبحثت عنه في الغرفة، في المكتب، في حجرة الجلوس، في الحمام، وبالطبع لم يكن بالمطبخ.

دخلت غرفة النوم مرة أخرى، وسمعت حكة بالأرضية، نظرت تحت السرير، مختبئاً في مكان معتم مكتوم، وجدته أخيراً بعد أن بحثت عنه في كل أركان شقتنا الصغيرة، هلعا، ومرتجفاً، وبأكيا، شاحبا، ومنكمشا، وصغيرا كطفل يختبئ من شبح عملاق.

أتذكر جيداً، أن النظر إليه في هذه الحالة، مؤلم تماماً. يضع يديه على أذنيه ويرتجف بعنف، ذاكرته تسجل حضورها من جديد كجلاد تحيته ضربة سوط. ناديت عليه كي يخرج من أسفل، خربش الأرض بأصابعه كأنه يود التشبث بها، ضغط جسده وانكمش أكثر، وتصلبت قدميه. انحنيت وزحفت حتى وصلت إليه، تقابلت أنفاسنا، مسحت عرقه، وربت على كتفه وضممته، "لا تخف يا حبيبي.. لا تخف".

أرعبته أصوات مفرقات العيد. ذكرته بأشياء لا يريد تذكرها. تحدثت بهدوء محاولة إقناعه بفكرتي "أنت ترى الأشياء أكبر من حجمها الحقيقي.. إنها مجرد ألعاب للأطفال" لم يبدو أنه يسمعي، كان يرتجف بلا توقف. وكنت قد قرأت في كتاب من قبل أن أجسادنا كالأسلاك توصل الطاقة، من يومها والضوء يسري في جسدي، سعيت مرارا للتخلص مما يقلقتني، وملء جسدي بالحياة كي يمتصها مني، أخذت رأسه بين ذراعيّ وهمست بما أتذكره من آيات قرآنية. خرجنا بهدوء من أسفل السرير إلى أعلاه، دثرته فغرق في النوم سريعاً، نوم مشوّه ممزوج بهمهمات وشهقات، وصرخات مكتومة، كل قليل.

قبل ذلك الوقت كان طبيعياً. تعرفنا في مكتبة، شاب عادي يختار أقلام وأوراق وألوان من مكتبة أشتري منها دفاتر وبطاقات ورقية. يمسك بياقة أقلام ويختار بينها بعناية شديدة كأنه سيرسم لوحة على الهواء أمامه، اختارها بشغف، شغف حُرمت منه منذ وقت طويل.. شغف بأشياء بسيطة، قلم جديد، ورقة جديدة.. وبعض الألوان.

أحسست برهبة وحنين جارف، كانت ملامحه جميلة، قمحي البشرة، عيون بنية تميل للون العسل على استحياء، وتقسيمة وجه كنجوم السينما العالمية، منحوت بعناية فائقة، يا الله.. كيف أمنع نفسي من النظر إليه؟! يا لهذا السحر الذي تجسد في رجل يقف أمامي، أي نوع من الجمال الهادئ منحك الله؟ كيف يُصَبّ علي كل هذا الجمال الأخاذ دفعة واحدة؟! رجولة شرقية نادرة تكشف عن نفسها، أيقظتني من عز غفوتي، وذهبت بي، دون رفق أو رأفة. سقطت الدفاتر والأقلام من يدي، فأنحى وجمعها وأعطاني إياها، وكان من بينهم قلم غريب وسميك ليس لي، فأعدته له وسألته عن نوع القلم، قال أنه قلم بسيط، له سنّ واحد سميك ولكنه ساحر. خطّ به على قطعة ورق صغيرة، ميل يديه أكثر من مرة ليربني كيف يرسم به، كان يرسم كمن يمرر أصابعه على رمل شاطئ البحر، وصمت للحظة.. ثم أعطاني قلم لأجربه.

نظر إليّ طويلاً ليشجعني، كأنه يريد اصطيد سمكة ذهبية تقفز في بحر عيني. جربت القلم بخطوط ملتوية، كان ناعماً وقوياً. أخذه مرة أخرى ورسم، راقبت يديه أكثر مما يفعله، كان ساحراً، بأصابع رقيقة قوية كنخات من العصور الوسطى ضل طريقه إلى عصرنا. يتدفق الشغف من عينيه ليصنع نهراً من السحر، ويصطحبني معه في رحلة صيبانية على ظهر طوف مثل مغامرات توم سوير وهيكلبري فين لمارك توين. أحببنا بعضنا، تزوجنا، ذهبنا لرحلات، رسمنا لوحات، حلمنا، وسافرنا إلى كل ما تمنيناه. لم يكن سوى رجل علمني الكثير بغيابه قبل وجوده، أحببت نفسي في حضرتة، وشعرت بأني كما أريد تماماً، بسيطة وعفوية ولا أريد شيء من العالم. وأشعر بأن ظهري أقوى كمن يستند إلى جذع شجرة ضخمة، أو كان هناك سقف يحميني من مطر البشر، كان وجوده بمثابة مصباح، أنيره فينير لي الحياة، متشابهين نحن إلى حد كبير، حتى في أجزائنا العادية.

كان يسافر إلى سوريا كل فترة، يطمئن على أهله ويعود، حتى بعد اندلاع الحرب. بعد عودته آخر مرة تغير الوضع، أصبح قلقاً شاردًا طوال الوقت، كأنما يحمل خارطة بلاده الجريحة في قلبه، وركام الأصوات والصور في عقله. إذا رأى شعلة نار على الموقد وأنا أظهو هبّ من مكانه، إذا سمع صراخاً في مكان ما ركض منه، فحسبت حساب لكل تصرف قد يستثير أعصابه ولو بسيط. لكن هناك أشياء لا أستطيع حسابها، لا أستطيع تخيل كم الألم الذي يشعر به عندما يستحم، ويتخيل الأطفال يستحمون إجباراً بقطرات الجليد في الشتاء ورجفة البرودة تكتم أصوات الألم داخلهم. لا أستطيع حساب سماع صوت النسوة اللاتي يصرخن في بائع بالشارع، وأخريات يصرخن مستنجدات من القتل. كانت مفرقات العيد كابوس آخر لم أحسب له حساب، كانت قوية بصوت يهز الأوصال، تضيء السماء، يفرح بها الجميع، إلا من عرف أنواع أخرى من المفرقات. لم أكن قادرة على تحديد ما إذا كان ذلك حالة أم أنه انتقال واجتذاب واستدعاء لموجات صوتية معينة، تشده لمكان ما.

استيقظ بعد ساعتين، نظر إلى الغطاء طويلاً نظرة جامدة، وقال لي "رفاهية.. نحن في منزل، له جدران، ونوافذ، وبه غطاء، وطعام.. هذه رفاهية". صمتت، فتابع "في بلدي، يتسلمون بطانية واحدة في المخيم، يحرقون أجزاء منها يوميا كي يدفنون قليلاً في الثلج".

اقترحت أن نقضي العيد في مكان آخر غير المنزل، ربما تؤثر رؤية فرحة العيد على حالته، جهزت حقيبة وانطلقنا بالسيارة من القاهرة إلى الإسكندرية. في الطريق الصحراوي استمعنا إلى أغنية "هنا الشام" لفرقة "جين"، تركناها تعيد نفسها أكثر من مرة. أغنية ذات حزن شهبي، بصوت سوري رانع وموسيقى ناطقة يتصاعد فيها الغضب بالتوازي مع الوجد، وكان اسم الفرقة "جين" يحمل شيئا من الجينات الوراثية للوطن. تقول كلماتها "هنا الشام.. هنا قلبي، هنا قلبك، هنا حُبي.. على كعبك، وأنا عم طير حمام.. طير لعنדה يا حمام.. خدله قلبي سلام.. هنا الشام.. أه يا شام".

بمجرد وصولنا حدود الإسكندرية توقفنا قليلا لنشرب شيئا ونشترى بعض الصحف، إلى جانب المتجر كان هناك خليج مائي كبير، متعرج الحواف، كجزيرة مائية وسط الأرض، محاطة بالمباني من كل النواحي، وفي الأفق يذوب اللون تدريجيا، حتى أن الخطّ الفاصل بين السماء والبحر غير موجود. بالنظر إلى هذا المكان، شعرنا أنها حافة العالم أو بوابة سحرية للخروج منه، تأملناه قليلا ثم انطلقنا.

تبع ذلك مسطحات أخرى أصغر وأكبر، محاطة بشجر وسط مباني أو تتوغل حقوق قمح، وتبدو المياه هي الأصل والأرض دخيلة عليها، فالمياه تحيط كل شيء، ببحيرات صغيرة وأنهار قزما وخلجان ضيقة، بعضها يمشي فيه قوارب صيد صغيرة والآخر يعوم فيه البط.

وصلنا إلى منطقة صناعية كانت محاطة بالماء أيضا، لكن يبدو أن مخلفات المصانع تُلقى في الماء، فقد تكونت طبقة جير سمكية على السطح، غطت كل شيء كأنها ثلج سميك، سماء رمادية وثلج أبيض مصطنع، منظر ساحر من بعيد. فكرنا في المشي على هذا الجير واختبار قوته، أوقفنا السيارة وخلعنا الأحذية وجربنا المشي خطوتين، تكسر الجير وغاصت قدمينا، لم يكن سميكًا كما توقعنا، فضحنا وعدنا للسيارة.

قررنا الوقوف في مكان جميل قبل الوصول لقلب المدينة، به بحيرة وأشجار وبعيد عن الناس، كان أشبه بتلك التي تذهب إليها معسكرات المدارس. صنعنا خيمة من سجادة كبيرة كانت بالسيارة، وكسرنا بعض سيقان الشجر كحطب. فرشنا الجرائد على الأرض ووضعنا عليها الحقائب والطعام، وتركنا الأغنية تنطلق من مسجل السيارة.

حللنا بسرقة بعض الوقت، يوم، يومان، سنوات، إلى الأبد، أي وقت نستطيع أخذه من محفظة الزمن. بدلنا ملابسنا، استلقى على العشب وحاولت أنا المشي على الماء مرة أخرى، فغاصت قدمي، وبالتدريج غصت. شعرت بأني دولفين أودي رقصة في الماء، "هنا الشام" كانت تنبعث من السيارة فرقت عليها بحركات ارتجالية، كان نانما فلعبت مع سمكات صغيرات بقدمي، وعندما استيقظ من نومه لحق بي.

أضاء وجهه من الفرحة، نغوص ونقفز إلى السطح، نحاول الإمساك بسمكة بأيدينا، نبتت له زعانف فضية، ونبتت لي مثلها ذهبية، ضحكنا ولعبنا كالدلافين. كدت أسمع دبب الفرخ من قلوبنا كأننا

شخصيات من "ديزني لاند" تتحول فجأة في حدوتة للأطفال، لا نضع حساباً للدنيا، نعيش كما الدلافين، نختر أن نتنفس، نفضل الحياة على السطح، ونحبس أنفاسنا في القاع، حتى نصعد مرة أخرى.

خرجنا وجففنا أنفسنا، ودخلنا خيمتنا الصغيرة ونام ثانية. داخل كوكبنا الهش الذي يعزلنا عن العالم، نائم أنت، في ملكوت آخر مع ملائكة أخشى إن فكرت فيها ثارت غيرتي، لأنها نور لا نعرفه. كنت أعتقد أن خوف المجهول هو كرات الدم الثالثة التي لم يروها بعد بالعدسات المكبرة، ولكن ماذا عن خوف المعلوم؟! ماذا عن الخوف الذي رأيناه بأعيننا، كيف نمحيه؟ وكيف نضعه في حجمه الحقيقي؟ وكيف نعرف حجمه الحقيقي أصلاً؟!

صوت طلقات نيران من مكان بعيد أفرعته مرة أخرى من نومه، يبدو أن هناك بعض الصيادين أطلقوا النار على البط، نظر إليّ طويلاً وبكى. كان ذلك هو الشيء الوحيد الذي لم أستطع أن أشغله عنه، "إمحنى وجعك يا حبيبي" فسكت، سكوت ينم عن آلاف المعاني، أقربها أنه لا يستطيع، وأبعدها أن وجعه محي كل شيء في مخيلته وأصبح كل ما يمتلك.

قلت له أنهم مجرد صيادين للبط، فقال "يصطادون الأطفال بنفس الطريقة، في سوريا، يتمنى الأطفال أن يموتوا بدلاً من الهلع كل قليل، من صوت قنبلة أو قذيفة، أو شخص متوحش سيمزق أهمهم أمام عينيهم قبل أن يمزقهم". الموت في سوريا أصبح كالمغناطيس، يجتذب البشر في مده. مسحت جبهته بيدي وملست على وجهه، فقيل يدي، يعتذر عن خطأ لم يرتكبه.

توسطت الشمس السماء، فمزقت ورقة من الجريدة، صنعت منها عروسة ورقية. كانت هذه حيلة قديمة تعلمتها من أمي لتطرد الأشباح والسحر والحسد. كانت تصنع عروسة ورق بالمقص ثم تشكها بدبوس، ومع كل شكة دبوس تذكر اسم حاقد أو حاسد.. ثم تحرقها بعود كبريت، وأنظر إليها حتى يحترق العود والورقة وبهذا ينتهي الحسد.

التقطت دبوس من حقيبتى ومسكت العروسة باليد الأخرى "من عينك يا فلان ومن عينك يا فلان، من عينك يا فلانة ومن عين كل اللي بيصولنا في سعادتنا. من عين كل اللي شافك ومصلاش على النبي.. عليه الصلاة والسلام" ذكرت أسماء كل المحيطين بنا ومعارفنا، وبدون سبب، ذكرت أسماء السياسيين والقتلة من خطرنا ببالي، تأكلت العروسة من كثرة الشكشكة، سحبت ولاعته من جيب البنطلون، وأشعلت طرفها.. انظر يا حبيبي.. كل هؤلاء الأوغاد يحترقون.

نظر إلى النار قليلاً، ومط شفثيه بابتسامة ضئيلة. "كفى نار، تعالي إلى حضني" تتبدل الأدوار، أصبح أنا الطفلة الشريفة الباكية، وأود لو كان هو أبي وأخي وصديقي كما هو زوجي وحبيبي.. أريده أن يكون جميع رجال العالم، أريد أن أكبر بين يديه وفي حضنه، أريد أن أبكي كل ما عانيته من قسوة، أريد أن أقص ورق ذاكرتي كعروسة، وأحرقه، وأرى جميع من فيه تأكله النار. وأعود إليه كورقة بيضاء ليرسم عليها ما يشاء، وأضحك من كل قلبي على أي شيء مادام معه.

سألني عما يقلقتني، فخلجت من همومي الصغيرة كأنه يحارب وحش ضخم وأحارب بعوضة. سرحت، وأغمضت عيني في حضنه. كل الأوجاع مقارنة بفقدان الوطن والذكريات بلا قيمة، كل المشاكل تافهة وحقيرة، إذا ما قارنتها بشيء أكبر "أنت ترى الأشياء أكبر من حجمها الحقيقي.. ومنظورك لها هو الحقيقة". كيف أقتع حبيبي أن رسوماته لن تعود؟ كيف أجد له مبرر بأن مجهود وألوان وأحلام طفولته ومنبع اكتشاف موهبته أصبحت رماد أو جزء من حطام بيت؟ كيف تدرك عقولنا وحشية عقول أخرى مثلها؟ كنت أسمعه من حين لآخر يقول "لا يهم البيت.. المهم اللوحات". ارتبطت معه اللوحات بتفاصيل كثيرة، عزف الأمسيات وصورة بنت الجيران، والهرب من نافذة المنزل للمشي في ضوء القمر، أتذكر حين قال لي "أنا بلا تاريخ.. ذكرياتي قد حطموها، مدرستي، منزلنا، أين سادفن؟ في الغربية؟".

أصابني الخرس، ماذا أقول له؟ ما يريد أكبر من أستطيع أن أعطيه، لو أستطيع يا حبيبي لدافعت عن وطنك، لناديت "سُخِمت" ربة الحرب والغضب الفرعونية، لتنفخ في السياسيين جميعا وتأتي عليهم ولا ترتوي إلا بعد أن تشرب دمانهم، لو أستطيع، لتبادلنا الذكريات، فتنعم أنت وأشقى أنا.. لكن كيف؟ كيف أعوضك عن رسومات لم يعد موجود في هذا العالم الذي لا يدرك قيمة الرسم؟ كيف أقتع العالم أن الورق والألوان أكبر من حجمهم الحقيقي؟ وأن الوطن أكبر من حدود جغرافية يتنازع عليها حجر؟ الحقيقة، أن السياسيين كائنات أنانية وهم يعلمون ذلك، والحقيقة أننا - الشعوب - نعلم ذلك جيدا، ونبحث طوال الوقت عن أنانية نستطيع احتمالها، لكن أوطاننا أصبحت أنانية مثلهم، وتركنا عرايا بدون أي حماية. تركنا في فراغ متسع اسمه العالم، لنشعر بالغربة فيه طوال عمرنا، ونحن نرى الأشياء أكبر من حجمها كلما افتقدناها، وفقا لمدى ارتباطنا بها، فالبعض يخفي كبالون في السماء، والبعض يترسب في ذاكرتنا كالرمل في البحر.

مرر أصابعه بشعري، ففتحت عيني وقلت:

- حاولنا قبل قليل المشي على الماء المغطى بالجير، وكان شكله في بياض الثلج. ولأنه هش للغاية عكس ما يبدو، فشلنا. المشي في الماضي شبيه بذلك، تغوص قدميك في الذكريات كلما توغلت، لكن عندما سبحنا في الماء كان جميلا، أليس كذلك؟
- نعم
- رغبت في إقناعك بتغيير منظورك نحو الوطن، ولكن هذا فوق احتمالنا. علينا إذا تكبير صورته القديمة الجميلة. فلنصاحك ذكرياتنا حتى المولم منها، نلعب معها كالسمك، لكن لا نصطادها، لا نأكلها مرة أخرى. بل نحتفظ بالجيد منها، نلعب معه على السطح كالذلافين.
- نظر إليّ طويلا، وابتسم. قبلته، واحتضنت كتفيه بذراعي، أفلتت يده وخط أصابعه على الرمل، رسم نصف قلب كبير فرسمت بذراعي الثاني النصف الآخر، وغنينا، "هنا الشام.. هنا الشام".

Walking on Water

Basma Eloufy. Egypt

“Watch out!... objects in a mirror are larger than they appear.” That is what was written on car mirrors, and what I remembered when he finally fell asleep in my arms. That was the idea I wanted him to understand but I couldn’t say a word, possibly because we couldn’t find a way to talk about more difficult things.

I thought of that when I was preparing the morning coffee on the first day of Lesser Bairam. Children were playing, tearing down Ramadan decorations from walls. We heard their laughs from windows and firecrackers were like small suns in the sky.

I made two cups of coffee and searched for him in the bedroom, office, living room and bathroom; and, of course, he wasn’t in the kitchen.

I went into the bedroom again, and I heard a scratching sound, so I searched under the bed, and finally I found him. He was in a dark hidden place, very frightened, scared, pale, shrunken, shaking, and small like a child hiding from a giant ghost.

I remember very well that looking at him in such a state was quite painful. He had put his hands over his ears; his body was shaking violently. I called for him to come out, and he scratched the floor with his nails, as if he wished to cling to it. He shrank more and more, and his legs stiffened. I bowed and crawled to reach him and our breaths met. I wiped his sweat, patted his shoulders and hugged him. “Don’t be scared, honey. Don’t be scared.”

Feast crackers frightened him; they made him remember things he wanted to

forget. Trying to reassure him, I said quietly: “you see things bigger than they really are... it’s just children’s games”.

It seems that he did not hear me and was trembling ceaselessly. I had read in a book that our bodies connect powers like wires, and since then I have felt light in my body. I frequently tried to get rid of my worries and fill my body with life for him to absorb. I took his head in my arms and began to pray.

I got him into bed. I covered him and he quickly fell into a deep sleep, a restless sleep, mixed with humming and sobbing sounds and suppressed cries every now and then.

He was a normal ordinary person. We had met in a bookstore where I used to buy notebooks and paper cards and he was choosing pencils and coloured papers.

He would hold a bunch of pencils and choose very carefully, as if painting a picture in front of him. He chose very passionately, a passion I had missed for such a long time, a passion for little things, a new pencil, a new piece of paper, and some colours.

I was frightened and felt overwhelming nostalgia; he was handsome, wheatenskin and brown-eyed. His face looked like the face of a Hollywood star and its features were magnificent. Oh God, how could I stop myself from looking at him?! What a charming man! What beauty the Almighty has given you.

His unique eastern manhood awakened me and betook me mercilessly and ruthlessly. I dropped my notebooks and pencils, and he bent down, picked them up, and gave them to me. I found a strange pencil among them that

was not mine; I gave it back to him and asked him about it. He said “it was a simple pencil, with a single head, but it was charming.” He wrote with it on a small piece of paper. He tilted his hand to show me how he could draw with it. He was drawing as if he was moving his hands on the sand of the beach. He fell silent for a moment, and then he gave me the pencil to try.

He looked at me to encourage me. It was as if he wanted to catch a golden fish from my eyes. I tried the pencil. It was smooth and strong. He took it again and started to draw. I watched his hands; he was charming, with strong, gentle fingers. He was like a sculptor who had lost his way from the Middle Ages to our time. The passion of his eyes made a river of imagination that took me on a childish journey, like the journeys of Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. We loved each other and got married. We went on tours, painted, and we did everything we wanted. I learned from his absence more than his presence. I loved myself in his presence, and I became simple and unprompted just like I wanted to be. I did not want anything from the world. I felt very strong as if I was depending on a trunk of a huge tree, or like having a roof that saved me from the rain. He was like a light that illuminated my life; we were alike, even in our ordinary sadness.

He travelled to Syria to visit his family, even after the war but, after the last visit, everything changed. He was very worried all the time, as if he had put the map of his wounded country in his heart, and its voices and pictures in his mind.

When he saw the cooker turned on, he would stand up. When he heard a scream, he would run away.

Therefore, I took care of everything that might upset him, but there were things I could not control.

I could not imagine the pain that he felt when he took a shower and remembered children who forcibly bathe with ice drops in the winter while the coldness silences the painful screams inside them.

I could not control the voices of women shouting to sell in the street, and others calling for help. Firecrackers in the feast were another nightmare I could not control.

They were very powerful and lit up the sky; everybody liked them, except those who knew another kind of firecracker. I could not decide if a specific sound attracted him to a certain place.

He woke up two hours later, he looked at the cover for a long time, and then he said:

“It is a luxurious life. In my country we live in a house that has walls, windows, covers and food. This is a luxurious life.”

I fell silent, he continued:

“In my country, people are given one blanket in the camp; every day they burn parts of it to feel warm in the snow.”

I suggested spending the feast time somewhere else, as this might make him happy.

I packed our luggage, and we went to Alex. On the desert road we listened to a song by Gene Band called *Hona el Sham*.

The song was performed many times. A sad song, sung by a fantastic Syrian voice, and the performance of the band reflected the Syrian genes. The lyrics of the song were very moving:

“Here is Sham, here is my heart, here is your heart, and here is my love... on your heel, I am flying pigeons. Fly there pigeons, take my heart there, here is Sham... oh, Sham.”

Once we reached Alex, we stopped to buy newspapers and drink something. Next to the shop, there was a big zigzagging bay. It was like an island in the middle of the earth, surrounded by buildings; colour dissolved on the horizon, the separated line between sky

and sea disappeared. When we looked carefully at this place, we felt it was like the edge of the world or like a magic gate for us to pass. We looked deeply and then we left.

We found smaller and larger water surfaces, surrounded by trees around buildings, or through wheat fields, water around everything, small lakes, short rivers, and narrow gulfs where small boats were sailing on some, and ducks were floating on others.

We arrived at an industrial area surrounded by water but the industrial waste seemed to be thrown in the water. There was a thick lime layer on top of the water; it covered everything like thick snow. There was a grey sky and artificial white snow; it was a magnificent view from afar. We thought about walking on this lime and testing its strengths; we stopped the car, took off our shoes, and tried to walk two steps; it broke, and our feet sank, it was not as thick as we believed. We laughed and returned to the car.

We decided to stop in a nice place before reaching the centre of the city. It has a lake and trees, far from people, similar to those places school camps head to. We made a tent from a big carpet, chopped some tree trunks as firewood, spread out newspaper on the floor, put out food and luggage, and left the song playing in the car.

We dreamt of stealing some time, a day, two days, years, forever, any period of time we could. We changed our clothes, and he lay on the grass. I tried to walk over water again, but my feet sank again and I gradually sank. I felt like a dolphin dancing in the water. He was sleeping. I played with small fish with my feet, and when he woke up, he followed me.

His face shone, and we sank and jumped to the surface. We tried to catch fish. He grew silver flippers, and I grew golden flippers. We played and laughed like dolphins. I almost

heard joyful footsteps in our hearts, like Disneyland characters, instantly transforming into a children's tale. We had no concerns, living like dolphins, choosing to breathe, preferring to live on the surface, and holding our breath at the bottom until we came up again.

We got out, dried ourselves, entered our small tent, and he slept again. In our fragile world isolating us from the world, you sleep in another world with angels. I was afraid that if I thought about it, I would feel jealous. They are light that we do not know.

I thought fear of the unknown is part of blood cells, which can't be seen under a microscope, but what about fear of the known?! How do we put it in its real size? How do we know its real size?

A sound of shooting woke him up again; some hunters might be shooting ducks. He looked at me at length and then he cried. That was the only thing that I could not make him forget. "Give me your pain my darling." He kept silent, a silence with thousands of meanings, the nearest of which was his inability, the furthest was his pain that removed his imagination and became everything in his life.

I told him they were just duck hunters and he replied that "in Syria, they chased children in the same way; children there wish they could die instead of feeling the horror of bomb and missile sounds or a savage who would rip their mum in front of their eyes before he rips them." Death in Syria became like a magnet that attracts everything in its range. I wiped his forehead, I touched his face, and he kissed my hand, apologised for mistakes he did not make.

The sun rose to the middle of the sky. I tore a part of the newspaper and made a paper puppet. It was an old trick my mum used to do to chase away envy, ghosts and magic; she used to make a paper puppet, then she would call the envious people's names.

When calling every name she used to prick the puppet with a pin; then she would burn it, and I looked at it while it was burning, so it prevented envy.

I picked a pin from my bag. I held the puppet with the other hand, began to call all the names of those who envy our happiness. I called all the people envious of us and our friends without reason. I even called on politicians, killers, and pricked the puppet everywhere, and then I burned it.

“Look, my dear, all these bastards were burnt.”

He looked at the fire, and then smiled:

“Put out the fire, come to my arms.” Roles changed. I became the crying child. I wished he was my father, brother, and friend, as he is my husband and beloved. I wanted him to be every man in the world, to grow up in his arms, to cry all that I suffered. I wanted to tear my memories like a puppet and then burn it. I wanted to see the fire eating everything and everyone then come back like a fresh sheet of white paper he could draw on, and laugh about everything with him.

He asked what worried me. I was ashamed of my petty troubles; he was like someone fighting a monster, and I was fighting an insect. I kept silent and closed my eyes; all troubles compared to homesickness and memories become nothing; all troubles are tiny and ridiculous when you compare them to something bigger. “You see things bigger than their real size, your perspective of them is the truth.”

How could I tell him that his paintings had gone away? How could I tell him that his efforts, colours, childhood dreams and his talent discovered in his homeland were burnt or part of a demolished house? How could our minds imagine the crawl of other minds?

“The house doesn’t matter, painting is what matters most,” I heard him saying.

Painting linked him to many details, such as evenings playing music, the neighbour’s daughter’s picture, escaping through the window to walk in moonlight. I remember when he said:

“I am without history, they destroyed my memories, school, house. Where will I be buried? Will I be buried in foreign lands?”

I was speechless, what should I tell him? What he needs is greater than my abilities. If I could I would defend your home, my love, I would call on Sekhmet, goddess of war and anger, to destroy all politicians and drink their blood. If I were able, I would exchange our memories, but how?

How do I redeem your paintings while nobody in the world values painting anymore? How do I convince the world that paper and pencils are bigger than their actual size? That homeland is bigger than border conflicts.

Politicians are selfish and we the people know that, and we search for selfishness we can bear, but our countries became selfish like them. Our countries left us without any security, left us in a wide space called the world, to feel foreignness all our life. And we see things bigger than their real size when we lose them. Some disappear like a balloon in the sky while others remain in our memory as sand in the sea.

He passed his fingers through my hair; I opened my eyes and said:

“We tried to walk over lime, and it looked like snow, and it was very weak, so we failed. Walking in the past is as difficult as walking over the lime. Your leg will sink in memories, but swimming in water is better, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“I wanted to convince you to change your vision of the homeland, but it’s too difficult. Therefore, we ought to maximise its old

image. Let us be friendly with our memories, even the painful ones, and play with them like fish But let us not catch them and not eat them again, let us keep the good ones, and play with them on the surface like dolphins.”

He looked at me for a long time and smiled. I kissed him and held his shoulders. He took his hand and drew a half a heart on the sand. I drew the other half with my other hand, and we sang: “here is Sham, here is Sham.”

Der gegen die Haie kämpft

Maria Tramountani. Deutschland

„Woher kommst du?“ Ahio sah den jungen Mann vor ihm abwartend an. Dieser blickte überrascht auf, während er einen Knopf an der Maschine drückte und diese mit einem lauten Geräusch Kaffee in die Tasse füllte.

„Köln“, antwortete er.

„Nein. Woher kommst du *wirklich*?“, fragte Ahio ungeduldig die Frage, die ihm selber so verhasst war. „*Ursprünglich*.“

Sein Gegenüber wirkte nun verwirrt. Er war es wohl nicht gewohnt, dass Männer, die er nie zuvor gesehen hatte, in das Café kamen, in dem er arbeitete und ihm persönliche Fragen stellten.

„Wieso fragst du?“

Der Junge musterte Ahio nun genauer. Diese Frage hatte er wohl, genau wie Ahio, schon oft beantworten müssen. Nur kam sie normalerweise nicht von Menschen, deren Haut so dunkel war wie die seine.

„Bist du Filimoeika?“

„Woher kennst du meinen Namen?“

„Ich bin in Freund von Sarah. Sie hat mir von dir erzählt und von ihr weiß ich auch, dass du hier arbeitest.“

Der Junge mit dem Namen Filimoeika wich etwas zurück und schien plötzlich sehr froh über den Tresen zu sein, der ihn von dem seltsamen Fremden trennte.

Ahio ärgerte sich über sich selbst. Er hatte das eigentlich geschickter anstellen wollen. Er hatte sich genau ausgemalt, wie seine erste Begegnung mit Filimoeika verlaufen würde. Und nun hatte der schmale junge Mann Angst vor dem großen breitschultrigen Ahio. So war das nicht geplant gewesen.

Er hatte Sarah vor ein paar Tagen auf der Geburtstagsfeier eines Arbeitskollegen kennengelernt. Sie hatte ihn angesprochen und sie waren ins Gespräch gekommen. Als er von seiner Heimat erzählt hatte, hatte sie plötzlich die Stirn gerunzelt. Der Name der kleinen polynesischen Inselgruppe, von der Ahio stammte, war ihr bekannt vorgekommen. Sie hatten ihn sich gemerkt, weil er so lustig klang. Takuu. Ahio hatte große Augen gemacht, als sie nach kurzer Überlegung ausgerufen hatte, dass sie noch jemanden kannte, der aus Takuu kam. Er hatte ihr versichert, dass das kaum möglich war. Den großen Sturm vor 15 Jahren hatte kaum ein Einwohner Takuus überlebt. Ahio selbst hatte auf einen Schlag seine Geschwister und seine Frau verloren. Die wenigen Überlebenden, etwa hundert waren es gewesen, hatten Asyl in Neuseeland gefunden, als klar war, dass Takuu nicht mehr bewohnbar war. Auch Ahio war nach Neuseeland gegangen, doch aus irgendeinem Grund hatte es ihn weitergezogen. Ein deutscher Unternehmer hatte ihn irgendwann nach Europa mitgenommen und ihm Arbeit in seiner Fabrik gegeben. Sei sieben Jahre arbeitete Ahio nun am Fließband und setzte Scheibenwischer für Autos zusammen.

Er hatte schnell Deutsch gelernt und Freundschaften geschlossen – das war ihm immer leicht gefallen – doch bis zum heutigen Tag hatte ihn jede Sekunde das Heimweh gequält. Be-

sonders an Februartagen wie diesen, an dem seine Finger an der Zigarette festzufrieren drohten, wann immer er ins Freie ging, um sich eine anzuzünden.

Er hatte seit 15 Jahren keinen einzigen Kontakt zu einem Landsmann gehabt und das hatte er Sarah erklärt.

„Ich bin mir fast sicher. Er sieht dir sogar ein bisschen ähnlich, wenn ich dich genauer betrachte. Du könntest sein großer Bruder sein.“

Ahio hatte gegrinst. Für die Deutschen sahen doch alle Schwarze wie Brüder aus.

„Filimoeika“, hatte Sarah gesagt. „So heißt er. Aber alle nennen ihn Fili.“

Ahios Blut war ihm in den Adern gefroren. Es war das erste Wort auf Takuuanisch gewesen, das er seit sehr langer Zeit gehört hatte. Plötzlich hatte er Möwen kreischen und die Palmen im Wind rascheln gehört. „Filimoeika“: der gegen die Haie kämpft.

Und nun stand er hier. Vor ihm der Junge, der ihn immer noch misstrauisch ansah. Ahio war klar, dass er nun etwas sagen musste, der Moment des Schweigens hielt schon zu lange an und hinter ihm wurden die anderen Kunden in der Schlange unruhig.

„Mein Name ist Ahio. Ich komme aus Polynesien. Aus Takuu.“

Filimoeikas dunkle Augen weiteten sich und er musste sich am Tresen festhalten, um nicht das Gleichgewicht zu verlieren.

Ahio betrachtete den jungen Mann genauer. Sarah hatte Recht gehabt, es gab tatsächlich eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit. Filimoeikas Haut hatte denselben schokoladenfarbigen Ton, seine Wangenknochen waren hoch und spitz und seine Augen waren mandelförmig. Seine Haare waren kurzgeschoren, genau wie Ahios.

Filimoeika wurde von einer Kollegin hinter dem Tresen aus seiner Trance gerissen.

„Fili, mach schon. Die Leute warten.“

Er fasste sich, nickte und griff nach der Kaffeetasche. Er reichte sie Ahio.

„Ich mache in einer Stunde Feierabend. Wartest du auf mich?“

Ahio nickte, nahm den Kaffee und setzte sich in eine Ecke mit niedrigen Tischen und mit Blick auf den Tresen. Wirklich gemütlich war die Sitzbank nicht, aber er merkte es kaum. Während er an seinem Kaffee nippte, ließ er Filimoeika, dessen Hände routiniert an der Kaffeemaschine hantierten, nicht aus dem Blick.

„Sprichst du Takuuanisch?“

Filimoeika schüttelte den Kopf. Dann zuckte er mit der Schulter.

„Ich war 4 als der Sturm kam. Ich kann vielleicht noch einzelne Wörter, aber ich habe seit 15 Jahren kein Wort Takuuanisch gehört oder gesprochen.“

„Wie bist du nach Deutschland gekommen?“

„Adoptiert. Meine biologischen Eltern starben beim Sturm. Meine Adoptiveltern hatten kaum Informationen dazu, woher ich komme. Nur Takuu wussten sie. Ich habe ein bisschen recherchiert, aber nicht viel gefunden. Irgendwann will ich zurückgehen.“

„Es gibt nichts mehr auf Takuu. Der Meeresspiegel steigt und der große Sturm hat alles vernichtet. Die Bewohner sind tot oder weg. Was willst du dort?“ Ahio schluckte. Nach so vielen Jahren schmerzte es ihn immer noch. Nicht nur die Menschen, die er liebte, hatte er verloren. Auch seine Heimat Erde, das Meer, die Sonne.

Ahio rechnete. Wenn Filimoeika vier Jahre alt gewesen war im Jahr des Sturms, müssten seine Eltern nicht viel älter als Ahio gewesen sein.

„Weißt du die Namen deiner Eltern?“

„Fau und Jaimia.“

Ahio hatte plötzlich einen Kloß im Hals. Fau und Jaimia. Er hatte sie nicht wirklich gut gekannt, aber auf einer Insel von wenigen hundert Einwohnern, war man jedem schon mal irgendwie begegnet.

„Du siehst deinem Vater ähnlich“, sagte er nach einer kurzen Pause.

Filimoeika starrte ihn an.

„Was weißt du über meine Eltern?“

„Nicht viel.“ Ahio erzählte von dem Fischer Fau, der schmal gebaut gewesen war, aber mit dem Fischernetz umgehen konnte wie kein anderer. Und von Jaimia, die eine üppige Figur und ein hübsches Gesicht gehabt hatte.

„Kennst du die Bedeutung deines Namens?“

Filimoeika nickte. Es war ein polynesischer Name, er hatte die Bedeutung im Internet gefunden.

„Dein Vater war einmal beim Fischen von einem Hai gebissen worden. Er hat fast sein Bein verloren. Zur Erinnerung hat er dir diesen Namen gegeben. Der gegen die Haie kämpft.“

Filimoeika senkte den Blick. Er rührte mit einem Löffel in der Tasse, die vor ihm auf dem Tisch stand.

„Was bedeutet dein Name?“, fragte er irgendwann.

„Wirbelwind. In der Nacht, in der ich auf die Welt kam, tobte ein Sturm. Er tötete viele Menschen und machte die halbe Insel obdachlos. Meine Familie hatte Glück und unser Haus blieb unversehrt. Und ich kam gesund auf die Welt.“

Filimoeika verzog die Lippen zu einem kleinen Lächeln.

„Versteh mich nicht falsch“, sagte er dann, nachdem sie eine Weile lang geschwiegen hatten. „Deutschland ist meine Heimat und ich habe großartige Eltern. Aber ich wüsste gern, wo meine Wurzeln sind.“

Ahio fühlte sich plötzlich sehr müde. Er lehnte sich auf der ungemütlichen Bank zurück. Er hatte sich so sehr auf dieses Treffen gefreut. Darauf, einen Landsmann zu treffen, jemanden, der ihm ähnlich war und der seine Sehnsucht teilte. Doch alles, was er vorgefunden hatte, war ein Junge, der bis auf sein Aussehen und ein bisschen Neugierde keinen Bezug zu Takuu hatte. Nicht mal Takuanisch konnte er und Ahio hatte sich doch so sehr darauf gefreut, seine Sprache zu sprechen.

Er erhob sich. Filimoeika sprang ebenfalls sofort auf.

„Können wir uns wiedersehen? Ich würde gern mehr über Takuu erfahren.“

Ahio zögerte. Er hatte keine Lust darauf, das Objekt des wissenschaftlichen Interesses dieses Jungens zu sein.

„Und...“ Filimoeika brach ab. „Ich weiß nicht, wahrscheinlich ist es zu viel verlangt.“

Wahrscheinlich, dachte Ahio bei sich.

„Was denn?“, fragte er dann doch.

„Kannst du mir Takuanisch beibringen? Ich meine, ich wollte es schon immer können und ich bin sicher, dass ich mich an ein bisschen erinnere, wenn ich ein paar Worte höre und es gibt weder Lehrbücher, noch Sprachkurse. Es gibt so viele polynesischen Sprachen, wahrscheinlich sind alle irgendwie dem Takuanischen ähnlich, aber... Ich würde gern richtiges Takuanisch können. Das, das du sprichst. Das meine Familie gesprochen hat.“

Filimoeika holte tief Luft. Seine Augen strahlten und seine Wangen waren gerötet. Ahio konnte nicht anders als über die Begeisterung des Jungen zu grinsen.

„Ich kann dich auch bezahlen“, fügte er eifrig noch hinzu, als Ahio nicht antwortete.

Das Lachen verging Ahio. Finster blickte er Filimoeika an.

„Willst du mich beleidigen? Glaubst du wirklich, ich würde Geld annehmen, um die Kultur meiner Heimat weiterzugeben?“, fuhr er ihn an. Filimoeika wich erschrocken einen Schritt zurück.

„Nein, nein, entschuldige, natürlich nicht. Ich dachte nur...“

„Lass das lieber“, fuhr er ihm ins Wort. Dann seufzte er. „In Ordnung. Ich bringe dir Takuuanisch bei.“

Filimoeika strahlte. „Danke! Ich bin auch echt flexibel. Ich habe gerade Semesterferien und bis auf die Stunden hier im Café kann ich eigentlich immer.“

„Was studierst du?“

„Nachhaltiges Energie- und Umweltmanagement.“

„Was bedeutet das?“

Filimoeikas Augen sprühten nun fast Funken und seine Stimme überschlug sich, als er antwortete.

„Es bedeutet, dass keine Insel mehr auf dieser Welt das Schicksal von Takuu teilen soll.“

The One Who Fights Sharks

Maria Tramountani. Germany

“Where are you from?” Ahio looked expectantly at the young man standing in front of him. The young man glanced up in surprise while pressing a button on the machine, which made a loud noise as it filled the cup with coffee.

“Cologne,” he replied.

“No. Where are you *really* from?” Ahio asked impatiently. It was the same question that he himself so hated. “*Originally.*”

The young man in front of him looked confused now. He was obviously not used to people he’d never seen before coming into the café where he worked and asking him personal questions.

“Why do you ask?”

The young man took a closer look at Ahio. Just like Ahio, he too had often had to answer that question. Only it normally didn’t come from people whose skin was as dark as his.

“Are you Filimoeika?”

“How do you know my name?”

“I’m a friend of Sarah’s. She told me about you, and that you work here.”

The young man called Filimoeika recoiled slightly, and suddenly seemed very happy to have a counter separating him from this odd stranger. Ahio had pictured exactly how his first meeting with Filimoeika would go. And now the slender young man was scared of Ahio, with his large frame and broad shoulders. This wasn’t what Ahio had planned.

He had met Sarah a few days earlier at the birthday party of a colleague from work. She had approached him, and the two of them

had struck up a conversation. When he’d spoken about his home, she had suddenly knit her brow: she seemed to know the name of the small Polynesian island group that Ahio came from. She had noticed the name because it sounded so funny: Takuu. Ahio’s eyes had widened when she, after a moment of reflection, declared that she knew someone else from Takuu. He had assured her that was highly unlikely. Hardly anyone from Takuu had survived the great storm 15 years ago. Ahio himself had lost his siblings and his wife in one fell swoop. The few survivors — about a hundred of them — found exile in New Zealand once it became clear that Takuu was no longer habitable. Ahio had gone to New Zealand as well, but for some reason he was drawn farther afield. After a while, a German businessman brought him to Germany and gave him work in his factory. For seven years now, Ahio had been putting together windshield wipers on the assembly line.

He had quickly learned German and made several friends — that had always been easy for him. Yet he was constantly tortured by homesickness, every second of every day. And especially on February days like these, when his fingers risked freezing on his cigarette, every time he went outside to light one.

For 15 years he’d had no contact whatsoever with anyone from his country, and he had told Sarah this.

“I’m almost certain. He even resembles you, now that I’ve gotten a closer look at you. You could be his older brother.”

Ahio had smiled. For the Germans, all Black people looked like brothers.

“Filimoeika,” Sarah had said. “That’s his name. But everyone calls him Fili.”

Ahio’s blood had frozen in his veins. That was the first word in the Takuu language that he’d heard for a very long time. He could suddenly hear seagulls screeching and palm trees rustling in the wind. Filimoeika: the one who fights sharks.

And now here he was. The young man was in front of him, still looking at him suspiciously. It was clear to Ahio that he had to say something. The moment of silence had already gone on too long, and the other customers behind him in the queue were becoming restless.

“My name’s Ahio. I’m from Polynesia. From Takuu.”

Filimoeika’s dark eyes widened, and he had to hold onto the counter to not lose his balance.

Ahio inspected the young man more closely. Sarah was right: there was in fact a certain similarity. Filimoeika’s skin had the same chocolate-coloured tone, his cheekbones were high and sharp, and his eyes were the shape of almonds. His hair was cropped short too, just like Ahio’s.

Filimoeika was snapped out of his trance by a colleague behind the counter.

“Fili, come on. People are waiting.”

He pulled himself together, nodded, and reached for the coffee cup, which he then handed to Ahio.

“I get off work in one hour. Will you wait for me?”

Ahio nodded, took the coffee, and sat down in a corner with low tables that overlooked the bar. The seat was not particularly comfortable, but he barely noticed. As he sipped his coffee, he didn’t let Filimoeika, whose hands expertly worked the coffee machine, out of his sight.

“Do you speak Takuu?”

Filimoeika shook his head. Then he shrugged.

“I was four when the storm hit. I still know a few words, but I haven’t heard or spoken a single word of Takuu for 15 years.”

“How did you come to Germany?”

“I was adopted. My biological parents died in the storm. My adoptive parents barely knew anything about where I was from. All they knew was that it was called Takuu. I’ve researched it a bit, but I haven’t found much. I want to go back one day.”

“There’s nothing left on Takuu. The sea level is rising, and the great storm destroyed everything. The inhabitants are all dead or gone. Why do you want to go?” Ahio swallowed. It still hurt him, after all these years. He hadn’t only lost his loved ones. He’d also lost his native soil, the sea, the sun.

Ahio did some mental math. If Filimoeika was four in the year the storm hit, then his parents couldn’t have been much older than Ahio.

“Do you know your parents’ names?”

“Fau and Jaimia.”

Ahio suddenly felt a lump in his throat. Fau and Jaimia. He hadn’t known them all that well, but on an island with just a few hundred inhabitants, you crossed paths with everyone at some point.

“You look like your father,” he said after a brief pause.

Filimoeika stared at him.

“What do you know about my parents?”

“Not much.” Ahio told him about Fau, the fisherman: although he had a slender build, Fau could handle a fishing net like no other. And he told him about Jaimia, who had a voluptuous figure and a lovely face.

“Do you know what your name means?”

Filimoeika nodded. It was a Polynesian name, and he’d found the meaning on the Internet.

“Your father was attacked by a shark once when he was fishing. He nearly lost his leg. He gave you your name as a reminder: the one who fights sharks.”

Filimoeika lowered his gaze. He stirred a spoon in the cup on the table before him.

“What does your name mean?” he asked eventually.

“Whirlwind. A storm was raging on the night I was born. It killed several people and left half the island homeless. My family was lucky: our house was untouched, and I was born healthy.”

Filimoeika’s lips curled into a slight smile.

“Don’t misunderstand me,” he said after they’d been silent for a while. “Germany’s my home, and I have wonderful parents. But I’d like to know my roots.”

Ahio suddenly felt very tired. He leaned back against the uncomfortable seat. He had so looked forward to this. To meeting a fellow countryman, someone like him, someone who shared his longing. But all he’d found was a boy who had no ties to Takuu other than his appearance and a bit of curiosity. He couldn’t even speak Takuu, and Ahio had so been looking forward to speaking his language.

He got up. Filimoeika immediately jumped up as well.

“Can we see each other again? I’d like to learn more about Takuu.”

Ahio hesitated. He had no desire to be the object of this boy’s scholarly interest.

“And...” Filimoeika broke off the thought. “I don’t know, it’s probably too much to ask.”

Probably, Ahio thought to himself.

“What?” he asked anyway.

“Can you teach me how to speak Takuu? I mean, I’ve always wanted to, and I’m sure that some of it will come back to me once I’ve heard a few words. There aren’t any textbooks or courses for it. There are so many Polynesian languages, and they’re probably all somehow similar to Takuu, but... I’d really like to learn proper Takuu. The language you speak. The language my family spoke.”

Filimoeika took a deep breath. His eyes were bright and his cheeks were flushed. Ahio couldn’t help but smile at the young man’s enthusiasm.

“I can pay you too,” he added eagerly, when Ahio didn’t reply.

The smile vanished from Ahio’s face. He looked at Filimoeika darkly.

“Are you trying to insult me? Do you really think I’d accept money to pass on the culture of my homeland?” he snapped. Frightened, Filimoeika took a step back.

“No, no, excuse me. Of course not. I just thought...”

“Forget about it,” he interrupted, before letting out a sigh. “Alright. I’ll teach you Takuu.”

Filimoeika was beaming. “Thank you! My schedule’s really flexible. I’m on semester break right now, and I can get together just about any time I’m not working here in the café.”

“What are you studying?”

“Sustainable energy and environmental management.”

“What does that mean?”

Filimoeika’s eyes were practically sparkling now, and his voice cracked as he replied.

“It means that no other island in the world should share Takuu’s fate.”

Safe Journey

Christoforos Pavlakis. Greece

When, in the year 762, Caliph Al-Mansur was travelling through the vast expanses of the Orient in search of rest and calm, his eyes fell suddenly on a landscape that lay idyllically on the banks of two rivers. Without hesitation, he ordered his soldiers to dig a large ditch around this piece of land, to fill it with wood and, at dusk, light a fire. As the flames flared, he looked down from a nearby hill and announced: “Here is where my city shall be founded.” And he named the city Madinat – A’Salam, the city of peace, known today as Baghdad. The city of peace has since never known peace. Again and again, yet another ruler has stood on the hill and watched it burn.

I was born in this fire, in this city, and possibly that’s why my skin is this coffee colour. I was well-grilled – like mutton, so to speak – over the fire. For me, the ghosts of the fire were ever-present; throughout my life I’ve seen the city burn time and again. One war embraces another; one catastrophe arrives hot on the heels of the next. Each time, Baghdad, or all of Iraq burned – in the skies and on the ground: from 1980 to 1988 in the first Gulf War; from 1988 to 1989, in the war the Baath regime waged against the Iraqi Kurds; in the second Gulf War in 1991; in the same year again, during the Iraqi uprising; in 2003, in the third Gulf War; and, in between, in hundreds of smaller fires, battles, uprisings and skirmishes. Fire is the country’s fate, and even the waters of the two great rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, are powerless against it.

Even the sun in Baghdad is friendly with the fire-ghosts. In summer, it never wants to set. It rolls powerfully through Baghdad, like a chariot of iron and fire, lacerating the horizon’s face, shunting its aimless way through the streets and houses. Maybe this merciless sun is the reason for my burnt and dusty appearance. Yet my birthday is on 3 March, and thus long before the hot Baghdad summer, with its temperatures of up to 50 degrees. That’s why the heat of the kitchen is to blame for my dark colour. If – as she herself always maintained – I really did drop from my mother’s belly in the kitchen, then I must have spent many hours there, even as a newborn, right next to the stove where black beans and eggplant were often cooking. It’s my suspicion, also, that the stone oven, in which my mother baked our bread, did its part. How I loved to watch, when I was little, as my mother took the bread, when it was ready, from the oven, and threw the fresh pita breads onto a large palm-leaf plate at her feet. Each and every time, I’d sneak up to the hot bread. Each and every time, I’d feel the irresistible urge to touch it, only to burst out crying when I’d again burned my fingers. And each and every time, I’d remain sitting, as close as I could get to this fascinating stone-oven fire.

So I have several possible explanations for my dark skin. The rulers’ fire and the Baghdad sun, the heat of the kitchen and the stone-oven embers. They’re all crucial to the fact that I go through life with brown skin, the darkest black hair, and dark eyes.

But if these four factors really are the cause of my appearance, shouldn’t most other inhabitants of this two-river country look like me? Many do, but I look so different that people doubted my Iraqi origins. In Baghdad, the bus conductors addressed me in English on several occasions. Most of the time I just laughed and answered using the vernacular of southern Iraq,

which left them staring at me, baffled, as if they thought they were seeing a ghost. The same thing would happen to me, occasionally, at police checkpoints. Each time, I'd have to answer long lists of questions – questions like: What do Iraqis like to eat? What songs are sung to Iraqi children? Tell me the names of the best-known Iraqi tribes! Only when I'd answered all these questions correctly, and my Iraqi origins had been proven, was I permitted to carry on. The boys in my part of town called me “The Red Indian” because I looked like the Indians in American cowboy films. In middle school, my Arabic teacher and the other pupils nicknamed me “Indian” or “Amitabh Bachchan”, after a famous Indian actor I really did look a bit like: a tall, thin, brown fellow.

My father was the only person who had a completely different explanation for my appearance. He claimed something really exciting. He took me aside one day. I must have been about fifteen at the time. “Son,” he said, “your real mother’s a gypsy. That’s why you do not look like your brothers!” He kept it short, but as far as I could gather, he’d been together with a gypsy a good while back. It was just an affair. She was called Selwa. “One of the most beautiful women in the world, she was,” he claimed, proudly. “Had a butterfly ever landed on her, her beauty would have caused it to wilt.” The story began in Baghdad, in the part of the town called al-Kamaliya, close to ours. A dancer, she was, and a woman of the night. My father has been her best customer. She’d loved him, wanted a child by him, and then had that child. My father, though, didn’t want a gypsy as the mother of one of his children. So, together with the men of our tribe, he decided to drive her, and her entire family, out of the district, first taking the baby from her. No sooner said than done. I was accepted into the tribe, and the gypsies were chased away. Later, it was rumoured that the gypsy had moved with her clan to northern Iraq, but had then left her family to emigrate, alone, to Turkey, and on to Greece. She’d worked there, apparently, for an Egyptian in a dance club, before killing herself in the end. My stepmother never spoke about it. She brought me up as if I were her own.

The funny thing, though, about this story is that both my mothers have the same name: Selwa. My non-gypsy Selwa claimed my father was a liar, and I her flesh and blood. Once, she even brought an old lady home with her who testified to being present at my birth. She swore on all the saints that my non-gypsy Selwa had indeed given birth to me in the kitchen. The gypsy story I only ever heard from my father. I even went once to the al-Kamaliya part of town, also known as the Pimp District, where there really was no shortage of brothels. I asked whether they knew a gypsy there called Selwa, and her people, but no one had the faintest idea. And that’s why I doubt there is anything at all to the story. My father just told me it, I suppose, to punish me. Because I couldn’t stand him.

I didn’t see the story as punishment at all, though. Why should I? What was wrong with gypsies? Beautiful women, full of fire and passion, who every man desired. In the past, when I was still a child, boys tussled to get a better look at the women dancing in their skimpy, colourful skirts, half-naked, at weddings and other parties. I remember all the men’s hungry eyes devouring them. The male gypsies, too, were so handsome that the men in our part of town thought they’d have to lock their doors to stop their women smiling at them. I think that whenever the gypsies had been at one of our weddings, the women round our way revelled for weeks in the memory of their black hair; their deep, big bull-eyes; their firm muscles and brown bodies, glistening with sweat beneath the blazing lights of the wedding party, and wished they

could secretly feel them beneath the covers at night, as their hands tried to satiate this unfulfilled desire. It will hardly have been any different for the men, thinking of those gypsy women, with such a full temperament.

I really was one of the best-looking boys in our part of town. It's possible that I inherited my looks from my gypsy mother. Possibly also the colour of my skin; my long, dark curly hair; and my big black gentle eyes. I adored the gypsies, after all, and the songs they sang. For a long time, I even kept a picture of a dancing gypsy woman in my pocket. Nonetheless, I decided to accept my non-gypsy mother as my "proper mother". She was my guardian angel. She loved me more than all my brothers and sisters, her biological children.

The question of whether gypsies are really originally from India, as some scientists claim, has always passionately interested me. I hope, secretly, that the theory is true. I could then present myself as an Indian-Iraqi gypsy, and put an end to all my existential questions!

Thinking back to the names I was called, as a result of my appearance, they always seem to have had something to do with India. India – where I've never been, a country I do not know at all. Some called me the "Iraqi Indian"; others just "Indian". I can live, of course, with being a gypsy, an Iraqi, an Indian, an extra-terrestrial, even – why not? What I can't live with, to this day, is that I don't know who I really am. I only know that I was "burned and salted by many suns of the earth," as my lover always says. And I believe her.

I've realised, meanwhile, there could be a concrete link between me and India, after all – my grandmother. This has a historical context: when the British came to Iraq at the start of the twentieth century, they were also, at the time, the occupying force in India. Accordingly, they brought a good many Indian soldiers with them, who set up camp in the south of our country; where there are extensive palm forests. Who knows, maybe my grandmother – from the south originally – met such a soldier in the forest once. And I, accordingly, am perhaps the product of the union of two British colonies.

The Dancing Raindrop

¿Por qué no bailas siempre?

Ilias Kolokouris. Greece

Way up high above the city, far away from car exhausts, a cloud was flying. Sceptical yet also cheerful was the cloud. A cloud as white as a little lamb, but loaded like a donkey. That cloud bore many raindrops on its back. Each raindrop had its own story. But the strangest story of all was that of the dancing raindrop.

The dancing raindrop was a droplet called Cyclops. “What a weird name!” said all the other raindrops when they met her. “Cyclops was the name of that enormous giant Odysseus met, back in the good old days! What kind of raindrop is this and why do they call her so?” they asked one another. But they did not wonder for too long and they forgot the question because raindrops do not think for more than one second. They have no memory. They only ponder for a second. And then they let go. And they fall. Pluffff!!!

Cyclops, the strange raindrop of our story, had straight, long hair with glints of azure. She did not have just one eye, like the giant of Odysseus, but two round eyes. She was a tall, pretty raindrop, with concerns and interests. She enjoyed playing and diving deep. She liked to dance. She danced a lot. Oh the whirls she made! She was a rather temperamental raindrop. Always facing moody dilemmas. Should she evaporate? Or would it be more preferable if she became liquid? She played with her properties in the most idiosyncratic manner. Indecisive. Playing. Like all children do. Ever since she was born, thousands of years ago, she has lived the normal life that all raindrops live.

One beautiful morning, way up high above the mountains of Poland, a dragon appeared. This was a good dragon; he was not of the wild and fearful kind. He enjoyed swimming. He liked the sea. But in Poland, there was no sea. With his long legs one step at a time, after coming down the Balkan cordillera he arrived at a big lake of Pindos. From Warsaw to Warasova. The mountain range was shaped like a camel, and the atmosphere was immensely hot as if we were in the desert. “Phew, I’ll pop like popcorn from this heat! Let me take a dive instead!” said the dragon and dipped his snooty nose into the lake. Ever since that moment, the lake had been called Drakolimni and they did not know whether there was indeed a dragon in there, taking its baths, or if the mountaineers, in oracular illusions were imagining this due to the dizziness and heat of the ascent. At any rate, right at that moment as the dragon was taking a deep dive, our raindrop, Cyclops, made a dancing *zeimbekiko* whirl and her life began. The dragon blew fire from his nose and then many droplets took up dancing, but Cyclops was a tiny bit higher than the others in her moves.

They danced and danced like mad until they became smoke. A steam going up towards the sky, turning it into blue azure, like glints of Cyclops’ hair. But they were scattered droplets, one raindrop here, another raindrop there. “Why don’t we get together, keeping each other company and playing together?” they wondered, scattered as they were. And so they gathered for the first time, forming the first cloud ever. Just as with all toys, balls and dolls, so it was for the

raindrops. Having played blissfully and peacefully with each other for three or four days, they began to quarrel. “I am the leader!” said one raindrop. “He is the leader!” the other corrected. “Nobody is the leader!” said Cyclops, making a flamenco move. “Olé!” And so it was. Fights and frights began. One raindrop would take a few steps back, gain strength and head butt the innocent raindrop. “I don’t like you fighting! You naughty children!” said the cloud. “I’ll go somewhere else! I will go away from Drakolimni! Perhaps there, far from your lake, you will make peace with each other!” he said.

And he began strolling down, one step at a time and he reached another mountain range, away from Pindos, the Pyrenees. Right there, he found the Montcalm Massif. “What a calm and collected mountain this is!” said the cloud and was happy. “This is where I will swing! Finally, you will be at peace with each other!” But the raindrops were very angry and bad tempered, and kept on kicking one another, as if they were wild goats. “Fine, then! I will show you!” said the cloud. He had no other choice. He made a single move, and boom! Pluff! All the raindrops fell into the lake that was called Estany de Canalbona. “So there! Punishment! Back to a lake!” said the cloud, and left.

And then time went by, and the raindrops were searching for the Dragon, but they could not find him. “With your mind, everything will succeed!” said Cyclops for a second, but nobody was listening. Everybody felt cold, their aquatic teeth trembling from the freezing temperatures. Cyclops was dancing and shaking, but in a cuddly manner, so she would not poke any other droplet, as they were stuck together so tightly.

The wind blew strong, winter came along and the raindrops realised that they should keep each other company other again. So they formed a union, stuck to each other and became ice. “We’ll wait for springtime, perhaps we’ll play again in the summertime!” they decided in the most democratic manner. And so they waited. Then summer came along, the ice melted and the raindrops started hanging out together again, except not one raindrop on top of the other this time. By the end of summer, the ice had melted completely. Cyclops decided she wanted to run away from the Estany de Canalbona Lake. She sat down with the other raindrops and flooded a small brook. By the end of August they were hiking, heading down and down until they reached the river Besòs. They gave him a blissful kiss thanking him for his hospitality. “How kind you are, oh grateful raindrops! I will make your wishes come true! Tell me what you wish!” he said.

“We wish to see Barcelona! To blissfully dance the Macarena in a rumba! And then go swimming in the sea!” said Cyclops, and those who had followed agreed with these wishes. And so it was. They saw the beautiful city in all its might and rolled down to the Mediterranean Sea. They gave one last kiss to the Besòs and climbed up on an empty freighter that was heading for Greece. The ship emptied its cargo in Barcelona and loaded its reservoirs with seawater, so salty that not even the waves could shake it.

The raindrops had a hard time during the trip. The salt stung and hurt their eyes. But when they reached the Ionian Sea they calmed down a little. The ship was bound to load fish in Piraeus, so it set them free in the Aegean Sea. Oh the whitewashed churches. Oh the sandy beaches. But afterwards, it got hot again, an unbearable heat wave, and the raindrops started staring at the sky. They waited impatiently for a cloud to come by and take them away from the heat. That would calm them down again. Eventually, that cloud arrived.

“Where are you heading?” asked Cyclops.

“I’m heading up North!” said the cloud in a temper.

“I’m off to Chalkidiki! If you like the place, hop up!”

Cyclops gave it some thought. She was born in Drakolimni. She missed the place. But she had never been to Chalkidiki. “Plu-ufff! A dilemma again!” She had heard of a place called Kavourotrypes (crab-holes), and it was a very beautiful place for swimming. But raindrops do not think much. They have no memory. They only ponder for a second. And then they let go. And they rose. Plufff!!! She forgot the dilemma, she rode up on the cloud just as Don Quixote would and was travelling. Excited. Cheerful. She was about to discover a new land! How wonderful!

And, indeed, this was the way her life was flowing, a raindrop’s life, Cyclops the raindrop. But Cyclops, as we said before, was a raindrop of a strange kind. Temperamental. Moody. She acted as she herself wished. She had a mind of her own. She did her crazy things. Accordingly, when they reached Chalkidiki she decided to go and explore how native people lived there. She deliberately caused a supposed disagreement, and within a spring shower the cloud gave her a strong kick on her bottom, and she fell on the ground. The place where she fell was called Skouries, in Halkidiki.

Right then and there, Cyclops fell on a field. She met a farmer, Georgie was his name, and she watered his crops. The farmer was cultivating tasty lettuce, radishes and carrots. Georgie the farmer did not cultivate too many, just enough to cover his needs. He lived a life of peace for him and his family. He did not make too much money, but what he earned was enough. He used to kiss the soil of his field, and hug the land as if it were his child. He fed his animals. Cyclops liked this very much, but because she was a little bipolar in her behaviour, and her mind was making circles, right after watering the last carrot roots she jumped into a small underground river and decided to go find a spring. The Pozar hot springs, close to Alexander’s house. The Great’s, that is.

In that spring people took their thermal baths. Cyclops also liked it here. He watched older ladies next to young male athletes taking their hot baths, getting warm, and finally freshening up with cold running water. No soap included. Tourists enjoying their bath, taking care of the pines and the oriental planet trees and carefully listening to them and actually responding to them. Wasting their money without wasting a tiny piece of the scenery. Respecting nature. Sharing nature. “Nature is my favourite teacher!” said a little girl wearing a pink bathing suit, and took a dive in the spring waters. But since Cyclops was a curious mind and wanted at any cost to visit the Kavourotrypes (crab-holes), he got up and left again. He jumped softly into a small stream, and went out in the open again in the Thermaikos Gulf.

“So this is how it is done!” he thought, “and this is what that miracle in Cana was all about. A little wine proved enough for everyone. Transformation. We watered it and... Maybe I should become wine, and make people happy? Different strokes for different folks!” However, he continued diving in the Thermaikos Gulf. Remembering Cyclops the elder, who Odysseus got drunk with wine to deceive him, made him think logically.

“Now these are some nice tricks!” Cyclops thought and continued on her sea journey. The sea waves brought her to the coast of Skouries, in Chalkidiki. “Well, well, how have you been over here?” she asked the other raindrops who she had never seen before. “Well, Cyclops, here there is a big thing going on! How to start with it? Let me tell you. We just stare at them, not knowing what to do!”

“Who are you staring at?” asked Cyclops full of curiosity. Meanwhile, she kept on dancing. All the other raindrops thought she was crazy. “We are staring at the people!” said an elderly raindrop. “They have made it ugly here and everything is a huge mess, just like their faces! And what’s worse, they make us look ugly as well!”

“How do they make us look ugly as well? We are just raindrops. We will become either ice or steam! What are you talking about?”

“You poor, tiny, innocent raindrop. So much you know, so much you say,” said the elder. “Here, at Skouries, there is a strange material coming out of the ground, it is called ‘gold’. It shines like the sun. It is cold as ice. But people’s eyes become red like fire when they find it. They get feverish. They care for no one! Not me, not you, nor any other raindrop! Everything belongs to them! Their supervisor said ‘I’m a crazy madman, and I do as I wish!’”

“And what do they do?” asked Cyclops again, dancing around and around like a carousel.

“They are using us in order to extract that beastly thing, gold. They make us dirty and then they throw us away as waste, and we can never turn into either ice or steam! They shove us in those huge yellow barrels with the skull sign on them. They don’t call us raindrops anymore. We are effluent. They call us waste. W-a-s-t-e!!! Do you get it? Here where you have come, poor Cyclops, this is where your journey ends. Unless...”

Cyclops got really scared that his journey would end then and there. Unacceptable catastrophe. A solution had to be found. They all gathered together on the cloud, and remained patient and calm. They agreed not to quarrel or fight, so that the cloud would keep them on its back for more days, and not drop them all over Skouries. Nonetheless, Cyclops was immensely anxious. She began sweating and her straight long blue hair had turned black from the agony.

“Unless what?” she asked the elderly droplet.

“Unless these people here accomplish something!” said the elder, pointing down below, in front of the mine. A great number of young people had gathered right there, having started a huge fire. They were burning wood, screaming aloud “The companies are not welcome in Skouries! Out with them!!!” There were also some other people, wearing black clothing, with the boring name “Police” on them. These people were beating the others and were much stronger. They could not chase them away, not even away from the mines. “Gold has been extracted here since ancient times...” said the elder, continuing with his story. “I remember Alexander the Great’s father, Filippus, making gold coins. But at least he was not making us dirty. These people here, they want to make waste out of us. Do you understand, my tiny Cyclops? We are finished and done with. Doomed. It’s over.”

Cyclops cried in despair. She pulled her long blue hair, sobbing. She didn’t know what to do. She looked down at the people fighting. Losing. The Police and the Company were winning. The mines would start again the next morning. Night fell and the sun, like a king all dressed in deep red colours, went to bed. The cloud waited for dawn to come back.

Cyclops was whirling like a tiny little lamb in her bed. She could not fall asleep. Something had to be done. She was fantasising about other solutions, dreaming with eyes open. She would sweat, turn over, still in the same agony. She finally managed to fall asleep early at dawn. Waking up, the sky was strange.

Another cloud had just arrived, empty of raindrops, but carrying tons and tons of dust on its back. “I come from Africa,” he introduced himself, “and I have come for us to be in peace

with each other. Would you like a cup of coffee?” Then, an utterly crazy idea came to Cyclops’ light and flighty mind. Yes! That was it! The raindrops themselves would destroy the people’s destructive plan.

“Hey, cloud, I have to make you an offer,” she whispered into his white ear. “You? A raindrop? To begin with, stop shaking and moving all over the place, dancing round and round like a whirligig. You are not a child’s toy! You’re making me dizzy! Go on. Tell me...” The Cloud listened attentively. In the end the response was firm: “Agreed! No problem. Tomorrow morning, first thing!”

And so it happened. The next day they began reconstruction works for the hungry mine. The first bulldozer began digging the ground. People had retreated kilometres away, unable to resist the Company. But right at the moment when no one expected it, numerous white clouds came together, in a fight.

Right opposite them, the yellow cloud from Africa waited. And right at the agreed time, they all came together, and forcefully bumped on his head the yellow cloud and all the raindrops got dizzy for a while. “Wow, my eye!!”, said Cyclops. But she forgot it immediately. Raindrops do not think much. They have no memory. They only ponder for a second. And then they let go. And they fall. Pluff!!! And then it was Cataclysm. A flood full of mud and revolution.

The reconstruction works stopped immediately. The bulldozers were rolling into unknown rivers. The place was flooded all over. The holes of the ancient mine were filled with water. Cyclops happily circled the peoples’ destructive plans, destroying people before people destroy her.

She became all filthy and dirty, this was a fact. Her azure hair became all full of dirt and dust. But she was not bothered at all. That dirt would disappear eventually. The peoples’ plan for the mine stopped forever. The Company could not financially cope with natural disasters. “Nature’s Rage”, read the headlines in the newspapers the next day. “God is punishing us,” said the priests. But nobody really knew the truth, that all this was the plan of a small, tiny, crazy dancing droplet, called Cyclops. It was not in their interest to start rebuilding. The government was unable to compensate the Company. Interest in gold faded away. Besides, a huge red coloured lake emerged, in place of the mine. It was impossible to conceal it. Everything came to a tomba. With a dance of rumba.

And what became of Cyclops? A week later, she fell onto a beautiful field with vineyards, where you can find her and lose her, in the Tuscan Valley, watering a row of Chianti vineyards. Soon, they produced the best tasting red wine, outside the village of Leonardo Da Vinci. And she was dancing. Dancing beautifully and cheerfully. A relentless, inexhaustible, swinging tarantella.

جنون مواطن !

عمر حسين العثمان، الأردن

يوم خريفي من شهر تشرين، وجه الأشجار ممتقع، وحتى ثوبها الأخضر الذي لبسته على مدار أشهر عديدة قد استحال إلى لون أصفر قاتم اهترئ مع الأيام، فلم تجد بدأً من طرحه ليتساقط أمامها وتذروه الرياح التشرينية الباردة، لقد تناول الدكتور معين سالم قهوته الصباحية في حديقة المدينة حيث راقب بصمت تمايل الأشجار مع نسائم الصباح وهي تخلع أثوابها استعداداً لاستقبال الشتاء القادم، لقد كان مزاجه معكراً للغاية وهذا يفسر استخدامه الزائد للسكر في قهوته اليوم.

إنه طبيب نفسي بارع ذو شهرة واسعة في مدينته بالرغم من عمره الصغير نسبياً إذ كان لا يزال في أواخر عقده الثالث، يقصد عيادته ناس كثر من مختلف الأعمار ومختلف الطبقات في المجتمع، أما لماذا كان مزاجه معكراً هذا الصباح فذلك مرده إلى أن والدة أحد الأطفال الذين كان يعالجهم كانت قد بكت كثيراً البارحة في عيادته، إذ لم يكن ليدها أي تأمين صحي ولا تستطيع دفع ثمن الدواء، لقد أشفق عليها حتى أنه أعطاها دواءً على نفقته الخاصة، لم تكن هذه المرة الأولى التي يبكي فيها أحدهم في عيادته فكما يقولون دمة البسطاء سخية ! لقد كان يؤلمه كثيراً أن يرى ازدهار مدينته في الحي الراقي الذي يعيش فيه حيث السيارات الفارهة من طراز "شيفروليه" و"بي ام دبليو" وغيرها، بالإضافة للبيوت الضخمة الفخمة والتي تنتصب على مساحات واسعة، وفي الجانب الآخر هناك من لا يجدون ثمن دوائهم وما أكثرهم، في الأسبوع الماضي وحده صادف في عيادته اثني عشر شخصاً منهم، تنهد تنهيدة طويلة واجترع جرعة من قهوته الحلوة عله يخفف من مرارة حلقه فلم يكن هذا الأمر ما يكدر صفوه وحسب.

في الجريدة الصباحية التي بين يديه خبر صادم جديد، لقد كان يقرأ بعصبية شديدة جعلت الجريدة تهتز بين يديه، إذ كان هناك مشروع جديد يناقشه مجلس المدينة ل طرح قطاع واسع من الأراضي الزراعية التي تقع شرق المدينة والتي تعد أهم مميزات ومعالم هذه المدينة إلى من يرغبون بالاستثمار لإنشاء عدد من المصانع عليها، إن هذا كابوس جديد وكأن ما ينقص المدينة الآن أن تتخلى عن رنتها التي تتنفس بها ! لقد كان بحكم عمله يعلم أن مشاكل الناس الذين يقصدونه للعلاج كان تتبع في جزء كبير منها لأنهم أصبحوا حبيسي علب إسمنتية، وما الاضطرابات النفسية التي يعانونها إلا لأن التطوير المادي استهدف جانباً من حياتهم مغفلاً جوانب عظيمة أخرى.

وصل إلى عيادته حيث كان طابور طويل من المراجعين بانتظاره، ارتدى معطفه الأبيض وطلب من السكرتيره إدخال أول مريضة، لقد كانت امرأة قد فسخت عقد خطوبتها مؤخراً، إذ كان وحسب روايتها بأنه وبعد أن ابتمت الدنيا في وجهها ووجه خطيبها مؤخراً بعد أن شهدت منطقتهم استثمارات جديدة وبعد أن سرت الوعود بأن الأولوية ستكون لأهل المنطقة في العمل، تقدم لها

خطيبها على أمل أن تحمل الأيام فيما بعد التغيير الذي انتظره طويلا، لكن التغيير الذي انتظره خطيبها وحلمه بالعمل تبخر بعدما انتظر لأيام ومن ثم لأسابيع تحولت لأشهر طويلة فقد رأى بأم عينه كيف استعيص عن الناس هنا بعمالة وافدة كانت أرخص بالنسبة للمستثمرين فما كان منه إلا أن أعلن انسحابه لعدم قدرته توفير ما وعدها به، وبعينين تغصان بالدمع أنهت كلامها قائلة بأنها تسمع من الأخبار عن فوائد ومكاسب مثل هذا المشروع في حينها دون أن تلمس منه أي أثر في حياتها ! لا بل ها هي حياتها قد دمرت قيل أن تبدأها، شعر الدكتور بمزيد من الحزن في قلبه، وصف لها بعض الأدوية التي ستساعدها على التخفيف من حالة الاكتئاب التي تمر بها، وطلب منها الاعتناء بنفسها ورافقها حتى الباب متمنيا لها السلامة، وطلب من الممرضة إدخال المريض التالي.

دخل من الباب رجل ضخم يرتدي بدلة وربطة عنق، لم يكن كالمرضى الآخرين، سلم على الطبيب بحماسة وكأنه يعرفه منذ زمن، وبدون مقدمات قال: " دكتور أريد أن أسألك سؤالا، هل أبدو لك كرجل مجنون ؟ "

ما هذا السؤال ! إنه يشي بأن صاحبه قد يكون مجنونا حقا، قرر الدكتور معين مجاراته وقال : "لماذا تظن ذلك ؟ " هز الرجل الضخم كتفيه وقال : حسنا سأخبرك بقصتي وسأترك لك مهمة الحكم علي: اسمي علي حاتم، أبلغ من العمر خمسا وأربعين عاما، وأدير شركة لصناعة الخزف " شركة الماضي التليد" ، هل سمعت بها من قبل ؟ هز الدكتور معين رأسه إيجابا، استكمل السيد علي قوله : لقد توارثت عائلتنا هذه المهنة منذ زمن طويل، إذ أن والد جدي وفي أعقاب الاستقلال طور هذه الحرفة وقام بتصنيع القطع وزخرفتها بما يدل على التضحيات التي بذلت في سبيل تحرير هذه الأمة، بالإضافة للقطع التي تذكر بتاريخ وحضارات المدينة القديمة، وقد تناقلنا هذه الحرفة عبر العائلة حتى قمت أنا بتطويرها في سن صغيرة وحولتها لشركة أصبحت بمثابة سفير لنقل تاريخ وثقافة المدينة من خلال ما يتم بيعه للسياح وما يشتريه الناس ليضعوه في بيوتهم.

ربما تعرف أيضا أن مقر الشركة يتوسط المدينة، وهو مكان يسهل له لعاب الكثيرين من " حيتان السوق" ، مؤخرا عرض علي أحدهم مبلغا خياليا ليشتري الشركة مني، ليتسنى له هدمها لكي يستغل الموقع في بناء أحد أبراجه التجارية، لكنني رفضت طبعاً، فما قيمة المال أمام ما تحافظ عليه شركتي من إحياء الإرث الذي تتمتع به مدينتنا الحبيبة، إن هذه رسالة يجب علي أن أستمر بها ولهذا سميت الشركة باسم " الماضي التليد" علينا ألا ننسى ماضينا وإرثنا الثقافي إن كنا ننوي النهوض حقا بأممتنا، لكنني منذ ان رفضت هذا العرض لم أعد أسمع سوى سؤال واحد " هل جنتت يا سيد علي ؟ " ، البعض يحاول الضغط علي ويتعلل بأن ذلك سيساهم في تنمية المدينة، يخاطبونني وكأنني لست في السوق منذ زمن بعيد وأفهم كيف تسير الأمور هنا، كل ما في الأمر أن أحدهم ستنتفخ جيوبه أكثر، ولن يرى الناس أي شيء من هذا المال إذ أنه فقط سيتكدس في أحد البنوك متحولاً إلى أرقام في أرصدة.

لكن انتظر يا سيدي حتى أكمل لك القصة، إن هذا ليس وحده ما دفعني لسؤالك إن كنت تراني مجنونا، فليس عدم بيعي للشركة هو مصدرهم الوحيد لاتهامي بأني مجنون، إذ أن هذه الحادثة

أثارت شينا في داخلي وأشعرتني بأن الناس هنا فاتهم ما هو المعنى الحقيقي لتمنية مدينتنا الجميلة، ونسوا أن الخير إذا لم يعم الجميع فلن يكون خيرا دانما، لذلك قررت أن أقوم بموجة تغيير حقيقية، في الأسابيع الماضية اعتكفت في البيت وأنفقت جل وقتي في تجهيز مسودة هي نواة لبرنامجي الانتخابي ! أجل لا تستغرب فقد قررت خوض انتخابات مدينتنا التي ستجرى في الربيع القادم، أريده أن يكون ربيعا حقيقيا هذا العام وأن يشعر الجميع بأنهم متساوون في هذه المدينة ، أريد أن يلمس الجميع النمو الذي لطالما سمعوا عنه في مدينتهم ولم يشعر كثيرون أنهم جزء منه، فهم فقط يسمعون ذلك في الجرائد ووسائل الإعلام دون أن يترك ذلك أثرا في حياتهم، ولقد قررت استغلال ما جمعت من أموال خلال سنوات عملي الطويلة من أجل تحقيق ذلك، وهو ما أثار سخط من حولي إذ رأوا ذلك ضربا من الجنون ! يعتبرون خطوتي هذه جنونا لكن من يريد الاعتداء على رنة المدينة وتحويل أراضيها المزروعة إلى مجمع من الآلات المعدنية متناسين جق الأجيال القادمة حتى من الهواء النظيف لا يعتبر هذا جنونا ، بل يتسابق الإعلام لتغطية الخبر والإثناء عليه وتعيد فوائده !

ببساطة لن أفق مكتوف الأيدي وسأعمل على تحقيق ما تحلم به الناس البسيطة، انظر للبسطاء خارج عيادتك، إن نفوسهم مضطربة بسبب المصاعب التي يواجهونها من عدم توزيع ثروة مدينتهم الكبيرة، جيوب محددة تنتفخ وأفواها كثيرة تجوع وأخرى تمرض ولا تجد دوانا، أليس من حقهم أن نؤمن لهم عملا يليق بهم كأفراد محترمين في مجتمعهم ؟ أليس من حقهم ان نحافظ على أراضي المدينة وأن نوقف الزحف البشع نحوها، أليس من واجبنا أن لا ننسى الأجيال الي ستخلفنا في المستقبل.

أتعلم عندي قناعة بهذه الحياة بأن كل شخص منا له نصيب من اسمه، انظر إليك مثلا اسمك معين وكم من الناس أعنتها في حياتك، أما أنا اسمي علي واظن أن علي أن أسير مع الناس نحو العلا التي ينشدونها دون أن تستثني أحدا، البعض يتهمني أنني أعيش في عالم طوباوي، لكنني أرد عليهم بكل بساطة بأن العالم الذي نعيش فيه هو صنع أيدينا ونحن من نستطيع التحكم بسير مجرياته، وإن كنا حقا نريد السعادة فعلينا أن نؤمن بأن يكون للآخرين نفس النصيب الذي نرغب بأن يكون لنا، وهو ما يشيع جوا من الرضا ويعكس الوجه الحضاري لأمتنا.

صمت الدكتور معين فترة طويلة، ومن ثم قام نحو النافذة وحلق ببصره نحو الخارج وقال : أتعلم يا سيدي، سأقولها لك بملء الفم، انت أعقل من قابلت في حياتي كلها ! لا أجد أي كلام بعد الذي قلته ولا أستطيع سوى أن أتمنى لك التوفيق في مسعاك بالرغم من صعوبة مهمتك، لكنني واثق أن الأهداف النبيلة كفيلة بأن تذلل لصاحبها المصاعب التي يواجهها، أتمنى أن أراك حيث تريد وأن أرى من خلالك ما أريد أنا أيضا.

نهض السيد علي حاتم وكان الحيوية التي دخل بها رجعت إليه فجأة، شكرالدكتور معين وصافحه، وببده الأخرى ربت على كتفه وقل: أتعلم إلى الآن لا أدري ما الذي دفعني للدخول إلى عيادتك، لقد كنت مارا بالصدفة من هنا، لكن عندما رأيت عيادتك واسمك، شيء ما دفعني للدخول، لم أدري لماذا

دخلت وماذا سأقول ولكنني وجدت نفسي أبوح لك بكل ما اعتلى صدري في الفترة الماضية، شكرا لك على وقتك الثمين وبكل خفة غادر العيادة.

عاد الدكتور معين لعمله وتناوب على الدخول إليه عشرات المرضى، وكلهم أحسوا بنفس الملاحظة وبأن طبيبهم كان ساهياً اليوم على غير عادته ولم يدروا أن ذلك كان مقدمة لتغيير دراماتيكي كان على وشك أن يطرأ على حياة طبيبهم، ففي الأشهر القليلة التالية قلل من ساعات دوامه في عيادته واستعاض عن عطلة بالعمل في شيء ضخم آخر، تبين لاحقاً أنه يحشد الدعم في معركة الانتخابات لصالح المرشح الذي أعلن عن نفسه متأخراً وكان اسمه السيد "علي حاتم" ، وقد لمس الجميع طاقة إيجابية تفجرت عند الطبيب بالرغم من عمله المضني بين عيادته وندواته التي كانت تدعو لما يؤمن به ويمني نفسه بأن يراه بعد الانتخابات القادمة، وهكذا مضت أيامه اللاحقة، يساعد المرضى على الصعيد الفردي ويدعم ما يرى أنه سيساعدهم على الصعيد الاجتماعي الجماعي، وكل ما اقترب الموعد أحس بطاقة إضافية تحته على العمل أكثر، وحل الربيع وحلت معه الطيور المهاجرة وكل ما رآها منى نفسه أن يحل التغيير الذي ينشده في هذا الربيع كما حلت هذه الطيور بجمالها هنا.

يوم ربيعي دافئ، الدكتور معين سالم وبالرغم من إرهاقه الذي تراكم على مدار أيام طويلة يجلس في حديقة المدينة، يراقب بابتهاج ثوب الأشجار الأخضر وأناشيد العصفير ابتهاجا بالربيع، الأزهار المكلمة بالندى تعانق الشمس الدافئة، ملأ صدره بالهواء الصباحي المنعش وأحس بأن كل ذرة في جسده مفعمة بالسعادة، ارتشف قهوته وأعاد قراءة الخبر للمرة السابعة عشر ! " فوز السيد علي حاتم بانتخابات المدينة... خطوة أولى نحو تنمية مستدامة" وجاء فيه قول السيد علي حاتم: أحيانا علينا أن نكون مجانيين كفاية لنستطيع الوثوق بأن بإمكاننا التغيير ! وفيه أعاد التذكير على ما رفعه خلال حملته وما سمعته جنباة عيادة الدكتور معين للمرة الأولى منذ عدة أشهر، وختم المقال بقوله : الغد أفضل وسيكون ملكا للجميع دون استثناء.

طوى الدكتور جريدته ووضعها على الكرسي بجانبه، مد يديه وكأنه يريد معانقة الشمس كما كانت تفعل الأزهار أمامه، عندما مر من جانبه شاب يحمل جهاز موسيقى تنبعث منه أغنية تقول : " غدا يوم جديد... غدا سيكون أفضل بالتأكيد" وكانت لا تزال جملة السيد علي تتردد في ذهنه : أحيانا علينا أن نكون مجانيين كفاية لنستطيع الوثوق بأن بإمكاننا التغيير !

A Citizen's Insanity

Omar Hussein Al Othman. Jordan

An autumn day in October. The trees look gloomy, even the green outfit they have worn over the past few months has turned into a shabby dark yellow. The trees had to let it fall and be blown away by the cold winds of October. Doctor Mu'een Salim had his morning coffee in the city park. He silently observed the trees swaying in the morning breeze as they were taking off their clothes in preparation for winter. His mood was sad, hence the extra sugar in his coffee today.

He is an eminent psychiatrist with a widespread reputation in the city despite his relatively young age; in fact, he is still in his late thirties. People from different ages and different social classes come to his clinic. As to the bad mood he is in this morning, it is because the mother of a child he is treating wept a lot in his clinic yesterday, as she had no insurance and could not afford the medicine. He felt so sorry for her that he paid for her medicine himself. In fact, this is not the first time someone has cried in his clinic for, as they say, "simple people cry easily!"

It really hurts him to see the prosperity of his city in this prestigious neighbourhood where he lives; all the luxurious cars like Chevrolet and BMW, in addition to the luxurious mansions spread over large areas. While, in contrast, there are people, too many people, who cannot afford their medicine. Only last week he met twelve of them in his clinic. He sighs and sips his sweet coffee in an attempt to mitigate the bitterness in his throat. This, in fact, is not the only thing depressing him.

He reads some shocking news in the morning paper. He is so nervous that it is

shivering in his hands. The city council is discussing a new project to open a big portion of the lands to the east, which are considered the landmark of the city and its best advantage, for those who wish to invest in plants and build factories. This is a new nightmare; the city is going to remove its only lung. He knows from his practice that much of the problems of those who come for treatment result from the fact that they are encased in cement boxes. They suffer psychological disorders because material development only targets one aspect of their lives and neglects many other significant ones.

He arrives at his clinic and finds a long queue of patients waiting for him. He puts on his white coat and asks the secretary to let the first one in. It is a woman who recently broke up with her fiancé. She explains that life seemed hopeful for them after their area saw new investments, especially as promises were given that priority would be given to employing locals. But the change that her fiancé had dreamed of for days, weeks and months vanished when he saw that migrant workers were recruited instead because they are cheaper for the investors. So he told her that he was giving up as he could not provide what he promised her. With tearful eyes she ended saying that she always hears about the advantages of such a project in her neighbourhood, yet she never sees any benefit for her life. In fact, her life has been destroyed before it has even begun. The doctor's heart gets heavier with sadness. He prescribes some medicine that will mitigate the depression she is going through, asks her to take

care of herself, walks her to the door wishing her a good recovery, and asks the secretary to let the next patient in.

A big man with a suit and tie enters the room; he is not like the others. He greets the doctor passionately as if he knows him from long time ago.

“I have a question doctor: do I look like an insane man to you?” he asks without any introduction.

What a question. In fact, it indicates that the questioner is actually insane. Doctor Mu’een decides to humour him, replying “why do you think that?” The man shrugs his shoulders and says, “OK, I will tell you my story, and I will leave it for you to judge me!”

“My name is Hatim. I am 45 years old and I run a ceramics manufacturing company, the Glorious History Company. Have you ever heard of it?”

Doctor Mu’een nods.

“This trade has been in our family for a very long time. My great grandfather developed it in the wake of independence, and produced and decorated pieces that express the sacrifices that were made to liberate this nation, in addition to the pieces that recall the history and civilisations of the city. We inherited this trade, and I transformed it into a company that works as an ambassador that carries the history and the culture of this city, through what is sold to tourists and what people buy to display in their houses.

“You may also know that the company is located in the city centre, a location many of the ‘big fish’ desire. Recently, one of them offered to buy the company at an unbelievable price. He wanted to demolish it, so he can build one of his commercial towers instead. I refused, of course. For what is the value of money when compared to the value of the city heritage my company stands for? This is a mission that I need to continue. And this

is why I have called it the Glorious History Company. We should not forget our history and our heritage if we really want to advance our nation. However, since I declined his offer, I have only heard one question: “have you gone mad Mr. Ali?” Some are trying to pressure me and they justify it by saying that this will contribute to the development of the city. They talk to me as if it was only yesterday that I came to the market, and I was ignorant of how things work around here! I know that it is all about filling one person’s pockets while others won’t see any of this money, for it will be piled in banks adding to his wealth.

“However, I would like you to wait till I finish my story. This is not the only thing that makes me ask you if you think I am crazy. The fact that I did not sell the company is not the only reason that makes them accuse me of being mad. This incident has triggered some feelings in me; it made me realise that people here don’t understand the genuine meaning of developing our beautiful city. They have forgotten that if good does not involve everybody it will never be sustainable. I therefore decided to start a real movement of change. Last week I stayed at home and I spent the whole time preparing a draft for my electoral manifesto. Yes, do not be shocked; I decided to run for the election that will be held next spring. I want it to be a real spring this year. I want everybody to feel that they are equal in this city, and I want them to actually see the development they have always heard about but have never been part of. They only hear it in the media and newspapers, but never see that it has an impact on their lives. I decided to use the money I made over the years to achieve that. This vexed the people around me, who thought it was crazy. This they consider crazy, but the sabotage of the city’s lung and changing its cultivated lands into metal machinery complexes, neglecting the rights of

the coming generations to clean air, is not crazy. On the contrary, the media is competing to cover the story and sing its praises.

“Simply put, I will not remain passive and I shall achieve what the simple people are dreaming of. Look at these people in your clinic. They are lost because of the hardships they face as a result of the unjust distribution of the city’s wealth. Some pockets are being filled, while others starve, get sick and cannot even afford their medicine. Is it not their right to be provided with decent work as decent community members? Is it not our right to protect the lands of our city and stop this ugly encroachment? Is it not our duty to consider the generations that will come in the future?”

“You know what? I have a conviction that people’s characters will bear traits that very much resemble the meanings of their names. Look at yourself for example, your name is Mu’een [helper] and you have actually helped so many people in your life. My name is Ali [high reaching] and I think I should lead people to the high goals they aspire to without exclusions. Some accuse me of living in a Utopia, and I say that the world we live in is what we make of it, and it is we who can control the course of its developments. If we really want happiness we should believe that others should have it, just as much as we wish to ourselves. This is the thing that brings about contentment and reflects the civilised aspect of our nation.”

Doctor Mu’een was silent for a long time, and then walked towards the window and soared with his gaze in the open air.

“You know sir, I will say confidently that you are the wisest man I have ever met in my entire life! I find no words after what you have said, and I cannot but wish you success despite the difficulty of your mission. But I am confident that noble objectives will subdue the difficulties one faces in the course

of achieving them. I hope to see you where you want to be, and I hope to see through you what I also want.”

Mr. Ali Hatim got up as if the vitality he had walked in with suddenly returned to him. He thanked Doctor Mu’een and shook his hand, while with his other hand he patted his shoulder.

“Do you know, till now, I didn’t know what it was that drove me here. I happened to be passing by, but when I saw your clinic and your name, something made me walk in. I did not know why I walked in and what I was going to say, but I found myself opening up to you with everything that has burdened me of late. Thank you for your precious time,” and he quietly left the clinic.

Doctor Mu’een returned to his work, and dozens of patients walked in, one after the other. They noticed that their doctor was unusually distracted that day; they did not know that that would be the beginning of a dramatic change in the life of their doctor, for in the following months he reduced his working hours and gave up his holidays to work on something huge. It emerged later that he was rallying support in the election battle for the recently announced candidate, and whose name was Mr. Ali Hatim. Everybody felt the doctor’s explosive positive energy despite his hard work in his clinic and in the seminars that advocated what he believed in and hoped to see after the coming elections. Thus, he spent the next few days helping patients on an individual level and supporting what he believed would help them on a collective social level. As the appointed date drew closer, he felt additional energy encouraging him to work more. Spring came and with it migrant birds arrived, and everyone who saw the birds hoped that the desired change would come this spring, just as the beautiful birds had come here.

It is a warm spring day, and despite the exhaustion that has accumulated over long days, Doctor Mu'een Salim is sitting in the city park, joyfully watching the green garment of the trees and the birds' songs celebrating spring and flowers crowned with dew embracing the warm sun. He fills his chest with the fresh morning air and feels that every kernel of his body is full of happiness. He sips his coffee and rereads the news item for the seventeenth time! "Mr. Ali Hatim wins city elections... a first step towards durable development." The story quotes Mr. Ali Hatim:

"Sometimes we have to be mad enough to trust that we can change!" He reminded people of what has sustained him throughout his campaign, heard for the first time in Doctor Mu'een's clinic a few months ago, and he concluded the story saying, "tomorrow will be better, and it will belong to all without exceptions."

Doctor Mu'een folded his newspaper and put it on the chair next to him. He reached out with his hands as if he wanted to embrace the sun like flowers do, when he passed by a young man performing a song with the words: "tomorrow is a new day... tomorrow will surely be better." Mr. Ali's words still echoed in his head: sometimes we have to be mad enough to trust that we can change.

A Second Kind of Genesis

Giulia Privitelli. Malta

*“Let this be a sign,
Not of death in the sky,
But of life in the ground!”*

Every single time the chimney would smoke, these words spilled out of Leyla’s mouth, watering the seed she had just placed in the virgin soil. It was a sort of ritual, one could say, like the blessing on a newborn child, entrusted not to a parent of flesh and bones, but to a parent who could instil fear through raging winds as much as it could lovingly caress through the stroke of a gentle breeze. The young girl had made a promise to herself – never to betray that parent, who at the loss of even one of its children, would howl continuously, endlessly, throughout the night.

A couple of years had gone by, but Leyla never tired of planting seeds, caring for what had grown into healthy trees, bushes, and crops of every type and make. Yet with every seedling that broke through the surface of the ground, another stone would be laid in the nearby necropolis of dull, smoking chimneys – a different kind of plant, so to speak. As Leyla’s fields expanded towards the east, so did the industrial park towards the west, until one day, inevitably, the frontiers of the two met. For the first time, Leyla could see that majestic bark of concrete she was competing with from up close – a hollow column, reeking of what must be the suffocating, pungent smell of death. It stood upright towering above her, mocking her, and the petty garden right below. Craning her neck, she tried to make out the top, but instead, at the horizon of visual clarity, her eyes fell on an image of what looked like the rising sun.

Absorbed as she was in making sense of this curious image at the top of the even more curiously shaped high-rise building, Leyla hardly noticed the high-pitched voice suddenly calling out in shrill excitement, “*Duhaan! Duhaan!*” In this seemingly desolate place, Leyla had not expected to see anyone around, least of all a young boy, pulling at an older woman’s shirt with one hand, and pointing to the top of the chimney with the other. The chimney had started smoking again, but this time it had an audience. Joining the young boy was a chorus of other people chanting the same, strange name “*Duhaan, Duhaan!*” in a manner that reminded Leyla of the Hindu *japa* mantras she had read about in a book on ancient religious hymns. Leyla wondered whether this “*Duhaan*” was the name of the god they were glorifying. Maybe, she thought, these people were descendants of a long-lost tradition, and came all the way here to venerate their god of smoke – the god that stopped her from planting further seeds.

Until, one day, she saw the same people cutting down her trees, uprooting plants and flattening the land, to make space for one more of those goddamn chimneys. A sacrilegious act to make space for a sacred site. “Oh the irony, the injustice!” Leyla thought. Frustrated and annoyed by the inconsiderate decision of their god, she glared at the symbol of the sun that would not rise, nor would it set, and finally made up her mind to visit Duhaan and let him know what she thought of him and his smoke.

As Leyla ascended the steps of the highest chimney, she structured her thoughts into the most polite form she could possibly come up with. She had never addressed a god before, nor had she ever seen one. As she called out Duhaan’s name, the second time louder than the first,

and the third louder still, a cold, chilling sensation starting spreading through her body as she thought of the possibility that maybe, just maybe, Duhaan might not be real after all. Looking down for the first time, Leyla saw the vulnerable land she had cared for so tenderly recede, as it made way for the almighty concrete tyrant and his court. The sight reminded her of the reason she had gone all the way up there.

But, perhaps, she wasn't as prepared as she liked to believe. Otherwise, why would a simple cough startle her so much that she had to grip onto the hand-rail to prevent herself from stumbling down the steps? Hesitating slightly, she turned round to meet the gaze of a wrinkled, black-stained face, whose watery, bloodshot eyes were fixed upon her. His odd appearance startled her more than his cough, and he had an odd way of standing too, as if one shoulder was heavier than the other. There was really nothing about his sad appearance that would remind one of a majestic god. But Leyla, not quite forgetting her mission, firmly asked him whether he was Duhaan, the god of the smoke, without ever daring to take her eyes off him. Duhaan, however, did not seem to understand her, and only mumbled something while pointing one very large crooked and dirty index finger in the direction of her beloved fields.

The following day, Leyla climbed back up the stairs of the chimney with a basket of fruit she had gathered from her trees. She kept recalling her meeting with Duhaan of the previous day, how he had not said a word, how she had felt sorry for him that he was up there alone and so far away from the trees he had pointed longingly to, and how she had forgotten all about her anger towards him and his chimneys. So she thought of befriending him instead, and slowly introduced him to her world of natural production. Biting into an orange or an apple, Duhaan would sit, and listen patiently to Leyla go on about all sorts of different fruits, and how some trees produced them once a year, and others throughout the year. His eyes widened, and seemed unusually bright, as she told him that it all started from one seed, and that nature took care of most of the rest. He bit into a lime, and a tear rolled down his cheek.

Leyla continued visiting Duhaan for a number of days after that, explaining more about plants, herbs and their several properties and uses. Each day she would bring him a sample of fruit and nuts, and illustrated books for him to look at. But the one thing that Leyla wondered about most of the time was why he would not smile.

The answer to that came soon enough.

Duhaan, who although up till then had spoken little, had long been thinking of ways to make good and effective use of the food Leyla would bring him. But, for his plan to work, he had to first convince her of his ways. So one day, not quite sure she would understand, he told her:

“Lejla. Ma nafx intix ser tifhimni meta nkellmek, iżda issa wasal iż-żmien li ngħidlek dak li għandi f’moħħi għax ma nistax nistenna aktar. Kont wisq twajba miegħi. Flok rabja, ħawwilt żerriegħa ta’ ħbiberija, u sqejtha bl-istess imħabba u attenzjoni li biha tisqi l-għelieqi, is-siġar u l-pjanti tiegħek. Nixtieq li b’xi mod nħallsek lura ta’ dan. Nixtieq noffrilek l-art kollha tiegħi, sabiex tużaha kif tixtieq inti – ħawwel liema siġar u ħxejjex tixtieq, u kabbarhom. Issa, ismagħni sewwa. Dan il-frott u ikel kollu, la int u l-anqas jien m’għandna bżonnu, imma hemm eluf ta’ nies hemm barra li qegħdin imutu bil-ġuħ, u inti tista tgħinohom! Meta jasal iż-żmien biex jingabar il-frott, aqtgħu u ġibuli, u jien nahliflek li nħallsek tiegħu. Dan l-ikel ser nibgħatu f’art barranija, u minħabba fik, ser ikollhom x’jieklu – permezz tiegħek id-dinja ser tinbidel għall-aħjar!” ihih.”

Fear was not something Leyla would experience often, but this time, she did. Duhaan had cursed her, or at least, that is what she thought.

Wide-eyed, Leyla stared at Duhaan's mouth, as if to convince herself that it was actually a disembodied noise she had heard. "No, no... maybe it's just me," Leyla thought to herself. "Maybe it's the air – I've been up here too long, and now I'm starting to hear things." But Duhaan had spoken, his mouth had moved, and uttered words that Leyla could not understand. Hundreds of questions were brimming in her mind, questions she did not want an answer for, until curiosity and fear pushed them out of her.

"What do you mean, Duhaan? All this time, all the things I have told you, haven't you understood any of it? What are you trying to tell me? Who are you, Duhaan? Who exactly are you?"

But Duhaan would not answer. Instead, prepared for Leyla's reaction, he conjured a sealed envelope, seemingly out of nowhere, dropped it into her hands, and in broken tongue replied, "This, for you." Inside was a letter – the transcription of Duhaan's speech, with a scribble scrawled at the bottom of the page.¹ In this letter, through these few lines of ink, a bond was forged that could never be undone.

"So it wasn't a curse," Leyla thought, sighing in relief.

Her only curse was that she trusted too much.

Persuaded of his good intentions, she did as Duhaan requested, and her fields grew so large that it became an impossible task to manage them alone. More people started flocking in to work, and large storage silos had been built. To Leyla's disappointment, however, the factory started to expand too, new buildings were built and traffic increased uncontrollably. So much had changed over the span of such a short time, and all because Leyla had been manipulated into accepting a promise that never was. Overwhelmed with work, she didn't even have the time, the strength or the will to make the journey up the chimney. Duhaan had virtually disappeared from the face of the earth, and was probably living among others like him in the realm of the clouds.

She wondered, still, whether he ever smiled from up there. She, on the other hand, had stopped smiling a while ago now. She stopped when growing crops became a forced, labour-intensive routine; she stopped when the soil became too parched to work; she stopped when it stung as it rained; she stopped when some of her once healthy trees no longer produced fruit; and she stopped, especially, when she realised that Duhaan would never come down from the throne of his chimney because, ultimately, he didn't really care.

The reader, who was by now struggling to control his tone of voice, cleared his throat. "That's it," he announced, turning the page back and forth. "That's the end of the story."

"What? You must be joking!" bellowed someone from the agitated listeners.

¹ "Leyla, I do not know whether you will understand me or not, but now is the time to tell you what I have been thinking of. I cannot wait any longer. You were too kind. Instead of anger, you sowed a seed of friendship and watered it with the same love and care with which you tend your fields, trees and plants. I would like to pay you back for this. I would like to offer you all of my land, so that you may use it as you wish – plant whichever trees and plants that you desire, and care for them. Now, listen to me carefully. Neither of us needs all this fruit and food, but there are thousands of people out there who are dying of hunger, and you can help them! When the time comes to harvest the fruit and crops, gather them and bring them to me, and I promise you I will pay you for it. This food, I will send to foreign countries, and thanks to you, their peoples will have food to eat – through you, the world will change for the better!"

“It’s not right to end a story that way!”

“Check the last page, maybe there’s more!”

“No, it cannot be! It cannot be that Duhaan gets to have the final say!” The disappointed children protested, taking out their anger on the reader as though he were solely responsible for the story.

“But that’s the way the author has left it! What was I supposed to say?”

“Well, we can try making one up – an ending – like we usually do when we don’t like how a story ends,” suggested a little girl.

Reciting, acting out stories and fashioning their endings was the main source of entertainment after a day of back-breaking work out in the ever-expanding corn fields. That evening, however, they moved on to a new story, one which had been passed down over four generations, and travelled far, all the way from across the Atlantic. They had been looking forward to it a great deal, so it was only natural for them to feel betrayed when it didn’t live up to their expectations. A strange story, they thought, especially Duhaan’s speech, and it certainly needed a different ending.

But as they lined up for supper, all shared one thing in common as their thoughts synchronised, still reflecting on the story they had just heard – in a conviction that, no matter what, the cruel master cannot be the victor. Whatever their master said and ordered them to do, their true parent, the only one they had ever really known, is nature, and nature alone.

Interrupting them, the master of the house promised them with over-used clichéd statements, such as “Tomorrow, life as you know it will change forever!” as he handed out unusually generous portions of food. “Tomorrow will be a day of plenty,” he continued, “and with many others to follow! The big boys will be coming, you lucky bastards! Now go, conserve your strength – a new beginning awaits!”

And like the stillness before the storm – a pause. A rare moment of suspended bliss, ending prematurely against the backdrop of a setting sun, as they realised who the big boys were. They were, and still are, those who consider themselves the demigods of newly-converted farmland, the heroes of a growing monoculture jungle, who feed millions of people as they drain the very same land that makes it possible. It was then, looking out onto the fields, through the open window, that they heard what sounded like the first ripple of a distant echo – a continuous, endless howl. And from a corner, the soft-spoken, timid words of the little girl:

“Let this be a sign,
Not of death in the ground,
But of life in the sky!”

She got the sequence wrong, but ironically, hers seemed to be a more fitting ending.

الرسالة الأخيرة

آية كامل رباح, فلسطين

" لا أذكر أنني كنت هنا قبل الآن..". قال أحدنا .

كان يبدو صوته مختنقا كمن يوشك على البكاء، لكنه صمت في الوقت المناسب و أشاح ببصره بعيدا ثم ساد جو من الحزن الصامت بيننا، أنا أيضا لا أذكر أنني كنت هنا في أي وقت من حياتي و لا أعلم كيف وصلت إلى هنا، شعرت أننا نحن الخمسة نحمل نفس التساؤل، كنا نحقق ببعضنا البعض لكن أيا منا لم يجرو على قول شيء بعد أن عبر أحدنا عما في داخلنا جميعا.

لم أكن أعرف أيا منهم، لا يبدو أننا تقابلنا من قبل، شعرت بالقلق من حضورنا هنا في هذا المكان الضيق الذي لا يكاد يدخل إليه كثيرا من الضوء، بدت السماء لي بعيدة جدا هذه المرة من خلال النافذة الوحيدة في المكان، و فجأة اعترتني رغبة بالبكاء و العودة إلى منزلنا الذي لا أعلم كم كان يبعد عني حينها، نظرت إلى أعينهم الحزينة و شعرت أنهم يفكرون بالأمر ذاته و ينتابهم ذات الشعور بالحنين، تشجعت لأقول لهم شيئا لكنهم بدوا من أماكن مختلفة في العالم فاستعنت بلغني الانجليزية و قلت لهم :

" هل يذكر أحد منكم كيف أتى إلى هنا؟"

" لا أذكر شيئا، آخر ما أذكره هو أنني كنت أهدق ببعض الفتية الذين يلعبون قبالة منزلنا قبل أن أجد نفسي هنا" أجابت فتاة عرفت من ملامحها و زياها أنها من أحد بلاد شرق آسيا، سألتها لتأكد فقالت لي أنها من الهند و أن اسمها تارا.

هنا تدخل الفتى الذي قال جملة الأولى تلك بالإنجليزية و قال:

" الأفضل أن يعرف كل شخص بنفسه و من أين أتى حتى نجد الرابط الذي قد يجمعنا معا هنا، أنا اسمي ناصر من أحد أرياف مصر."

وقفت عاجزة عن أن أفهم العلاقة بين فتاة تقطن في شرق آسيا و آخر في أفريقيا، كنت أريد أن أقول شيئا ما قبل أن يتدخل الشاب الذي بقي صامتا محققا في الأرض منذ لحظة و عينا بوجودنا معا. قال:

" لا أرى ذلك مجديا، لا أعتقد أن الرابط قد يكون مكانا، فلننظر إلى ملامح بعضنا البعض و سنعلم أننا من بقاع مختلفة من العالم بلغات مختلفة، لن تجدي تلك الذكريات الآن.. يكفي أن تعرفوا أن اسمي ادوارد." ابتسم بفتور و لم يضيف شيئا. ثم وجدنا أنفسنا نحن الأربعة ننتظر من الشخص الأخير أن يقول شيئا. لكنه بقي صامتا يهدق فيما حوله بيأس مفرج.

قلت :

"لا تنظر لنا هكذا، كلنا نشعر باليأس أيضا.. " لكنه قاطعني و قال : " أنا لست يانسا، لكني أفكر بتلك البلاد التي أتيت منها، لا أظن أنني أرغب في العودة إلى هناك مثلكم جميعا. هذا السجن أفضل."

شعرت بأنني أعرف هذا الشخص، سرت في قلبي فشعيرة باردة، أضفت بنبرة حزينة:

" أنا أيضا بلادي لا تبدو على قدر الجمال الذي تتوقعونه.."

ثم تناهى إلى سمعي صوت كل من تارا و ناصر و إدوارد يقولون ذات الشيء عن بلادهم. صمتنا جميعا و جلسنا متقاربين أكثر هذه المرة. كان يوحدنا حزن خفي لم يرد أي منا الإفصاح عنه.

كنا داخل غرفة مغلقة ذات جدران عالية للغاية، لا يتدلى من السقف سوى سلك رفيع يرتبط بنهايته مصباح خافت كان مطفاً في هذا الوقت من النهار حيث كانت الشمس تتطفل علينا من مكانها باعثة لنا بدفنها و ربما لتخبرنا بأننا لا نزال في مكان ما على هذه الأرض التي شعرت فجأة كم أحبها و كم أود لو تسطع شمسها هذه إلى الأبد و تمر عبر كل نوافذ المنازل التي أسدل سكانها عليها الستائر البيضاء في هذا الوقت من النهار لكي تقيهم حر الشمس ربما.

قالت تارا:

" عندما كنت أهدق في الفتية الذين يلعبون بالكرة قبالة منزلنا، خطرت ببالي فكرة أن العالم سينتهي قريبا، و أن صورة هؤلاء الفتية ستبخر في الهواء دون أن يبقى منها شيئا.."

خفق قلبي بقوة، فقد تذكرت أن هذه الفكرة خطرت ببالي أنا أيضا عندما كنت أنظر إلى طابور الناس الواقفين أمام تنكة الماء وسط الحي يتزاحمون لتعبئة أوعيتهم ببعض الماء، تذكرت حياة اللجوء التي كنت أحيها في ذاك المخيم المؤقت، كرافانات الاسبست و قطرات المطر التي تهبط علينا من ثقوب السقف، و الكهرباء التي تصلنا بشكل شحيح فتجعل الظلام أشد وطأة كل مساء، لكن الفكرة كانت ثقيلة للغاية عندما رأيت الناس بانتظار أن ترويهم بعض المياه.. فكرت: لا يمكن للعالم أن يستمر هكذا على الإطلاق.

أخبرتهم بذلك .

عندها قال إدوارد:

" لقد كنت في حملة شبابية في أفريقيا ، كنت أعمل فيها مصورا ، عندما شاهدت طفلا يكاد يشبه هيكلا عظيما ملتصقا بأمه، كانت عيناه مفتوحتين تعبران عن غضب عميق، أصابتنى الصورة بالرعب و تخيلت كم أن هذا الطفل شديد الشبه بالعالم الذي نعيش فيه، عيناه مفتوحتان بغضب على ما يجري بينما يقف عاجزا مكتوف اليدين و نعم فكرت بفكرة الفناء ذاتها و أن لا شيء منا سيبقى للأجيال القادمة.."

كانت الصورة التي رسمها إدوارد قد جمدت قلوبنا جميعا. بدأت الخيوط تتضح أمامنا فجأة فقد كانت تلك الفكرة قد عبرت رؤوسنا جميعا في نفس اللحظة و ربما هي من ألقتنا هنا حبيسين في هذا المكان.سأل ادوارد ناصر الذي كان أسمر البشرة شاحب الوجه و ضعيف البنية:

" ماذا عنك.. لقد قلت أنك من أرياف مصر. هل فكرت بتلك الفكرة أيضا. ما الذي أخافك أخبرنا ."

كان قد انزوى في مكان قصي بعض الشيء، نظر لنا نظرة مؤنبة جعلتنا نشعر بتوجس حياله، ثم قال :

" كنا قد قررنا الانتقال من الريف إلى المدينة، و قد باع جدي أراضيه كلها، لا أعلم لم فعل ذلك، لكن الأمر انتهى على هذا النحو و وجدت نفسي في سيارة تنقلنا جميعا للعيش في المدينة، كنت أنظر إلى حقول القمح تمتد أمام نظري ثم تصبح خلفي تماما.. أدركت حينها أن تلك السيارة التي تنقلني من الريف إلى حياة الصناعة و الدخان و الاسمنت قد تحمل العالم كله هناك قريبا.. و شعرت بأن كل شيء سيحترق.. و سأستاق إلى تلك الأشجار و ذلك الهواء الذي كان يأتينا من نهر النيل فيملاً الوادي كله بالسلام و السكينة، و أصوات الأجداد يروون لأحفادهم الذين يتحلقون حولهم قصص الأنبياء و قصص أخرى عن طموح البشر."

بدأت أشعة الشمس تشيخ بعيدا عنا، كنا لا نزال عاجزين عن فهم سبب وجودنا هنا، لماذا نحن تحديدا، هل كانت تلك الفكرة هي الجريمة التي نعاقب عليها هكذا، حتى من قاموا بأبشع الجرائم يملكون الحق في فهم ما يجري لهم. كان الشخص الخامس بيننا و الذي رفض الإفصاح عن اسمه و بلده يندن بلحن جميل، كان يبدو صغيرا للغاية، نظر لنا و قال:

" كان أخي يحب هذا اللحن كثيرا، كنا نغنيه معا في طريق ذهابنا إلى المدرسة، لكن أبي أجبره على ترك الدراسة للعمل معه لأننا لم نكن نملك نفودا كافية.." صمت قليلا . اقتربت تارا منه و حثته على أن يكمل كلامه بنظراتها. ابتسم لها شاكرا و استدرك :

" لا شيء.. لا تزعجوا أنفسكم بي، أنا أيضا رأيت نهاية العالم و لكن عبري أنا، فلا ريب أنني سأموت يوما ما.." شعر أننا لا نفهمه جيدا فأضاف و قد أصبح صوته خافتا:

" لقد أصابني حمى شديدة قيل أن أجد نفسي هنا، أخبر الطبيب والداي أنه لم يكن من المفترض أن أصاب بهذه الحمى لو تلقيت تطعيما معينا في صغري، كان والداي بجواري يبكيان، كانا يعلمان أنني لن أنجو و أنهم سيفقداني للأبد، عندما وجدت نفسي هنا ظننت.. تعلمون ما ظننته."

قاطعته و قالت:

"أنك مت؟"

طأطأ رأسه و بكى كطفل صغير، اقترب ناصر منه وربت على كتفه و هو يقول : " لا تخف، أعتقد أنك منحت فرصة للنجاة ولكن علينا أن نفكر بالخروج من هنا، أعتقد أنه علينا أن ننادي بأعلى صوتنا حتى يسمعنا أحدهم."

وقفنا جميعا بجوار بعضنا نحاول مرة أخرى، أخذنا ننادي و نصرخ، كانت صرخاتنا في البداية عالية ثم أخذت تخفت رويدا رويدا، كانت أصواتنا قد بحت و بحثنا عن الماء لنشربه، لكن الغرفة كانت خالية، كيف لم نفكر من قبل أننا قد نموت من الجوع و العطش في هذا المكان. شعرت أن أعصابي قد انهارت، غطيت وجهي بيدي، كنت أرى من خلال أصابعي الحزن يغمرهم جميعا، غربت الشمس و أضاء المصباح الموجود في الغرفة، ابتهجنا لشعورنا بأن ثمة وجود آدمي في المكان.

جاءنا فجأة صوت من الخارج، نادى على أسمائنا جميعا، ثم قال :

" لا تضيعوا وقتكم بالسؤال عن سبب وجودكم هنا، لقد جمعتم صدفة، في هذه الدقيقة من كل عام يكون العالم ماثلا أمام محكمة الخلق، ليحكم عليه بالبقاء أو الفناء، يحدث ذلك كل عام دون أن يشعر الموجودون على الأرض بأن تلك الدقيقة من ذلك اليوم و الشهر هي الدقيقة الفاصلة و التي يقف عليها مستقبل العالم بأسره، إنها تمر كدقيقة عادية بالنسبة للجميع، ذلك لأن الناس لا يصدقون إلا ما يعيشون و ما يرون، و لا شيء أبعد، مع ذلك ففي كل عام و بينما يكون العالم واقفا لتلقى الحكم عليه بالفناء الأبدى فإنه يطلب شفاعة من يكثرثون بنهايته لا فقط بنهاية حياتهم الفردية، و في كل عام منذ بداية الخلق و حتى اليوم يوجد هناك من يفكرون بنهاية العالم في تلك الدقيقة التي يكون فيها حكم الفناء على وشك التنفيذ، و لذلك فإننا نجتمع هنا ليعيدوا له الحياة و يخرجوا لتحقيق عالما أفضل لهم. نحن أيضا لا نعلم إن كان ذلك مصادفة كاملة أم هي فرصة غير مباشرة لإصلاح ما فات .. و لهذا فعليكم أن تفكروا سريعا بماذا ستفعلون، المحكمة و العالم يسمعونكم الآن، و بناء على ما ستوصلون إليه، ستعودون حيث كنتم أو يختفى العالم كاملا.."

سأل ادوارد بصوت متوتر:

"مهلا، ماذا حل بمن جاؤوا قبلنا كل عام، بما أن العالم لا يزال باقيا فلا بد أنهم نجحوا أيضا، لكن العالم لم يتغير، أنا لا أفهم شيئا.."

أجابته الصوت بقسوة :

" لا أستطيع أن أخبرك كيف اجتازوا الأمر و لكنهم حاولوا، كثير منهم نجحوا نجاحا مؤقتا، انظر إلى كل تلك الاختراعات و سبل الحياة السهلة التي تملأ عالمكم، و آخرون فشلوا، مطلوب منكم أن تكونوا رسلا.. أن تحملوا عبء تغيير العالم فقط. ذلك سيكون كافيا لمنح بعض الأمل."

سألت:

" كيف سنعرف أننا نجحنا.. "

"لن نعرفوا، ستعودون حيث كنتم و حسب، ستكونون قد نجحتم في هذا المكان أما عن نجاحكم في العالم الخارجي فهذا أمر تقررونه أنتم مع الوقت."

اختفى الصوت فجأة و كأنه كان وهما بالكامل، خارت أجسامنا جميعا و أسندنا ظهورنا إلى الجدار البارد لا أحد يجرو على التحديق في الآخر، كانت تسري بيننا تلك الطاقة الهائلة من التوجس، و شعرنا أننا فقدنا ثقتنا بأنفسنا على نحو فظيع، عندما كنا جالسين فكرت بأننا سنبقى هكذا لا نحرك ساكنا إلى الأبد و بدا أن حملا ثقيلًا كان يخنقنا جميعا، و بدأت أتخيل العالم و هو يحكم عليه بالفناء، فكرت سريعا بأصدقائي في بلدي البعيدة، لن يعلموا بالطبع أنني كنت هنا و أن فرصة إنقاذ العالم كانت بيدي، سيرحلون معتقدين أنني اختفيت قبلهم لا أكثر، لكني لا أعلم شيئا عن ما بعد الحياة، ماذا لو اجتمعت بهم، ماذا لو بقي هذا الشعور الهائل بتأنيب الضمير هو الشيء الوحيد الذي أنقله معي عبر العالم الآخر، شعرت بالاختناق، نظرت حولي و كانت وجوههم جميعا زرقاء كمن لو ينسحب منها أكسجين الحياة على مهل. قال أصغرنا سنا:

" هذا ليس عدلا.. "

" هناك حكمة ما حتما، أنا سأفكر و أقول ما يخطر على بالي، فإذا كانت الأمور على المحك إلى هذا الحد فلنحاول حقا." أجابه ناصر بحدة.

ثم تابع.

" سأعود إلى حقول القمح، لن أغرق في المدينة أبدا، سأحاول أن أقيم مشاريع كي تشجع الناس على العمل بالزراعة، حتى النساء، ذلك سيقفل من خطر المجاعات، و سأحرص على أن أجعل من أرضنا مصدرا للتكافل أقوم بتوزيع نصيب منه على الفقراء، اعني لو فعل كل شخص يملك أرضا مثل ذلك فسيكون وضع العالم أفضل.."

تقدمت منه ببطء و قلت له:

" الأمر أصعب مما تعتقد يا عزيزي، عليك أن تجعل الناس تعمل لتأكل لا تأكل فحسب، ذلك أمر زائل.."

كنت أشعر بيأس عميق ولم تكن تتمكن مني تلك الوعود الكبيرة. للحظة فكرت أنني أود لو ينتهي العالم فحسب فالأمر صعب للغاية، أعني هناك العديد من السكان في العالم، الظلم يكاد يكون في كل مكان و كذلك الغيوم السوداء تعبر سماء كل المدن، تذكرت من يقفون بانتظار الماء، قلت :

" الماء، على العالم أن يكون عادلا، لا يمكن أن تموت البشرية عطشا، سأحاول أن أقوم بمشاريع هندسية مع شباب آخرين لضمان وصول الماء إلى كافة أرجاء المخيم و قد .. صمت، لم أجد ما

أقوله فمنذ دراستي الهندسة و أنا أنتظر فعل شيء لهذا العالم، أياكون العالم قد اختارني لأقوم بهذا الشيء الزهيد.

قال إدوارد:

"لا تكونوا يانسين.. أعني لن نغير العالم كله بالطبع و لكن نستطيع أن نكون جزءا من ذلك الكل، اليس كذلك؟ أنا سأتابع رحلاتي و نقل معاناة المنبوذين بالصور، من يدري لعلني عبر ذلك أستطيع تغيير السياسات الكبيرة فكما تعلمون القرارات السياسية ضرورية في كل تغيير.."

كان الليل يزحف داخل المكان والوقت يمر، و كنا نشعر بضآلة حجمنا، أتى صوت أصغرنا سنا و قال:

" عليهم أن يوفروا التطعيم لكافة الأطفال، على الصحة أن تكون من نصيبي وكذلك التعليم من نصيب أخي، أتعلمون أمرا، أنا لا أزال صغيرا ، لا أعلم ماذا عليّ أن أفعل.."

تقدمت منه تارا و همست له بحنان:

" عليك أن تحتفظ بهذه الطاقة إلى حين تكبر، ذلك يكفيك إلى الآن.. " ثم أضافت.

" أنا سأكون جزءا من مناصري البيئة، تشهد منطقتي العديد من الفيضانات، لقد مات العديد من أقاربي فيها، ذلك أيضا ينشر الأمراض بيننا، البيئة تختنق حقا، و عليّ أن أكون جزءا و إن كان فقط من تيار الوعي، أتظنون أن ذلك يكفي؟ سأركب الدراجة مثلا بدل وسائل النقل، و هناك الكثير، سأحاول أن أجعل الجميع مثلي، مهلا هناك الكثير ممن قاموا بأمر شبيهه قبل ذلك اليس كذلك؟ أعني هل نحن نضيف شيئا حقا."

شعرت بأنه الرجفة سرت فينا جميعا في نفس اللحظة، أطفئ المصباح قليلا ثم أضيء مجددا و كأنه هو أيضا قد شاركنا هذه الارتجافة.

لقد ضغطت تارا على ذلك الزناد من الشك، و أخيرا هبت نسمة خفيفة من النافذة، سمعنا الصوت يأتينا مجددا:

" حسنا، لم تقولوا شيئا جديدا عما قالوه من سبقوكم، لقد فشلتم مثل معظمهم، لم أخبركم بالحقيقة، فمن فشلوا كانوا أمام خيار فنانهم هم أم فناء العالم. و قد اختاروا جميعهم فناءهم هم، لم أكن أود إخباركم بذلك كي تفكروا بعزيمة أكثر، لكن النتيجة كانت واحدة و مخيبة أيضا."

بدأت اشعر بالخوف حقا، انقلعنا جميعا و علت أصواتنا، صرخ أصغرنا : " ذلك ليس عدلا.."

وبخه ناصر مرة أخرى قائلا بصوت عال : " كفى.."

أصبحت النهاية غير واضحة بتاتا، انفجرت بالبكاء للحظات ثم تماكنت نفسي و قلت مدافعة:
 " لن نفنى قبل أن نخرج من هنا و نعمل معا من أجل العالم، من أجل بقائه، إنه يحتاج رحمتنا لا
 رحمتك.."

علت أصواتنا معا:

" سنعمل معا، لعالمنا..."

كنا كمن يؤدي صلاة جماعية، بهت الصوت فجأة ثم قال جملته الأخيرة. " ذلك هو الضمير الذي كنا نريد سماعه، كنتم تفكرون بحلول كل في منطقته، كل في مكانه و وفق تجربته تماما كمن سبقوكم، أما الآن فقد أصبحتم معا و لهذا قد تنعمون بالحرية.. ربما تكونون كاذبين و ربما لا.. لكن سيمنح العالم فرصة للبقاء عاما آخر أيضا.. من كانوا قبلكم كانوا أيضا صادقين ، و قد نجا كثيرون مثلكم أيضا.. و فنى آخرون. لا أعتقد أنه توجد قوانين لذلك."

شعرت بدفء هذا الصوت لأول مرة، تمنيت لو أرى وجهه، إنه هو الرسول الحقيقي لا نحن، آخر ما شاهدته هو ارتجاف المصباح فوقى ثم استيقظت لأجد نفسي وسط المخيم في ذات المكان الذي كنت أقف فيه، تفقدت الجميع حولي فكانوا كما تركتهم، أيعقل أن يكون كل ذلك حلما، أكون كل من تارا و إدوارد و ناصر و الصغير كائنات وهمية اختلقها عقلي وحسب، لم يكن هناك فرصة لمعرفة ذلك فقد دفعتني أخي الصغير من خلفي وهو يقول :

" إنظري يا ناديا.. إنها تمطر.."

ابتسمت و قلت:

" نعم يا صغيري، يبدو و كأن العالم بعث مجددا ..".

كان الناس حولي فاتحين أذرعهم للسماء و كأنهم يحتضنون أحلاما لا مرئية ملأت الجو سلاما لانهايا.

قلت بسرعة: " و أنا ناديا. لكني أصر أن أقول أنني من أحد دول شرق المتوسط"

The Last Message

Aya Kamel Rabah. Palestine

“I don’t remember being here before,” said one of us!

His voice sounded tense as if he was going to cry, but he chose silence at the right time and looked away, and an atmosphere of sadness prevailed among us! I also don’t remember being here at any time of my life and I don’t know how I arrived here. I felt like the five of us had the same question. We were staring at each other without daring to say a word, until one of us explained what was inside all of us.

I didn’t know any of them. I don’t remember having met before. I felt worried about our presence in this tiny place, which hardly allowed any light in. The sky seemed very far away to me through the only window in the place. Suddenly, I felt a desire to cry and go back to our house but I didn’t know how far away it was. I looked into their sad eyes and I felt they were thinking the same way and feeling the same nostalgia. I was encouraged to say something; it looked like they came from a different part of the world so I used my English and said:

“Do any of you remember how you got here?”

“I don’t remember anything, the last thing I remember is that I was staring at some boys who were playing beside our house before finding myself here,” answered a girl. I recognised from her features and clothes that she was from East Asia. I asked her to make sure and she said she was from India and her name was Tara.

Then the boy who first spoke the sentence in English intervened and said:

“It is better if everyone introduces themselves and where they come from, in order to

find the link that brought us here. My name is Naser and I am from Egypt, from a rural area.”

I was unable to see the relationship between a girl who lives in East Asia and the boy from Africa. I was about to say something when another guy, who had been staring at the floor since the moment we found out we were in the same place together, said:

“I don’t find that useful, I don’t think the link is a place. If we look at our features we will see that we are from different parts of the world with different languages. Those memories won’t work now. It is enough for you to know that my name is Eduard.”

I said quickly: “My name is Nadia. But I repeat that I am from one of the countries of the East Mediterranean.”

He smiled coldly and added nothing. Then the four of us waited for the last person to say something, but he remained silent, staring around him desperately.

I told him not to look at us in that way, that we all feel desperate as well! He interrupted me and said:

“I am not desperate, but I am thinking about the country where I come from. I don’t think I want to go back there like all of you, this prison is a better place.”

I felt like I knew this person, I felt a cold chill in my heart and I added plaintively:

“My country also doesn’t look as beautiful it could be!”

I heard Tara, Naser and Eduard saying the same thing about their homelands. We all fell silent and sat closer now, a hidden sorrow none of us wanted to reveal united all of us.

We were inside a closed room with very high walls. There was nothing on the wall but

a thin wire, linked to a dim lamp that was turned off at this time of the day when the sun was sneaking into our room, sending us its warmth and maybe telling us that we were still somewhere on this earth. I suddenly felt how much I love this sun and want it to shine forever and pass through all the windows of those houses with windows covered by curtains by those who live inside, perhaps to avoid the heat.

“When I was staring at the boys playing football in front of our house, I had the idea that the world will end soon, and that the image of those boys will evaporate in the air without anything left of it...” said Tara.

My heart started to beat fast. I remembered that I also had this idea when I was looking at the queue of people standing in front of the water container in the middle of the neighbourhood to fill their pots. I remembered the life of exile that I lived in that temporary refugee camp, the caravans and the raindrops falling on us from the holes in the ceiling, the electricity we rarely had and that made the night darker every evening. But the thought was stronger when I saw people waiting for a little water to quench their thirst... I thought that the world couldn't carry on this way at all!

Then, Eduard said: “I was participating in a youth campaign in Africa, I worked as a photographer when I saw a child who looked like a skeleton, glued to his mother, and his eyes were open, expressing great anger about what is going on while he is unable to do anything. And, yes, I thought of the same idea of dispersal, and that there will be nothing left of us for the next generations.”

The picture that Eduard drew froze all our hearts. The threads suddenly became clear to us. It was that idea that has crossed all of our minds at the same moment and probably is the one that brought us all together as prisoners in this place.

Eduard asked Naser, who was dark-skinned, pale-faced and physically weak:

“What about you? You said you are from rural Egypt, did that idea occur to you as well? What made you afraid? Tell us!”

Naser had secluded himself in another corner and gave us a scolding look, making us wary of him, and then said:

“We decided to move from the countryside to a city. My grandfather sold all his lands. I don't know why he did it, but it ended up this way. I found myself in a car that took us all to live in the city. I was looking at those fields of wheat passing in front of me and then disappearing. I realised by then that this car that was taking me from the countryside to the life of industry, smoke and cement may carry the whole world there very soon... I felt like everything was going to burn and that I would miss those trees and that air that came to us from the Nile and filled the whole valley with peace and softness, the voices of grandparents telling stories to their grandsons, the stories of the prophets and other stories about the ambitions of human beings.”

The sun's rays started to move away from us and we were still not able to understand the reason for our presence in that place. Why us? Was that thought a crime to be punished? Even those who committed the ugliest crimes deserve to know what happens to them. The fifth person who refused to tell us his name and nationality was singing a very beautiful song. He seemed very young. He looked at us and said:

“My brother used to like this song a lot, we used to sing it together on our way to school, but my father forced him to leave school and work with him, because we didn't have enough money.” He fell silent a while. Tara approached him and with her expression encouraged him to continue talking.

He smiled thankfully back at her and continued:

“Nothing... don’t bother with me. I also saw the end of the world, but through me! No doubt I am going to die one day...”

He felt that we didn’t understand him, adding in a low voice:

“I had a severe fever before I found myself here and the doctor told my parents that I wouldn’t have had this fever if I had received certain vaccinations when I was a kid. My parents were crying beside me, as if they knew that I would not survive, and that they would lose me forever. When I found myself here, I thought... you know what I thought.”

I interrupted him:

“That you’d died?”

He bowed his head and cried like a little baby. Naser approached him and patted his shoulder:

“Don’t be afraid. I think you were given a chance to survive, but we have to think of a way out of here. I think we should shout until someone hears us.”

We all stood up next to each other and tried another time, calling and shouting. At first, our shouts were loud, but later they began to fade slowly. Our voices were tired and we needed water, but the room was empty! Couldn’t we die from hunger and thirst in this place? I felt like I was having a nervous breakdown. I covered my face with my hands, and through my fingers I could see how they were filled with grief. The sun went down and the lamp in the room was lit. We felt happy to know that there must be a human being in this place.

Suddenly a voice from outside came to us and called all of our names, and then said:

“Don’t waste your time asking why you are here. A coincidence has brought you all. At this minute every year, the world is on the trial for creation, to be sentenced, to survive

or to die. Those who live on earth don’t realise that this moment of the day and month is the playoff that decides the future of the whole world. It passes like a normal moment for everyone else, because people only believe what they experience and see, nothing else... Nevertheless, every year, and while the world is standing to receive judgment, of eternal death, it asks for the intervention of those who care about its end, and not just the end of their individual lives, every year, since creation. There are a lot of people who think about the end of the world at that precise moment in which the judgment of death is about to happen and, for that reason, we gather them together to bring life to the world and go out to make it a better place for them. We also don’t know if it is just a coincidence or an indirect opportunity to fix what was ruined before... For this reason, you have to think fast about what you will do. The court and the world are hearing you now, and based on what you decide, you will go back to where you came from or the whole world will disappear.”

Eduard asked with a nervous voice:

“Wait!! What happened to those who came before us every year? Since the world is still alive they must have survived as well, but the world hasn’t changed. I don’t understand a thing!”

“I cannot tell you how they got through, but they tried!! Many of them succeeded temporarily. Look at all those inventions and conveniences of life that fill your world! Others have failed. You are required to be messengers, to carry the weight of changing the world enough to give some hope,” the voice answered harshly.

“How would we know that we succeeded?” I asked.

“You will never know, you will just go back to where you come from. You might

have succeeded in this place, but your success in the outside world is something you will decide with time.”

The voice disappeared suddenly as if it was an illusion. Our bodies failed and we assigned our backs to the cold wall. No one dared to stare at the others. A strong energy of suspicion ran through us, and we felt that we had lost the trust in ourselves in a terrible way. When we were sitting there I thought that we would stay still forever without moving a thing. It felt like a very strong weight was choking all of us. I started imagining the world being sentenced to death. I quickly thought of my friends in my far away country, who wouldn't know that I was here and that the opportunity to save the world was in my hands. They would depart thinking I disappeared before them, nothing more! But I won't know a thing about the afterlife. What if I meet them there? What if this terrible feeling of guilt is the only thing I am taking with me to the other world? I felt suffocation. I looked around me and all of their faces were blue as if someone was slowly sucking the oxygen of life out of them.

“This is not fair!” said the youngest among us.

“There must be wisdom in all this. I will think and say whatever crosses my mind. If things are so extreme, let's really try!” replied Naser. “I will go back to the fields of wheat. I will never drown in the city. I will try to start projects that encourage people to work on agriculture, even women. This will lower the risks of famines. I will ensure our land is a source of cohesion. I will give the poor their share. If every landowner does the same, the world will be a better place!”

I approached him slowly and said:

“It is more difficult than you think, you should help people work to eat, not just eat, because that is evanescent.”

I felt a strong despair, and those big promises wouldn't do me any good. For a moment I wished that the world would just end, because it is very difficult! There are plenty of people in the world, injustice is everywhere, and black clouds cover the sky of all cities. I remembered those who were standing waiting for the rain, and I said:

“Water! The world should be fair, humanity shouldn't die of thirst. I will try to create engineering projects with other young people to make sure that water reaches every part of the field, and maybe...” I fell silent, unable to find anything to say. Since I started studying engineering I have been waiting to do something for this world. Did the world choose me just to do this little thing?

“Don't despair. We won't change the whole world for sure, but we could be a part of that whole, couldn't we? I will continue travelling and showing the suffering of the disadvantaged with photos. Who knows, maybe I could change the big policies. As you know, political decisions are important for change...” said Eduard.

The night was crawling and time was passing, and we felt small:

“They should provide vaccinations for all kids; health should be a right for me, and education a right for my brother. You know something? I am still very young, I don't know what I should do...” said the youngest of us.

Tara approached him and whispered tenderly:

“You have to maintain this energy until you grow up. That's enough for you for now...” Then she added: “I'll be one of the supporters of the environment. Many of the regions in my country experience floods, many of my relatives have died because of this disaster. They also spread diseases among us. The environment is really dying,

and I have to take part. Do you think that is enough? I will use my bike instead of other forms of transport that cause pollution, and there is a lot more to do! I will try to make everyone like me. Hey, there are many who have done something similar before, right? I mean, can we really add anything?”

I felt a shiver that passed through all of us at the same moment. The lamp went out briefly and then lit again, as if it felt the shiver as well.

Tara pulled that trigger of doubt. Finally, a fine breeze came from the window, and we heard the voice again:

“Well, you haven’t said anything different to those who came before you! You have failed like the majority. I didn’t tell you the truth: those who failed were facing the choice of their death or the death of the whole world. All of them chose their own death. I didn’t want to tell you to make you think more courageously, but the result was equally disappointing.”

I started to feel real fear. We became angry and our voices started to get louder.

“This is not fair,” shouted the youngest.

Naser scolded him again and said loudly: “Enough!”

The end became very unclear. I burst into tears and then took a hold of myself and said defensively:

“We are not going to die before we get out of here and work together for the world, for its survival. It needs our mercy, not yours!!”

Our voices rose together and said:

“We will work together, for our world.”

We looked as if we were saying a group prayer. The voice became lower and then said its last sentence:

“That is the conscientiousness we wanted to hear. You were only thinking of solutions for your regions, each for his place and according to his or her experience, exactly like those who came before you, but now you are together and that is why you will get your freedom... Maybe you are liars and maybe not, but the world will be given a chance to live one more year. Those who came before you were honest, and a lot of them survived exactly like you did, others died. I think there are no rules for this.”

I felt the warmth of this voice for the first time. I wished I could see his face. He was the real messenger, not us! The last thing I saw was the flickering of the lamp above me, and then I woke up to find myself in the middle of the camp I was staying in. I checked everybody around me, and they were as I left them. Could it have been just a dream? Were Tara, Eduard, Naser and the young boy nothing but illusions created by my mind? There was no chance to find out as my little brother pushed me from behind saying:

“Look Nadia, it’s raining!!”

I smiled and said:

“Yes, my little one, it looks like the world has been reborn!”

People around me opened their arms to the sky, as if they were holding invisible dreams that filled the atmosphere with an endless peace.

Czerwona Wenus

Kasia Nocuń. Polska

Wenus wyznacza kierunek. Kilka godzin po zmierzchu, zawieszona nad horyzontem, nad spokojną taflą morza, prowadzi spojrzenie coraz wyżej ku rozległej mapie nieba i gwiazdnych galaktyk. Czuwa nad nią Jupiter, swoją obecnością akcentując męski pierwiastek w tej miękkiej, kobiecej przestrzeni. Woda jak kobieta oddana rytmom księżyca; płynna, nieuchwytna, zmienna, o tysiącu twarzy. Na powierzchni połączona z niebem, w głębi oddana ziemi, kryjąca skarby podmorskiego świata; królestwo ryb, koralu, żółwi morskich, delfinów. Szczególnie nocą, kiedy niebo jest najbliżej ziemi, łączy te dwa światy; podniebnych galaktyk i ich morskiego, lustrzanego odbicia w postaci rozgwiazd odpoczywających w przewiewnie tkanych koralach.

Ocean przyjmuje nas łagodnie, nie stawia oporu. Po kolana w wodzie, falujemy miękko z łagodnym przypływem. Pod wodą ciało traci ciężar, staje się morzem. Coraz głębiej, aż do całkowitego zanurzenia, wszystko się rozplywa. Z twarzą zwrócona ku niebu, z rozpostartymi nogami, rękoma, oświetleni blaskiem księżyca, przynależymy do morza. Szczególnie w nocy, kiedy spojrzenie nie sięga daleko, ocean wydaje się domem; bezpiecznym schronieniem znaczone grafitowymi ścianami nocy. Podłoga miękko fałuje, a gwiazdy zawieszone na suficie dostarczają odpowiedniej ilości światła, by nawet po omacku móc się poruszać i swobodnie widzieć.

„Tafła jest gładka, będą delfiny” – uważnie chwytam każde słowo, Engie nie mówi wiele, tyle tylko, ile wydaje się niezbędne, w końcu pod wodą słowa nic nie znaczą. Wkroczenie po raz pierwszy do tego świata przynosi prawdziwą ulgę; nie trzeba tracić energii; usta zawsze zamknięte, uwaga skierowana do wnętrza, nie rozproszona, połączona z oddechem. Pod wodą wszystko swobodnie płynie, nie trzeba zastanawiać się, co jest właściwe; kategorie, oceny, podziały na złe i dobre przestają obowiązywać. Wystarczy poddać się wodzie i miękko w nią wpływać, dokładnie tak, jak wszyscy tu to robią. Barwne ryby we wszystkich kolorach tęczy, rozmiarach i kształtach nie stawiają oporu. Szczególnie bliżej brzegu, gdzie ląd wznosi się ku niebu, fale wyczuwalne są coraz bardziej, a światło miękko przenika przez górną tafelkę wody, można doświadczyć rybiego oddania. Zarówno te tuż pod powierzchnią, jak i te głębiej, eksplorujące koralu; wszystkie wirują w podwodnym tańcu niesione przez prąd morski raz w jedną, raz w drugą stronę. Wszystko odbywa się w ciszy i wydaje się płynąć w zwolnionym tempie. Wszystko jest tańcem, połączeniem, oddaniem, szacunkiem złożonym wodzie. Czas przestaje płynąć.

Przed delfinami były żółwie; pradawne, odwieczne stworzenia. Kiedy po raz pierwszy dotykam ich chropowatych, przednich skrzydeł, badam twardą skorupę, staję oko w oko z ich miękko skupioną uwagą, kiedy na krótką chwilę odrywając się od oceanicznej ziemi pokrytej koralu, gdzie uważnie skubią plankton, podpływają na powierzchnię, by zaczerpnąć powietrza i znów zanurkować, zaczynam rozumieć. Niebo łączy się z ziemią, a woda umożliwia ten związek. Wszystko stanowi całość, niezoderżalnie połączony system odpowiadający prawom natury. Olbrzymie żółwie morskie płyną miękko, dostojnie falują skrzydłami, jakby szybowały

po niebie. Wśród rozgwiazd, koralu tworzących skupiska kolistych, podmorskich planet, niosą pamięć galaktyk i odległych czasów, kiedy podział na niebo i ziemię nie istniał, kiedy wszystko przuszało się w kosmicznym beczasie. Tak jest pod wodą, w świecie, który dziś stanowi odbicie nieba – oba połączone kosmicznym, naturalnym prawem, przyglądające się sobie.

Spotkanie z żółwiami jest jak spotkanie z przodkami niosącymi mądrość pokoleń, bez pośpiechu oddanym odwiecznym prawom. To Engie pokazuje mi ich zwyczaje i zabiera w miejsca, gdzie najpewniej można je spotkać. Podwodną przestrzeń zna na pamięć i porusza się w niej, jak w zorganizowanym, podmorskim mieście, gdzie prądy stanowią odpowiednik ulicznego ruchu, kopulaste koralu wyznaczają skrzyżowania, a nagle załamania terenu i ciemna, bezdenna głębia, odpowiadają nierównej powierzchni dróg położonych na górzystych terenach podczas jazdy nocą. Jak znajduje kierunek w tym beczasie, nie wiem, ale jego intuicja jest niezawodna i bez trudu spotykamy ryby wszelkich maści i różnych wielkości żółwie.

Engie urodził się w morzu, to nie ulega wątpliwości. Ze spotkania syreny z zamorskich żeglarzem uwiedzionym jej śpiewem, a może z opływowego ciała foki wyrzuconej na brzeg, na jedną, podniebną noc porzucającą swoją foczą skórę na rzecz ciała kobiety? Może dojrzewał w brzuchu wieloryba, a gdy był już gotowy, wypłynął głęboko w morze? Nigdy go nie pytałam, bo dobrze znałam odpowiedź. „Nie wiem”, – jeśli coś wychodziło z jego ust, kiedy spacerowaliśmy przy brzegu, najczęściej były to te dwa słowa. Szybko przekonałam się o ich głębokiej mądrości, a przede wszystkim o mądrości tego, który nie boi się ich wymawiać.

Wiedza zamknięta w słowach przynależy do świata rozumu; zamkniętego świata logos, gdzie brak miejsca na płynność i beczas wody; świata, gdzie *zawsze* nie istnieje. W tym ludzkim świecie trzeba wiedzieć, by nie być posądzonym o głupotę i zepchniętym na margines. Tymczasem, to niewiedza w rzeczywistości otwiera przestrzeń. Ten, który nie wie, otwarty jest na wszystko, co przychodzi; nie podąża ślepo utartą drogą, rozumie, że życia nie da się przewidzieć i zaplanować. Ten, który nie wie, żyje w skupieniu i teraźniejszości, w mądrości chwili, stale dostosowując się do zmieniających warunków, ale kierując się szacunkiem do praw tego świata. Ten, który otwarcie mówi, że nie wie, podejmuje wybór umknienia sztywnej logice świata logos, gdzie nie ma miejsca na swobodny przepływ i nieoczekiwany rozwój. Ten, który otwarcie mówi – nie wie, – bierze odpowiedzialność za zadawanie pytań w inny sposób; nie na zasadzie sztywnych reguł, ale elastycznego dostosowania się do zaistniałych okoliczności. W rzeczywistości kieruje nim inna wiedza; mądrość, której nie da się wytłumaczyć słowami, a która odpowiada esencji życia. Nie ma tu podziału na dobre i złe, ocen i przedwczesnego wyrokowania; jest konieczność chwili, respekt i szacunek do wszystkiego, co się wydarza.

Engie, kiedy mówił *nie wiem*, uśmiechał się nieśmiało, wrzeszał ramionami i łagodnie patrzył mi w oczy. Nie było w tym cienia zakłopotania, zażenowania, które towarzyszy większości ludzi nie znających odpowiedzi, ale wychowanych w logice logos, i tym samym, automatycznie zmuszonych do zagadania pustki, panicznie bojących się oceny innych, podskórnie zniewolonych logiką nagrody i kary obowiązującą w społeczeństwie, które obawia się nieznanego, dlatego ustanawia prawa, zakazy, nakazy i każe się ich trzymać. Bez nich człowiek zdany jest na przypadek, bezwolny niczym liść na wietrze, bezmyślnie i ślepo podążający za tym, co się nadarza, tak przynajmniej mogłoby się zdawać. Tymczasem, to właśnie ta logika skazuje często na ślepe podążanie i głoszenie prawd, które nijak mają się do zaistniałych warunków, a często okazują się powierzchowne i krzywdzące. W pozalogosowej niewiedzy natomiast, pozorny

przypadek nie obowiązuje, bo w każdej chwili trzeba być uważnym i czujnym, żywo reagować na wydarzające się życie, umieć czytać znaki pochodzące od świata.

Respektując tę wiedzę, przestałam zadawać pytania; komunikowaliśmy się gestem, a Engie, ośmielony taką postawą, pokazywał mi coraz więcej i więcej, ucząc mądrości świata.

„Tafla jest gładka, będą delfiny”. Powoli wpływiliśmy coraz głębiej i głębiej w morze wpatrzni w Wenus, która, im niżej nad horyzontem, tym bardziej purpurowa, zdawała się być punktem alarmowym, bijącym, niczym serce świata, w ciemnej przestrzeni nocy.

Łódź wyglądem przypominała pająka o cienkich i długich, rozpostatych na wszystkie strony nogach. Sunął po wodzie uważnie i w skupieniu, jak zawsze, kiedy wybiera się na polowanie. Przez głowę przeszła mi myśl, że czerwień Wenus, oprócz miłości, jest też kolorem krwi, a więc życia i śmierci zarazem.

Odgłosy silnika pracującego na najniższych obrotach podkreślały spokój i wszechobecna ciszę nocy, odbijając naturalną kondycję wszechświat. Wpływaliśmy bez słowa w morze.

Nie upłynęło dużo czasu, choć ile, trudno powiedzieć, bo czas zdawał się nie płynąć. Pod rozgwieżdżonym niebem rozległy się niewyraźne popiskiwanie. Nigdy wcześniej nie słyszałam tego dźwięku, ale przecucie podpowiadało mi odpowiedź. Engie wyłączył silnik. Stopiliśmy się z przestrzenią nocy. Trwało to może chwilę, a może wieczność, znowu – logika czasu nie obowiązywała. Popiskiwanie stopniowo nasilały się, aż do poziomu, w którym nie było wątpliwości, skąd pochodzą. Niewielka żarówka rozbłysła w przestrzeni nocy tak ciemnej, że najmniejsze źródło światła wydawało się bić z wielką mocą. Efekt był tak nieoczekiwany, że w pierwszej chwili miałam wrażenie znalezienia się na scenie, w świetle reflektorów, kolistym łukiem otaczających naszą niewielkich rozmiarów, drewnianą wyspę. Światło przenikało powierzchnię wody niezbyt głęboko, ale na tyle, by widzieć wyraźnie ławice ośmiornic w olbrzymich ilościach, garnących się do łodzi, jak do życiodajnego źródła. Za nimi, w promieniu kilku metrów, śmigwały we wszystkich kierunkach wielkich rozmiarów tuńczyki, mieniące się w świetle srebrną łuską. Dostarczając im źródła światła, usprawnialiśmy polowanie. Oktopusy, jedne za drugimi, nikły nam z oczu, wchłaniane przez tunę w mgnieniu oka. Na tym jednak barwny spektakl mieniących się w wodzie, podmorskich stworzeń się nie kończył. Tam, gdzie kończyła się granica światła pozostawiając znikające stopniowo w ciemnościach odbicia, sunęły delfiny w ilościach, które trudno było zliczyć. Wierzchołki ich górnych płetw, niczym załączki dryfujących gór wykształcających się z morza, przemykały nam przed oczami w zawrotnym tempie. Równie szybko spojrzeniem próbowaliśmy chwycić ich podniebne skoki, radosne witanie się z kosmosem, salta wykonywane w powietrzu, zataczanie kręgów wokół własnej osi, donośnie popiskiwanie. Nie ulegało wątpliwości, że to ich dźwięki zapowiadały wszystko to, co teraz z podziwem oglądaliśmy w pełnym świetle. Przed nami toczył się teatr ewolucji, w którym prawo większego dopełniało konieczność wzrostu, a więc posilania się większych mniejszymi. Tuńczyki polują na oktopusy, by za chwilę stać się pokarmem delfinów. Odwiecznie toczące się koło przyrody, w którym, by wszystko mogło istnieć w równowadze, większy zjada mniejszego, ale tylko w ilościach, które niezbędne są do optymalnego wzrostu. Wszystko to odbywa się pod rozgwieżdżonym niebem, w ciszy nocy, schowane przed ludzkim okiem, stanowiące kwintesencję praw rządzących wszechświatem.

To, co wydarza się teraz, mimo znajomości rzeczy i porządku panującego w świecie, jest dla mnie, mimo wszystko, zaskoczeniem. Doskonale wiem, dlaczego wypłynęliśmy w nocy,

kiedy zwabione źródłem światła ośmiornice podpywają do łodzi ściągając za sobą ławice tuńczyków, a w dalszej kolejności – delfinów. Że za dnia nic byśmy nie widzieli, a tym samym połów nie byłby tak obfity. Wiem już dlaczego Wenus, im głębiej w noc i w morze, tym bardziej czerwona. Rozumiem, dlaczego nic nie mówimy i wszystko odbywa się w ciszy. Myśli śmigają mi po głowie, jak ryby, w oszalałym tempie podążając we wszystkich kierunkach. Widzę Engiego, który wyciąga harpun i bezgłośnie mierzy, trafiając bezbłędnie ofiary, jedna po drugiej. Wszystko dzieje się bardzo szybko, a jednocześnie trwa nieskończenie długo. Choć może się tylko takim zdaje w tej ciemnej, bezsłownej nocy. Wbrew oczekiwaniom nie widzę krwi, a tylko bezszelestnie zamykające się, jedno po drugim, rybie oczy. Wydają się nie cierpieć, a miękko wtulać w gładką tafelę wody zahaczone strzałą harpuna. Po raz pierwszy widzę też Engiego w tym świetle; z namaszczenie i uwagą oddanego śmiertelnym rytuałom dedykowanym bezkresnej przestrzeni wody. Kontur jego postaci znaczący granicę światła i cienia, z łukiem i strzałą w ręku, przywodzi na myśl mitycznego boga, który celując szybko i bezbłędnie, dopełnia kosmicznego prawa w sposób zadający jak najmniej cierpienia. Podziw miesza się z zakłopotaniem, niewiedza wymyka się porządkowi logosu. Ten nocny spektakl toczy się poza słowami, w zupełnie innym wymiarze, niż ten przypisany językowi; w bezgłośniej mądrości i wiedzy. Zamykam na chwilę oczy, ze wszystkich stron dobiegają mnie popiskiwanie delfinów. Ciemność przed oczami dopełnia się z domknięciem połowu. Engie wyłącza światło, by delfiny mogły spokojnie odplynać wgłąb oceanicznego domu, zapominając na chwilę o jego rybich mieszkańcach, nasycone nocnym posiłkiem, który tym razem z nami odplywa do domu.

Droga powrotna odbywa się w zupełnej ciszy. Pod rozgwieżdżonym niebem tracę poczucie kierunku, w którym płyniemy. Miękko osuwam się na łodzi odpuszczając całkiem napięcie, w którym przez cały ten czas nieświadomie trwało moje ciało przejęte nocnym połowem. Oddając się zmęczeniu, z twarzą wróconą ku niebu, w ciszy przerywanej co jakiś czas dźwiękiem fal odbijających się od łodzi, oddaję się obserwacji pulsujących życiem gwiazd. Engie nad wszystkim czuwa, bezbłędnie obiera kierunek; ufam mu w pełni, w końcu urodził się w wodzie i doskonale zna jej prawa. Kiedy jednak odzywa się, miękko przecinają ciszę nocy, nie mam pewności czy używa słów, komunikuje się ze mną myślami, czy tylko nadaje kierunek moim własnym myślom miękko sunącym po niebie; *Jeśli Eros trafia w serce, nie ma wyboru, trzeba poddać się jego prawom.*

Człowiek z harpunem staje się bogiem dopełniając logiki kosmicznego świata. Porzucam myśli o słuszności układających się w głowie słów. Czyżby należały do logiki świata, który wie wszystko, czy raczej stanowiły próbę harmonijnego połączenia dwóch porządków; instynktu i rozumu, serca i głowy? Podział na dobre i złe znika, ocena rozplywa się w morzu, głównym kryterium staje się logika Erosa; miłość do setki ludzi z wioski, których w pełni wyżywi nasz nocny połów.

Oddaję się tej myśli ze spokojem i poczuciem równowagi panującej w bezsłownym świecie. Nad wszystkim czuwa Czerwona Wenus, która teraz widoczna nisko na horyzoncie wyznacza punkt łączący niebo z ziemią; miejsce, gdzie podniebne i ziemskie prawa dopełniają się tworząc kosmiczną jedność wszechświata w przepływie wszechobecnej wody.

Red Venus

Kasia Nocuń. Poland

Venus shows the way. A few hours after dusk, hung above the horizon, over the calm surface of the sea, it leads the eyes higher and higher towards the vast map of the sky, towards the galaxies of the stars. Jupiter watches over her; his presence emphasizes the masculine essence in this soft, female space. Water is like a woman bound by the rhythm of the moon; liquid, elusive, unstable, the one of a thousand faces. At its surface it is united with the sky, in its depths – to the earth, it hides treasures of the underwater world; the kingdom of fish, corals, sea turtles, and dolphins. Especially at night, when the sky is closest to the earth, it unites both worlds; this of skyward galaxies and their mirror reflection of starfish resting in airily woven corals.

The ocean accepts us gently, it does not resist. Water high up to our knees, we are softly swayed by the tide. Underwater the body loses its weight, it becomes the sea. Deeper and deeper, until complete immersion; everything dissolves. With our faces turned towards the sky, with outstretched legs and arms, illuminated by the moonshine, we belong to the sea. Especially at night, when the regard does not reach far, the ocean feels like home; a safe shelter within the graphite walls of the night. The floor sways gently and the stars on the ceiling give out the perfect amount of light to move even blindfold and still clearly see.

“Water is smooth. There will be dolphins.” I catch every word carefully. Engie does not talk much, only as much as it deems necessary. After all, underwater the words mean nothing. The first time you enter this world you feel relief, you do not have to

waste energy; lips are always closed, attention is focused inwards, aligned with your breath. Underwater everything swims calmly, you don’t have to wonder why; everyday categories, judgements, the distinction between good and evil do not apply. All you need to do is surrender to the water and softly swim into it, just like everyone here does. Bright fish in all colours of the rainbow, of all shapes and sizes, do not put on any resistance. Especially near the shore, where the land goes up towards the sky, the light softly penetrates the surface of the water and you start feeling the waves better, you can experience the devotion of the fish. Those swimming near the surface, as well as those that explore the coral fields in the deep, they are all swirling in their underwater dance, carried by the tide to the left, to the right, then back again. Everything in silence seems to happen in slow motion. Everything is dance, everything is connected, everything is in full commitment and in respect with the water. The time stops flowing.

Before dolphins, there were turtles – old, ancient creatures. I touch their scabrous front wings, check their hard shell, stand near their soft concentration and begin to understand. When they briefly leave the coral-covered ground of the ocean where they carefully nibble the plankton and go towards the surface to take a breath of air – the sky unites with the earth. Water facilitates this union, everything is one; an inseparable system reflecting the rules of nature. Huge sea turtles swim softly, majestically waving their wings as if flying through the sky. Among the starfish, among the corals which form clusters of round underwater planets, they carry on the

memory of the galaxies and of the times long gone, when the division into sky and earth did not exist, when everything lived in a cosmic *no-time*. This is how it looks today, underwater, in a world which is a reflection of the sky; both facing each other are united by one – cosmic, natural law.

Meeting with turtles is like meeting with ancestors who carry the wisdom of generations. They are faithful to ancient laws without rush. Engie shows me their habits and takes me to places where it is most likely to meet them. He knows the underwater space by heart and moves in it as if it was an organized underwater city where tides are the equivalent of traffic, the domed corals are the intersections, the constant breaks in the terrain and the dark, infinite depth is like the uneven surface of the road in the mountainside when ridden at night. I do not know how he finds the way in this *no-time* but his intuition is faultless and we have no trouble in finding all kinds of fish and sea turtles of all sizes.

Engie was born in the sea, there is no doubt. Maybe he is the outcome of a meeting between a mermaid and a foreign sailor seduced by her voice? Or maybe he emerged from the streamlined figure of a seal, which had been thrown into the land to shed her sealskin and for this one skyward night take the form of a woman? Maybe he grew in the belly of a whale and swam out into the sea when ready? I have never asked him, as I already knew his answer: “I don’t know.” If he said anything during our seaside walks, those were the words. I soon realized their deep wisdom and the wisdom of the man who is not afraid to utter them.

Knowledge locked up in words belongs to the world of reason – the closed world of *logos* where there is no place for the flow and the *no-time* of water – the world where *always* doesn’t exist. In this human world you

must know, otherwise you are accused of being stupid and fated marginalization. Whereas, it is the lack of knowledge that opens up the space. The one who does not know is open for anything that comes; he does not follow blindly along the beaten track and understands that life cannot be foreseen and pre-planned. The one who does not know lives in full concentration and in the present, in the wisdom of the moment; he constantly adapts to the changing circumstances, yet he is still guided by the respect towards the laws of this world. The one who openly admits that he does not know chooses to evade the rigid logic of the world of *logos*, where there is no room for a free flow and an unexpected development. The one who openly says “I don’t know” takes responsibility for different ways of asking questions; based not on rigid rules but on a flexible adjustment to existing circumstances. In reality, he is guided by a different kind of knowledge – a wisdom that cannot be explained with words and reflects the essence of life. It does not offer a division into good and evil, it does not offer assessments and pre-judgements; there is only the necessity of the moment, respect and appreciation towards everything that occurs.

When Engie said “I don’t know,” he said it with a shy smile, he shrugged his shoulders and gently looked into my eyes. There was no trace of embarrassment or awkwardness that usually accompanies most people who do not know an answer but who were raised in the logic of *logos*, thus instinctively forced to talk over the emptiness, fearing the judgement of others, innately enslaved by the logic of reward and punishment existing in a society that is afraid of the unknown and in consequence makes up and enforces laws, rules and bans. Without them, man is at the hands of fate, with no will of his own, like a leaf in the wind, thoughtlessly and blindly following

what comes on his way, or so it would seem. Whereas, it is this logic that often forces people to blindly follow and preach truths totally unconnected to the actual circumstances, which often prove to be superficial and harmful. In contrast, in the non-knowledge of the non-*logos*, the apparent accident does not enter the equation, as one has to be attentive and careful at all times, constantly responsive towards the enfolding life; one must know how to read the signs from the world.

Respecting this kind of knowledge, I stopped asking questions; we communicated by gestures and Engie, encouraged by this approach, started to teach me more and more by showing the wisdom of the world.

“Water is smooth. There will be dolphins.” Slowly, we have been swimming further and further into the sea looking at the Venus which was getting more and more purple the lower she got on the horizon. She seemed to be an alarm point pulsing like the heart of the world in the dark space of the night.

The boat resembled a spider with its long and thin legs outstretched in all directions. It glided through the water carefully and in full attention, like always when it goes on the hunt. I had a thought that the red of the Venus signifies not only love but also blood, thus both life and death.

The low hum of the engine on the lowest revs brought out the peace and the omnipresent silence of the night what was mirroring the natural condition of the universe. Wordlessly, we swam out into the sea.

Not much time has passed, though it is hard to say how much exactly as it did not seem to be flowing at all. Under the sky full of stars we started to hear vague squeaks. I have never heard such a sound before but I felt what it might be. Engie turned off the engine. We melted into the night. It might have been just a moment, it might have lasted an eternity – the

logic of time did not apply anymore. Gradually, the squeaks got louder and louder until there were no more doubts from where they came from. A small lightbulb flashed forth into the night so dark that every source of light seemed to shine with an extraordinary power. Its effect was so unexpected that at first I thought we were on a stage; the round spot of limelight encircling our small wooden island. The light did not shine very deep into the water but deep enough for us to see clearly large schools of octopi gathering around the boat as if it was a life-giving spring. Following the octopi came large tunas, swishing through in all directions, their silvery scales were flashing brightly. Giving them a source of light we somehow justified the hunt. One after the other, the octopi vanished into the mouths of the tuna. But that was not end of this colourful spectacle of shiny creatures sparkling in the water. At the border of the light gradually fading its reflections into darkness, came the dolphins in uncountable quantities. The tops of their dorsal fins like floating mountain-tops raising from the sea, swished through at a blistering speed. We tried to catch glimpses of their skyward jumps, their joyful cosmic greetings, their somersaults and circling manoeuvres, their loud squeaks. There was no doubt that the noises we had heard in the darkness were the announcement of what we were witnessing now in the light. We were the audience in the theatre of evolution which followed the laws of the food chain where the larger performers devouring the smaller one. The tuna hunts the octopi and soon falls prey to the dolphins. The eternal circle of natural life in which to exist the larger must eat the small but only in quantities that are necessary for their optimal growth. Everything happens under the sky full of stars, in the silence of the night, hidden away from the human eye – a quintessence of the laws of the universe.

And although I know the rules that govern the world, what happens now is still for me a surprise. I am perfectly aware why we had sailed off into the night in which, lured by the light, the octopi swim up towards the boat bringing with them the schools of tuna, which in turn bring up the dolphins. By day we wouldn't be able to see them so clearly and so our catch would have been smaller. Now I realize why the further it gets into the night and the sea, the Venus gets more and more red. I understand why we say nothing and everything happens in silence. My thoughts are rushing through my head like fish swimming in all directions at a blistering speed. I watch Engie as he takes out his harpoon, silently takes aim and infallibly catches his prey, one after another. It all happens very fast and lasts infinitely long at the same time, although that might also be an illusion of this dark, wordless night. To my surprise, I see no blood, just the eyes of the fish shutting soundlessly. When hooked on the harpoon, they do not seem to suffer, only nestle softly into the smooth surface of the water. It is also the first time I see Engie in this light: with great care and patience committed to the deathly rituals of the endless water space. His silhouette marks the borders of light and darkness; with the bow and arrow in his hand he reminds me of a mythological god, aiming quickly and accurately, fulfilling the cosmic laws in the most harmless possible way. Admiration is mixed with awkwardness, ignorance slips away from the order of *logos*. The spectacle of the night takes place separated from words, in a different dimension than that associated with language; in the silence wisdom and knowledge. I close my eyes for a moment, I hear the squeaks of dolphins coming from all directions. As we finish the catch, the darkness in front of us is complete. Engie turns off the light so the dolphins can calmly swim back into their ocean home, forgetting for a while about its piscine inhabitants,

well-fed on their nightly meal which goes back home this time with us.

We go back in total silence. Under the sky full of stars I lose my sense of direction. Softly, I slide on the boat, releasing all the tension I haven't realized I had been in, tired from the night fishing. With my face to the sky I surrender to the fatigue. In the silence interrupted once in a while by waves hitting the boat, I watch the lively heartbeat of stars. Engie is guarding over everything, he makes no mistakes in finding the right direction. I trust him completely; after all, he was born in the water and he knows its laws perfectly. When he does speak, gently cutting through the silence of the night, I am not sure if he is doing it out loud – using his words – is he just communicating with me by the way of thoughts, or maybe he is just setting my own thoughts, softly gliding through the skies, in the right direction. *When Eros hits the heart, all you can do is to surrender to his laws.*

Performing the final act of the logic of the cosmic world, the man with the harpoon becomes a god. I abandon my thoughts about the validity of words that are formed in my head. Do they belong to the logic of the omniscient world? Or are they rather an attempt to put together in perfect harmony elements of two worlds: instinct and reason, the head and the heart? The division into good and evil is no more, judgement dissolves in the sea. What remains is the logic of Eros; the love towards the people from who shall be fed by what we had caught in the night.

I surrender to this thought with a great calmness and I feel the balance of this wordless world. The Red Venus is watching over all this. Now she is visible low on the horizon, showing the point that unites the sky and the earth; a place where the skyward and earthly laws complement each other, where they unite creating a single cosmic entity within the flow of the omnipresent water.

El descubrimiento del fuego

Yeray García Celades. España

Una gota de agua en el desierto. No habría mejor definición para el Estado Líquido, la capital de un mundo formado por tres cuartas partes de tierra. Una ciudad de agua rodeada de océanos de arena, donde las dunas se estrellaban contra la costa, las playas eran de hielo y los ríos estaban hechos de piedra. Un lugar donde lo imposible era el oxígeno de sus habitantes, los Acuáticos.

Los Acuáticos eran muy afortunados. No sólo por haber nacido en el Estado Líquido, depósito de la materia más valiosa de la tierra, sino porque la sangre que corría por sus venas era también incolora, inodora e insípida. Constituían, sin ningún tipo de duda, la raza dominante en aquel globo desértico. Más que nada, porque no existía ninguna otra clase de organismo con vida más allá de sus fronteras. O, al menos, esa era la versión oficial que mantenían las autoridades de la ciudad.

Como sucede con todas las versiones oficiales, cualquier parecido con la realidad era pura indecencia. Hacía años que llegaban a las costas del Estado Líquido pequeñas embarcaciones de cuatro ruedas procedentes del exterior. Sus pobres tripulaciones estaban compuestas por Flamígeros procedentes de Tierras Ígneas que tenían como único capitán el deseo de una vida mejor.

Los Flamígeros eran un pueblo de sangre caliente, con una cierta propensión a arder. Habitaban los vastos desiertos que rodeaban el Estado Líquido, dispersados en diferentes tribus nómadas. Su piel era inflamable y, debido a su pobre nivel de vida, nadie debería culparlos por encenderse con facilidad. Como el lector más avisado podrá imaginar, una raza tan fogosa no iba a quedarse de brazos cruzados ante las difíciles condiciones que debía afrontar por el mero hecho de nacer en el lugar equivocado. El Estado Líquido era su Tierra Prometida. El destino de largas travesías por el desierto que sólo los más valientes se atrevían a realizar. Un paraíso donde les esperaba la felicidad y que no querían abandonar nunca. Sólo así se explicaba que ninguno de los valientes hubiera vuelto.

Por desgracia, la realidad era muy distinta. Las autoridades del Estado Líquido habían ocultado la existencia de los Flamígeros a sus habitantes, temerosos, como buenos gobernantes que eran, de que sus ciudadanos supieran más de lo necesario. Los cuerpos de seguridad se encargaban de interceptar las embarcaciones antes de que llegaran a la costa y cualquiera pudiera apreciar su presencia. En cuanto a los Flamígeros que iban dentro... Bueno, digamos que el gobierno se encargó de apagar esos fuegos.

Dadas las circunstancias, sólo hacía falta una pequeña llama para encender la mecha que haría saltar todo por los aires. Precisamente, Llama era el nombre del Flamígero que lo cambiaría todo.

Llama era el único miembro de su familia que había sobrevivido a las hostiles condiciones de vida que se daban en el exterior. De todos sus seres queridos sólo quedaban cenizas. La única herencia que recibió fue una misión. No se le legó ningún tipo de presente, sino un futuro. Debía llegar al Estado Líquido y conseguir que el sacrificio de su familia hubiera servido para algo. Si era preciso cruzar el desierto a nado para lograrlo, tragaría toda la arena que hiciera falta.

Su determinación de llegar nadando a la Tierra Prometida, que algunos tildarían de temeraria, acabaría propiciando que no fuera detectado por los descontrolados controles de seguridad del Estado Líquido, que ya sólo esperaban las acostumbradas embarcaciones. También fue la culpable de que, tras meses de travesía, llegara a la costa de la ciudad inconsciente, arrastrado por las dunas. Afortunadamente, no era el único que estaba incumpliendo la ley en aquellos instantes. Ha llegado el momento de presentaros a Gota.

Todos los Acuáticos tenían terminantemente prohibido bañarse en las playas congeladas de noche, pero Gota no estaba interesada en ser como todos los Acuáticos. Iba a contracorriente. Su propósito en la vida no era convertirse en otro miembro intercambiable de la uniforme multitud. Las únicas leyes que respetaba eran no creerse todo lo que oía y no acatar ninguna orden sin rechistar al menos una vez. Tenía un defecto congénito: la curiosidad. Para celebrar su pequeña parcela de libertad dentro de aquella prisión de mediocridad, cada madrugada se sumergía desnuda en la arena cuando el mar estaba desierto. Siempre se había preguntado cómo reaccionaría si aparecía alguna otra persona en la playa. Aquella noche podría averiguarlo.

Dadas las circunstancias, Llama estaba algo apagado. Aun así, el fuerte rojo de su piel anunciaba que no era otro Acuático azulado más. De todos modos, cuando Gota encontró su cuerpo inerte en la orilla, el color de su piel le importó bastante poco. Decidió acogerlo en su casa hasta que mejorara. Tenía espacio, tiempo y ganas de sobra. Y, sobre todo, no tenía excusa.

Aquella fue la primera vez que se vieron, pero sería durante los días que él pasó recuperándose junto a ella cuando se conocerían de verdad. Compartieron largas jornadas conversando acerca de sus culturas, descubriendo los secretos de pueblos que hasta ese momento ni siquiera habían sabido que existían. Se entendieron a la perfección, fundando una nueva lengua de la que eran los únicos hablantes. Aprendieron el uno del otro más de lo que nunca habrían podido aprender solos. Y, de manera nada sorprendente, se enamoraron. Puede que los dos fueran demasiado tercos como para reconocerlo, pero podéis fiaros de mí. Al fin y al cabo, soy un narrador omnisciente.

La razón por la que no se atrevían a expresar sus sentimientos en voz alta estaba bien clara: nunca podrían consumir su amor sin consumirse. Mientras tanto, las autoridades recibían cada vez más información sobre sucesos extraños en casa de Gota. Los informes de vecinos que afirmaban haber vislumbrado un intruso carmesí en su vivienda hicieron que se tomaran en serio el testimonio de un viejo pescador de escorpiones que afirmaba haber visto a una joven llevarse a cuestras un cuerpo escarlata de una playa congelada. Decidieron que había que acabar con aquel problema. Era la primera vez que una Acuática se veía envuelta en un asunto de estas características, pero, ¿qué importaban dos vidas frente a la seguridad de toda una nación?

El día en el que se cumplían tres meses desde la llegada de Llama, una patrulla de la Policía Húmeda se presentó en casa de Gota. Aunque sus intenciones fueran desconocidas, con un simple vistazo a sus rostros podía deducirse que no eran ni remotamente amistosas. La heterogénea pareja intentó escapar saliendo por la ventana y subiendo la escalera de inundaciones. En cuanto puso un pie en la terraza, Llama recibió un fuerte puñetazo.

—Supongo que los Flamígeros no tienen ni idea de lo que es un ascensor —gruñó el jefe de la patrulla, autor orgulloso del golpe.

Les estaban esperando en la azotea. No había escapatoria posible. Sin pensarlo demasiado, subieron a la cornisa, se cogieron de la mano, y contemplaron el vacío ante ellos.

–No hagan nada de lo que después puedan arrepentirse –les gritó el jefe.

Llama y Gota decidieron hacerle caso. Se abrazaron y se fundieron en un beso. Él ardió en llamas, ella se desbordó. De sus cuerpos quedó sólo vapor, que ascendió hasta mezclarse con las nubes.

¿Fin?

No.

Sólo el principio.

La historia de Gota y Llama se extendió por todo el Estado Líquido y mucho más allá. Cada vez más Flamígeros atravesaban las fronteras de la capital y cada vez más Acuáticos los acogían en sus casas. A modo de protesta, muchos se evaporaron en abrasadores abrazos como homenaje a la ahora mítica pareja que lo comenzó todo. Estas combustiones nada espontáneas se multiplicaron por toda la ciudad, dejando al gobierno sin nadie al que gobernar.

Sobre el Estado Líquido se formó un nuevo país poblado por los Gases Nobles, las volátiles nuevas formas de vida que originaban las combustiones. La Nación de las Nubes. Un país donde todos estaban a la misma altura y a aquellos que se creían superiores se los llevaba el viento. Un país donde no había más separación que la de los átomos de sus habitantes. Un país donde todos eran iguales fueran cuales fueran sus diferencias.

No había agua en el mundo capaz de apagar ese fuego.

The Discovery of Fire

Yeray García Celades. Spain

A drop of water in the desert. There could be no better definition for the Liquid State, the capital of a world formed three quarters by land. A city of water surrounded by oceans of sand, where the dunes clashed against the coast, the beaches were made of ice and the rivers of stone. A place where the impossible was the oxygen of its residents, the Aquatics.

The Aquatics were very fortunate. Not only because they were born in the Liquid State, a reservoir of the most valuable material of the earth but because the blood running through their veins was also colourless, odourless and tasteless. They undoubtedly were the dominant race on that desert globe. This was so because there was no other type of living organism beyond its borders. Or, at least, this was the official version argued by the city authorities.

As happens with all official versions, any similarity with reality was pure coincidence. For some years, small four-wheel boats from abroad had been reaching the coasts of the Liquid State. Their poor crews were made up by the Flammables from the Igneous Lands whose only captain was the desire for a better life.

The Flammables were a warm-blooded people, with a tendency to burn. They inhabited the vast deserts surrounding the Liquid State, dispersed in different nomadic tribes. Their skin easily caught fire and, given their low standard of living, nobody should blame them for burning easily. As the sharpest reader can imagine, such an ardent race would not remain arms crossed faced with the different conditions that they had to endure just

because they were born in the wrong place. The Liquid State was their Promised Land, the destination of long crossings through the desert that only the bravest dared undertake. A paradise where happiness was waiting for them and that they would never want to leave. This is the only explanation for why not one of the brave had returned.

Unfortunately, the reality was quite different. The authorities of the Liquid State had concealed the existence of the Flammables to its residents afraid, as the good rulers they were, of their citizens knowing more than necessary. The security forces were responsible for intercepting the boats before they reached the coast and anyone noticed their presence. As for the Flammables onboard... well, let's say that the government took good care to extinguish those fires.

Given the circumstances, a small flame sufficed to light the fuse that would blow up everything. In fact, Flame was the name of the Flammable who would change everything.

Flame was the only member of his family that had survived the hostile living conditions abroad. Only ashes remained of his loved ones. The only inheritance he received was a mission. Instead of a present, he was bequeathed a future. He had to reach the Liquid State and ensure that his family's sacrifice had been for something. If he had to swim across the desert, he would swallow all the sand necessary. His determination to swim until the Promised Land, which some would call recklessness, would finally mean that he was not detected by the uncontrolled security controls of the Liquid State, which

now only awaited the usual boats. It was also why, after months of crossing, he reached the city coast unconscious, dragged by the dunes. Fortunately, he was not the only one breaking the law at that time. The time has come to introduce you Drop.

All the Aquatics had strictly forbidden bathing on the frozen waters along the beach at night, but Drop was not interested in being like all Aquatics. She was going against the tide. Her purpose in life was not to become another interchangeable member of the uniform crowd. The only law she respected was not believing everything she heard and not obeying any order without complaining at least once. She had a congenital defect: curiosity. To celebrate her small portion of freedom within that prison of mediocrity, every dawn she dived naked in the sand when the sea was deserted. She had always wondered how she would react if any other person appeared on the beach. That night she would find out.

Given the circumstances, Flame was a little listless. Nevertheless, the dark red of his skin announced that he was not just another bluish Aquatic and when Drop found his body motionless on the shore, she did not care that much about the colour of his skin. She decided to put him up in her house until he felt better. She had enough space, time and will. And, above all, she had no excuse.

That was the first time they met, but it was during the days he spent recovering next to her that they would really get to know each other.

They shared long days talking about their cultures, discovering the secrets of peoples that until then they didn't know existed. They understood each other greatly, founding a new language that only they spoke. They learnt from each other more than they would have learnt on their own. And, not surprisingly, they fell in love. Perhaps they were both too

stubborn to acknowledge it, but you can trust me. In the end, I am the omniscient narrator.

The reason why they did not dare express their feelings aloud was quite clear: they could never consummate their love without extinguishing each other.

Meanwhile, the authorities received increasingly more news about strange events at Drop's house. The reports by the neighbours stating that they had glimpsed a purple intruder in her home made them take seriously the testimony of an old scorpion fisherman who said that he had seen a young girl carrying on her back a scarlet body from a frozen beach. They decided that it was necessary to put an end to the problem. It was the first time that an Aquatic woman had been involved in an affair of that kind, but what did two lives matter faced with the security of a whole nation?

The day that marked three months since the arrival of Flame, a patrol of the Wet Police turned up at Drop's. Although their intentions were unknown, with just a look at their faces you could see that they were not even remotely friendly. The heterogeneous couple tried to escape through the window and go up the flood staircase. As soon as he put one foot on the roof, Flame was violently beaten.

"I suspect that the Flammables have no idea of what a lift is," grumbled the leader of the patrol, the proud author of the punch.

They were waiting for them on the roof. There was no possible way out. Without thinking too much, they went up to the cornice, held hands and looked at the emptiness before them.

"Don't do anything you'll later regret," the leader shouted.

Flame and Drop decided to ignore him. They embraced and fused in a kiss. He burnt in flames, she overflowed. Of their bodies, only steam remained, which went up until it mixed with the clouds.

The end?

No.

Just the beginning.

The story of Drop and Flame spread throughout the Liquid State and far beyond. Increasingly more Flammables crossed the borders of the capital and increasingly more Aquatics welcomed them to their homes. In protest, many evaporated themselves in the burning embraces as a tribute to the now legendary couple that had begun everything. These not at all spontaneous combustions multiplied all over the city, leaving the government with no one to govern.

A new country was formed in the Liquid State by the Noble Gases, the new volatile forms of life caused by the combustions. The Nation of the Clouds. A country where they were all on the same level and those who considered themselves superior were blown away by the wind. A country where there was no other separation than that of the atoms of its inhabitants. A country where everyone was equal despite their differences.

There was no water in the world capable of extinguishing that fire.

Kendi dağıniza tirmanın

Lara Bulut. Türkiye

Sıcak bir Ağustos sabahı gözüne giren güneş ışıklarıyla uyanan Ali, gece yatarken perdele-ri kapatmayı unuttuğu için kendine kızarak yatağından kalktı, ağır adımlarla pencereye doğru yürüdü. İşsizliğin tek güzel tarafı geç kalkmaktı, bunu da kendime çok gördüm diye düşündü. Mutfakta kendine oldukça sert bir kahve yaparken, bir yandan da her sabah yaptığı gibi bilgisayarını açmış, yaptığı iş başvurularına geri dönüş olması umuduyla e-maillerini kontrol ediyordu. Mail kutusunda birkaç saçma reklam dışında bir şey bulamamanın hayal kırıklığıyla derin bir of çekip salona geldiği sırada telefonun çaldığını duydu.

Arayan Daniel' dı. Daniel, üniversitenin üçüncü senesinde exchange öğrencisi olarak git-tiği Fransa'da oda arkadaşıydı. Çok güzel bir dostluk kurmuşlar, birlikte geçirdikleri dört ay bo-yunca Daniel onu ülkesinde adeta bir ev sahibi gibi ağırlamıştı. Ali İstanbul'a döndüğünden beri de ara ara konuşurlar, birbirlerinin halini hatırlarını sorarlardı. Ali, arkadaşının iş bulup bulamadığı sorusuna cevap vermek istemediğinden telefonu açmakta tereddütte kapıldığı sırada yapacağı bu konuşmanın hayatını değiştireceğinden bihaberdi. Yanıtlı tuşuna bastığı an, telefonun diğer ucundaki sevgili arkadaşının hayat dolu sesini duydu.

-Merhaba Ali, nasılsın?

-İyiyim Daniel, aradığına çok sevindim. Ben de geçen gün uzun zamandır konuşamadığı-mızı düşünüp seni arayacaktım sonra aklımdan çıkmış. Sen nasılsın?

-Ben de iyiyim. Defne nasıl? Düğüne davet edileceğim günü dört gözle bekliyorum, İstan-bul'u da sizleri de çok özledim.

-Henüz ufukta evlilik gözüküyor dostum ama bizi ziyaret etmek için bir bahaneye ihti-yacın yok biliyorsun.

-Tabi biliyorum, o işin şakası. Aslında ben seni niçin aradım biliyor musun? Hala çalışmı-yorsun sanırım, değil mi?

İşte beklediğim soru diye düşünen Ali; -"Evet dostum, henüz kendime uygun bir iş bula-bilmiş değilim." dedi.

-Pekala, işte bu harika.

-Nasıl yani?

-Çünkü ben senin için bir tane buldum.

Ali, sevinç ve şaşkınlık içerisinde arkadaşını dinlemeye devam etti.

-Biliyorsun ben Fransa'da enerjisi sektöründe bir firmada çalışıyorum. Şirketim güneş enerjisi sektöründe de faaliyet gösteriyor. Yalnız güneş enerjisi panelleri üretmekle kalmıyoruz aynı zamanda farklı bölgelerde güneş enerjisi kullanımının yaygınlaşması için projeler oluşturu-p güneş enerjisi santralleri kuruyoruz. Ve bil bakalım bu projelerden birinin gerçekleştirilmesi düşünülen ülkelerden biri hangisi?

-Türkiye mi ?!

-Evet dostum, aynen öyle. Projeye ilişkin olarak devlet kurumlarından bir iki tanesiyle yazıştık ve olumlu sonuç aldık, bizi ülkenize davet ettiler. Ancak bizim projemizi detaylandırıp

gerçek anlamda bir fizibilite raporu hazırlayabilmemiz için devlet mercilerinin yanı sıra, bölgeye hakim ve insanlarla ana dilinde iletişim kurabilecek bir kişiye ihtiyacımız var. Eğer projeye sıcak bakarsan sana şimdiye kadar yapılmış ön araştırmaya ilişkin raporları ve yapılması gereken şeylerin detaylı bir listesini mail atabilirim. Bu arada maaş konusunda hiç endişelenme, şirketimi bu konuda oldukça cömert bulacağına eminim. Evet, ne diyorsun?

-Ne diyeceğimi bilemiyorum dostum. Bu gerçekten harika bir haber. Sana teşekkür etmek dışında bana söyleyecek bir şey bırakmadın Daniel. Seni şirketine mahcup etmemek için elimden geleni yapacağım. Tekrar teşekkürler dostum.

-Teşekkür etmene gerek yok, sen benim için çok değerlisin Ali. Üstelik senden iyisini bulacak değiliz, ben bu işin altından kalkacağına eminim. Müdürüme senden ve özgeçmişinden bahsedip Türkiye projesinde bize yardımcı olabileceğini söylediğimde bu durumu çok sıcak karşıladı. Ona işi kabul ettiğini söylediğimde eminim o da memnun olacaktır. Sana bu konudaki bütün çalışmaları ve yazışmaları iletıyorum şimdi. Daha sonra ne yapman gerektiğiyle ilgili seni bilgilendireceğim. Görüşürüz dostum.

-Görüşürüz dostum.

Ali telefonu kapatır kapatmaz Defne'yi aradı. Onu akşam yemeğe çıkartmak istediğini söyleyip kutlayacak bir şeyleri olduğunu da eklemeyi ihmal etmedi. Defne'nin özel günlerden biri olmadığını anlaması birkaç saniyeyi geçmedi. Erkek arkadaşının bir iş bulduğu düşünceyle sevinen genç kız cıvı cıvı sesiyle "Seni seviyorum sevgilim, akşam görüşürüz" diyerek telefonu kapattı. Ali, bilgisayarın başına oturmuş bir yandan Daniel'in atacağı e-mailleri beklerken bir yandan da bu işi gerçekten yapıp yapamayacağını düşünüyordu. Üniversitede mühendislik eğitimi alırken her ne kadar enerji sistemlerine ilişkin bir ders almışsa da güneş enerjisi sektörüne ilişkin çok bir bilgisi olduğu söylenemezdi. Heyecanı yerini tereddütlere bıraktığı o an, araştırmaya başladı. Araştırdıkça bir yandan insanlar ve çevre için ne kadar güzel bir şey yapılacağını düşünüyor, onun da bu işin bir parçası olma şansı elde edeceği için seviniyor, bir yandan ise ülkesinde bugüne dek bu sektörün gelişmemiş olmasına şaşırıyordu. Türkiye, Avrupa'nın en çok güneş alan ülkelerinden biri olmasına ve teknik olarak yüzölçümünün %63'ünde güneş enerjisinden yararlanılabilecek olmasına rağmen, Türkiye'de güneş enerjisi, elektrik üretim kaynaklarından biri olarak dahi sayılıyordu.

Ali, Daniel'dan gelen e-mailleri defalarca okumuş, saatlerce araştırma yapmış, konuyla ilgili fikir sahibi olduğunu düşündüğü bir iki arkadaşıyla konuşmuştu. Yapılması gerekenler listesinde, projeye başlanmadan önce alınması gereken bir takım hukuki izinlerden bahsediliyordu. Bunları Defne'ye sorarım diye düşündüğü an saatine baktı. Saat 20:00'ı gösteriyordu, Defne'yle buluşacaklarını tamamen unutmuştu. Alelacele yerinden kalkıp telefonuna baktığında kız arkadaşının cevapsız çağrı ve mesajlarını gördü. Mesajlardan anlaşılan oydu ki; Defne buluşacakları restorana çoktan gitmişti. Hemen kız arkadaşını arayarak olduğu yerden kalkmamasını, on beş dakika sonra yanında olacağını söyledi.

Restoranın kapısından girdiği an uzaktaki bir masada tek başına oturan kız arkadaşını gördü. "O kadar güzel ki" diye düşündü, "Onu fark etmemek, ışığıyla büyülenmemek imkansız, neredeyse altı senedir birlikteyiz ama ben onu her görüşümde sanki tekrar aşık oluyorum". Ali, bir eliyle arkasında sakladığı çiçekleri masaya gelince kız arkadaşına uzatıp onu beklettiği için özür diledi. Restoranda geçirdikleri birkaç saat boyunca son zamanlarda hiç olmadıkları kadar keyifli olan çift, durmaksızın Ali'nin yeni işi ile ilgili konuştular. Ertesi sabah alarmın sesiyle uyanan Ali, telefonunda Daniel'in cevapsız çağrılarını görünce hemen arkadaşını aradı.

-Dostum erkencisin, günaydın.

-Günaydın Ali.

-Bir sıkıntın yok ya, sesin kötü geliyor.

-Aslında var gibi...

-Endişelendiriyorsun beni, herkesin sağlığı yerinde değil mi?

-Yok dostum öyle bir şey değil. Dün sana bahsettiğim Türkiye projesiyle ilgili...

-Bir sorun mu çıktı?

-Evet, aslında sorundan da öte. Bu sabah şirkette projeye ilgili bir toplantı vardı. Seni biraz da dün bu yüzden aradım, bugünkü toplantıda senden bahsedebilmek için.

-Beni iş için yetersiz mi buldular?

-Hayır, seninle alakalı hiçbir sorun yok. Sorun projenin kendisinde. Devletinizle yapılan son yazışmalarla ortaya çıkan o ki; alınması gereken tonlarca izin var ve santralde üretililecek enerji devlet tarafından sınırlandırılmış durumda. Sadece bununla da kalmıyor santralin kurulabilmesi için, altı aylık bir deneme süresi zorunlu kılınmış. Bu süreçte belirli ölçümler yapılmalıymış, ancak yöneticilerim bu süreyi hem zaman kaybı olarak görüyorlar hem de altı ay zaten ölçüm yapmak için yeterli bir süre değil. Üstelik bu süre sonunda yapılan ölçümler devlet tarafından onaylanmazsa proje tamamen iptal oluyor. Yani, işin aslı, ülkenizdeki prosedür Avrupa'dan çok farklı ve bütün bunlardan dolayı yöneticilerim projeyi en azından prosedürler değişene kadar bekletme kararı aldılar.

-Anlıyorum.

-Çok üzgünüm dostum. Seni gereksiz yere heveslendirdiğim için kendimi çok suçlu hissediyorum. Keşke kesinleşene kadar sana bu işten hiç bahsetmeseydim. Ama inan böyle olacağını düşünemedim.

-Daniel kendini suçlayacağın bir durum yok. Sen nereden bilebilirdin ki? Üzülmedim desem yalan olur. Ülkem için böyle yararlı bir projede görev alacağım için çok sevinmişim açıkçası. Ama sanıyorum bu da benim şanssızlığım dostum.

-Kafana takma lütfen Ali, söylediğim gibi seninle hiçbir alakası olmayan bir durum. Ben kendine uygun bir iş bulacağından eminim dostum.

-Yine de beni düşündüğün için teşekkür ederim. Kapı çalıyor, şimdi kapatıyorum Daniel, sonra konuşuruz. Kendine iyi bak dostum.

-Sen de sevgili dostum.

Aslında kapının çaldığı falan yoktu. Ali'nin tek isteği bu konuşmanın bir an önce bitmesiydi ve bu yüzden arkadaşına bir bahane uydurmuştu. "Neden hep ben?" diye düşünüyordu, "Ne için heveslensem olmuyor, neden bu kadar şanssızım? Zaten Defne de yakında benden bir şey olmayacağını anlayıp beni terk eder, hayatım boyunca başarısız, beş parasız, işsiz bir adam mı olacağım?" Bu düşünceleri zihninden uzaklaştırmak için uyumaya karar verdi. Yatakta birkaç kez sağa sola döndükten sonra uyuyamayacağını anlayıp kendine bir kadeh içki koymak için mutfığa yöneldiği an gözü kütüphanesindeki bir kitaba takıldı. "Kendi dağımıza tırmanın". "Defne'nin aldığı saçma sapan kişisel gelişim kitaplarından biri daha" diye düşündüyse de kitabı eline alıp şöyle bir göz attı. İçinden "Dağı bir bulabilsem tırmanacağım" diye söylenirken gözü bir cümleye takıldı; "Henüz dağımı bulamadıysan belki dağı yaratmakla başlamalısın". "Bu da ne demek" diye homurdandı, sanki o kadar kolaydı. Şimdi, bu iş yattı diye mesela kendi başına yapabilir miydi bu işi? Ne sermayem var, ne deneyimim diye düşünürken birden

aklında bir ampul yandı. Daniel’ın şirketinin bu projeden vazgeçmesinin en büyük sebebi, altı aylık deneme süresi için bir santral kurma riski almak istememeleriydi. Peki santral kurulmadan projenin gerçekleştirilmesi düşünülen yere yakın konumdaki evlere güneş panelleri takılıp ölçümler yapılamaz mıydı? Böylece hem o yörenin yaşayanları kendi elektriklerini üretebilir hem de Ali’nin yaptığı ölçüm sonuçları beklenen düzeyde olursa devlet izni alınabilir ve proje yeniden gündeme gelirdi. Daniel’ın önceki gün gönderdiği e-maillerden biri vasıtasıyla, yapılması planlanan santralin yaklaşık konumunu öğrenmişti. Ülkenin güney doğusunda Gaziantep ilinin yakınlarında bir yerd. Zaten kendi araştırmalarından da Türkiye’nin en çok güneş alan bölgesinin Güney Doğu Anadolu olduğunu öğrenmişti. O bölgeye gidip orada yaşayan insanlarla konuşsa acaba çatılarına güneş enerjisi panelleri yerleştirmesine izin verirler miydi? Daha da önemlisi bu panelleri nereden temin edebilirdi?

Akşam Defne eve geldiğinde Ali’nin keyifli haline son derece şaşırılmıştı, bir gün içerisinde önce iş bulan sonra da bulduğu gibi kaybeden erkek arkadaşını bir hayli canı sıkıntı bulmayı bekliyordu. Merakına yenik düşen genç kız, bilmediği bir şey olup olmadığını sorunca zaten olanları dört gözle ona anlatmayı bekleyen Ali, Defne’yi karşısına oturtup konuşmaya başladı. Bu işi kendi başına denemek istediğini ve durumu Daniel ile paylaştığını anlattı. Daniel, Ali’nin bu fikrini hemen müdürüne anlatmıştı. Öncelikle böyle bir durumda maaş verilmeyeceğini hatırlatan müdür, arkadaşın yine de böyle bir şeyi gönüllü olarak yapmaya istekliyse “Ne mutlu bize!” demiş aradan geçen birkaç saat sonra ise ölçüm yapılacak evlere takılacak panelleri ücret almadan göndermeyi teklif etmişti. Bu durumda geriye tek bir sorun kalıyordu. Ali altı ay sonunda gerçekleşmesi kesin olmayan bir proje için uğraşacak ve bu esnada bir geliri olmayacaktı. “Sanki şu an hali hazırda bir işim, bir maaşım mı var?” diye düşünerek ölçüm sonuçları beklenenin altında çıkıp proje gerçekleşirse bile en azından panellerin takıldığı ev sahipleri için müthiş bir yarar sağlayacağı düşüncesiyle kendini iyi hissediyordu. “Doğa Dostları Derneği’ni aradın mı?” diye sordu Defne. “Biliyorsun ben oraya üyeyim ve bildiğim kadarıyla çevre için yararlı bu tarz projeleri destekliyorlar. Belki bu iş için sana da yardımları dokunabilir.” “Ah keşke” diye düşünen Ali, yarın yapılacaklar listesinin en başına derneği aramayı çoktan koymuştu.

Telefonda görüştüğü dernek yetkilisi Ali’nin anlattıklarıyla oldukça ilgilenmiş olacak ki Ali, ertesi gün konuyla ilgili detaylı bir sunum yapması için dernek merkezine davet edildi. Dersine oldukça iyi çalışan genç adam, yaptığı sunum sonrası dernek üyelerinin sordukları bütün soruları detaylı olarak cevaplamış ve üyeleri etkilemeyi başarmış görünüyordu. “Pekâlâ” dedi dernek yöneticilerinden biri, “Bizden beklentin nedir?”. Ali, güneş enerjisi santrallerine ve doğaya zarar vermemek adına ne kadar tercih edilebilecek bir sistem olduğu konusuna o kadar odaklanmıştı ki dernekten gerçek anlamda nasıl bir yardım beklediğini hiç düşünmemişti. Birkaç saniyelik sessizliği bozan, yine soruyu soran yönetici oldu; “İsterseniz şöyle yapalım. Biz bu konuyla ilgili kendi bünyemizde de bir araştırma ve değerlendirme yapıp birkaç gün içerisinde size herhangi bir yararımızın dokunup dokunamayacağına ilişkin size geri dönelim.” “Tabi, o zaman sizden haber bekliyorum” diyerek ayağa kalkan Ali, kendisine zaman ayırdıkları için teşekkür ederek oradan ayrıldı.

Ali sonraki günlerde araştırmalarına devam ederken bir yandan da Daniel ile fikir alışverişinde bulunuyor, kendine bir yol haritası çizmeye uğraşıyordu. Artık bu fikri iyiden iyiye benimsemişti, dernek olumsuz bir geri dönüşte bulursa bile bu işi yapmaya kararlıydı. Derken beklenen telefon geldi. Ali, tekrar görüşmek üzere, derneğe davet edildi. Dernek yetkilileri Ali’ye

hayal bile etmediği bir teklifle geldiler. Dernek bütçesinin bir kısmını bu işin için tahsis etmeye hazır olan gönüllüler, Ali'nin sadece ulaşım ve konaklama ücretini karşılamakla kalmıyor aynı zamanda ona belirli bir maaş ödeme teklifinde bulunuyorlardı. Şaşkınlığını her halinden anlamak mümkündü. Hayatında ilk defa, üstelik de talep etmediği halde para kazanacaktı. “Peki, benim böyle insanlara, doğaya gönüllü olarak hizmet eden bir dernekten para alacak olmam etik olur mu?” diye sormaktan kendini alıkoyamadı. Bu sorudan memnun olmuş bir ifadeyle hafifçe gülümseyen yaşlı adam “Geçen gün, doğa için ne kadar yararlı bir şey yapma niyetinde olduğunı kendin izah ettin ama bunun gerçekten farkında mısın?” diye sorarak, sorusuna bir yanıt beklemeden devam etti: “Biz yıllardır ülkemizde yapılan hidroelektrik santralleriyle savaşıyoruz biliyor musun? Yapılan her bir santral; ekolojik dengeyi bozuyor, iklimleri değiştiriyor, küresel ısınma dışında hiçbir şeye hizmet ettiği yok bu santrallerin. Yüzlerce, binlerce ağaç kesiyorlar, orada yaşayan bütün canlılar telef oluyor, tarihi ve doğal güzelliklerin sular altında kalması da cabası. Şimdi sen bize doğal dengeyi bozmadan elektrik üretme şansımız olduğunu söylüyorsun. Yurt dışında bu santrallerin kullanıldığı ülkelerden örnekler veriyorsun. Eğer söz ettiğin gibi ölçüm neticeleri beklentiye karşılar ve bu şirket ülkemizde bu santrali kurmaya ikna olursa hem insanlar için hem de doğa için ne kadar güzel bir şey yapılmış olur. Biz de Doğa Dostları Derneği olarak bunun bir parçası olmaktan ve seni desteklemekten ancak gurur duyarız. Hem emek karşılığı para alacak olmak neden yanlış olsun? Sen de genç bir delikanlısın, bir yandan da kendine bir hayat kurma gayesinde olduğunu tahmin ediyorum.” Yaşlı adamın bu sözleri karşısında gururlanan Ali, kendisine böyle bir fırsat sundukları için üyelere tek tek teşekkür edip bir an önce yola çıkmaya söz vererek yanlarından ayrıldı.

Havaalanında camekânın arkasından kendisine el sallayan kız arkadaşına gülen gözlerle bakan genç adam, kendinden daha önce hiç olmadığı kadar emindi. “Bunu başaracağım.” dedi içinden. “Ne kadar çalışmam, ne kadar uğraşmam gerekirse gereksin, bu projenin gerçekleşmesi için elimden gelenin fazlasını yapacağım.” “İnsanlara yararlı olabilmek için ne kadar büyük bir fırsat” diye düşündü. Eğer her şey planlandığı gibi giderse birkaç yıl içinde bölgedeki tüm insanlar kendi elektriğini üretebilecekti. Üstelik elektrik götürülemeyen köyler için de hiçbir problem kalmayacak, elektrik faturasını ödeyemediği için elektriği kesilen herhangi bir ev de kalmayacaktı. Doğa Dostları Derneği’ndeki yaşlı üyenin söylediği gibi, bütün bunlar doğal dengeyi bozmadan yapılacaktı. Ali bunları düşündükçe içi içine sığmıyordu. Bir elinde çantası, diğerinde Defne’nin genç adamın elinde gördüğü zaman hayret ettiği “Kendi Dağımıza Tırmanın” kitabı ve kafasında hayalleri ile Ali, hayatı boyunca gururla anlatacağı bir hikâyeyi yazmaya gidiyordu...

Climb Your Own Mountain

Lara Bulut. Turkey

Waking from the sunlight in his eyes on a hot August morning, Ali got up from his bed, mad at himself for forgetting to draw the curtains before he had gone to bed the night before, and took heavy steps towards the window. “Getting up late is the best part of unemployment and I don’t even get to enjoy it,” he thought. While making a strong coffee in the kitchen, he turned on his computer and checked his emails as he did every morning in the hope of getting a response to his job applications. It was when he walked to the living room with a deep sigh of disappointment at finding nothing but a few silly promotions in his inbox that he heard his phone ring.

It was Daniel. Daniel was his roommate in France, where he studied as an exchange student during his third year at university. They had become really good friends and Daniel was a great host to him during the four months they spent together. They continued to talk occasionally after Ali’s return to Istanbul, asking about each other. As he hesitated to answer the phone because of his reluctance to answer Daniel’s questions about his employment situation, Ali was unaware that this conversation would change his life. Upon pressing the reply button, he heard his beloved friend’s voice bursting with vitality on the other end of the line.

“Hi Ali, how are you?”

“Good Daniel, I’m really glad you called. The other day I noticed how long it’s been since we last talked and thought of calling you, but then I forgot. How are you?”

“I’m good too. How’s Defne? I’m looking forward to your wedding; I really missed you guys and Istanbul.”

“Marriage is not on our agenda yet, but you know you don’t need an excuse to visit us mate.”

“Of course I know that, I was just kidding. Actually, that’s not why I called you. Are you still unemployed?”

“Here we go,” thought Ali, and replied, “Yes mate, I still haven’t found a job that’s right for me.”

“Ok, that’s great.”

“What do you mean?”

“Cause I’ve found one for you.”

Filled with bewilderment and joy, Ali continued to listen to his friend.

“As you know, I work for a company in the energy industry in France. The company I work for is also active in the solar energy sector. We manufacture solar energy panels and create projects to spread the use of solar energy in different regions and install plants. Guess which country we plan to implement one of these projects?”

“Turkey?!”

“Yeah mate, exactly. We’ve been corresponding with a few government institutions regarding the project and have received positive responses. They have invited us to your country. But we need a person who has vast knowledge of the region and can communicate with the locals in their native language, in addition to the government authorities, so that we can detail our project and prepare a comprehensive feasibility report. If the project appeals to you, I can email you the reports of the preliminary studies we have done so far and a detailed to-do list. Don’t worry about the salary by the way; I’m sure you’ll find my company very generous in that. So, what do you think?”

“I don’t know what to say mate. This is really great news. I can say nothing but thank you Daniel. I will try my best to not embarrass you. Thank you again my friend.”

“No need to thank me, you’re very valuable to me, Ali. Plus, I don’t think we can find anyone better than you and you’ll pull this off. When I mentioned you and your background to my manager, saying you could help us with the Turkey project, he reacted very positively. I’m sure he’ll be really pleased when I tell him that you accepted the job. I’ll send you all the studies and correspondence in a minute. I will then let you know what you need to do. See you mate.”

“See you my friend.”

Ali called Defne right after ending the phone call. He told her that he would like to go out together for dinner that evening, also adding that there was something to celebrate. It took no more than a few seconds for Defne to realise that this wasn’t one of their special occasions. Happy with the thought of her boyfriend finding a job, the young girl said “I love you darling, see you tonight” cheerfully and hung up. Ali sat in front of his computer, thinking about whether he could actually pull this off while he waited for Daniel’s emails. Although he had taken a course on energy systems in his engineering studies at university, he didn’t really have much knowledge of the solar energy sector. When his excitement was replaced by hesitations, he began to research. As he did so, he thought about what a nice thing he would be doing for people and the environment, happy to be given the opportunity to be part of this project, while also being surprised at how this sector hadn’t been developed in his country so far. Despite being one of the sunniest countries in Europe and 63% of its surface area being technically capable of using solar energy, the technology

was not even considered one of the possible sources of electricity production in Turkey.

Ali read Daniel’s emails repeatedly, did hours of research and talked to a couple of friends that he thought had insight into the subject. The to-do list mentioned some legal permits that needed to be obtained before starting the project. He thought that he would consult Defne about these permits and looked at his watch. It was 8 pm. He had completely forgotten that he was meeting Defne. As he got up in a hurry and looked at his phone, he saw the missed calls and texts from his girlfriend. The texts suggested that Defne had already gone to the restaurant where they were to meet. He immediately called her, telling her to stay put and that he would be there in fifteen minutes.

Upon entering the restaurant, he saw his girlfriend sitting alone at a far table. “She’s so beautiful,” he thought, “that it is impossible not to notice her, not to be enchanted by her light. We have been together for almost six years, but it’s like I fall in love with her again and again every time I see her.” Ali walked towards the table with the flowers behind his back, and then apologised to her for keeping her waiting as he offered her the flowers. The couple, so blissful during the few hours they spent at the restaurant, talked non-stop about Ali’s new job.

Waking up to his alarm the next morning, Ali called Daniel right away as he saw his missed calls.

“Looks like you’re up early today mate. Good morning.”

“Good morning Ali.”

“You sound upset. I hope everything is fine.”

“Actually no...”

“I’m getting worried, is everyone ok?”

“No, it’s not that. It’s about that Turkey project I mentioned yesterday...”

“Is there a problem?”

“Yeah, actually it’s more than a problem. We’ve had a meeting at the company about the project this morning. It’s kind of why I called you yesterday, to mention you in the meeting today.”

“Do they think I’m unsuitable for the job?”

“No, it has nothing to do with you. The problem is the project itself. We understand from recent correspondence with your government that there are tons of permits that should be obtained and the government imposes a restriction on the energy produced at the plant. But that’s not everything; they also require a six-month trial period to install the plant. Certain measurements need to be taken in this process, but my directors think that’s a waste of time and six months is not enough for measurements anyway. What’s more, the project will be cancelled altogether if the government does not approve the measurements at the end of this period. So, the thing is, the procedure in your country is way different from Europe and for that reason my directors have decided to suspend the project, at least until the procedures change.”

“I see.”

“I’m really sorry mate. I feel so guilty for getting you excited over nothing. I wish I had never mentioned this to you before everything was final. But I never thought this would happen, believe me.”

“Daniel, you have nothing to feel guilty about. How could you know? I can’t say that I’m not upset. I was really happy to be involved in such a beneficial project for my country. But I wasn’t lucky, I guess.”

“Please don’t dwell over this Ali, as I said, it has nothing to do with you. I’m sure you’ll find a job that you’ll like.”

“Still, thanks for thinking of me. There’s someone at the door, so I have to hang up Daniel. Talk later. Take care, mate.”

“You too, my dear friend.”

Actually, there wasn’t anyone at the door. All Ali wanted was to end this conversation as soon as possible, so he had come up with this excuse. “Why is it always me?” he thought. “Nothing I get excited about ever happens, why am I so unlucky? Defne will also leave me soon, thinking I’ll be good for nothing. Will I always be a failure, an unemployed guy without a penny?” He decided to sleep to get rid of these thoughts. Tossing around in his bed a few times, he knew he wouldn’t be able to fall asleep and headed for the kitchen to get himself a drink, when he caught a glimpse of one of the books in his bookcase called *Climb Your Own Mountain*. “One of those ridiculous self-improvement books that Defne bought,” he thought, yet he picked up the book and took a look at it. “I would climb the mountain if I could ever find it,” he complained in his mind, and then a sentence attracted his attention: “If you haven’t found your mountain yet, maybe you should start by creating the mountain.” “What’s that supposed to mean?” he groaned. It wasn’t as easy as that. Now that the project was off the table, could he still do the job on his own? “I have neither capital, nor experience,” he was thinking. Then he had a light-bulb moment. The biggest reason why Daniel’s company didn’t proceed with the project was their reluctance to take the risk of installing a plant for a six-month trial period. But couldn’t they take measurements with solar panels installed in houses close to the project region without installing the plant? Thus, the locals there could generate their own electricity and the permit could be obtained from the government if the results of the measurements made by Ali were at the expected levels. This would put the project on the table again. He knew the approximate location of the plant, thanks to one of the emails sent by Daniel

the day before. It was near the province of Gaziantep, in southeast Turkey. He had also found out during his research that South East Anatolia was the sunniest region in Turkey. If he went there and talked to the locals, would they allow him to install solar energy panels on their rooftops? And more importantly, how could he procure those panels?

When Defne came home that evening, she was surprised by Ali's good mood as she expected her boyfriend, who had found a job and lost it immediately overnight, to be quite upset. Her curiosity made her ask if there was anything she didn't know about. Ali, who was already dying to tell her about his plans, started talking to her. He explained that he wanted to try this out on his own and had also shared this idea with Daniel. Daniel had immediately let his manager know about the idea. The manager first reminded him that Ali would not be paid in this case, and then said that if his friend would still voluntarily do this, it would be fine. A couple of hours after that, he offered to send the panels Ali would install on houses where the measurements would be taken free of charge. There was only one problem left. Ali would work for a project that might not happen at the end of six months and, meanwhile, would not have any income. "It's not like I currently have a job or a salary," he thought and felt good knowing that even if the measurements were lower than expected and the project did not happen, the panels would be extremely beneficial to the owners of houses where they were installed.

"Have you called the Friends of Nature Association?" asked Defne. "As you know, I'm a member there and they support such environmentally-friendly projects. Maybe they could help you with this work."

"Oh, I hope so," thought Ali, having already placed calling the association at the top of the to-do list for the next day.

The association authority who spoke to Ali on the phone was so interested in what Ali told him that he was invited to the association head office to deliver a detailed presentation about the matter the next day. The young man, having studied very well, answered all the questions of the association members in detail after his presentation and appeared to have made an impression on them.

"All right," said one of the association executives, "what do you expect from us?"

Ali was so focused on the solar energy plants and the fact that they were the perfect system to protect the environment that he had never considered the kind of support he actually wanted from the association. The silence that lasted for a few seconds was broken by the same executive.

"Here's what we'll do. We'll research and assess this matter and call you back in a few days to tell you if we can be of any help."

"Sure, then I'll wait to hear from you," said Ali. He stood up and left after thanking them for their time.

While continuing his research over the following days, Ali also exchanged ideas with Daniel, trying to draw a roadmap for himself. He had completely embraced the idea now and was determined to go ahead with his plan even if the association didn't give him support. Then the expected phone call came. Ali was invited to the association for another talk. The association authorities approached Ali with a proposal beyond his dreams. They would allocate a part of the association's budget to this work and would not only cover Ali's accommodation and transportation expenses, but also offered to pay him a salary. It wasn't hard to see his astonishment. He was to make money for the first time in his life, and without even asking for it.

"But would it be ethical for me to take money from an association that voluntarily

serves people and nature?” he couldn’t stop himself from asking.

Smiling faintly with an expression of content, the elderly man asked, “You yourself explained the other day that you were intending to do something very beneficial for nature, but are you really aware of that?” He continued without waiting for an answer. “Do you know that we have been fighting a war against the hydroelectric plants built in our country for years? Each plant that is built disturbs the ecological balance, changes the climate and is good for nothing but global warming. They cut down hundreds of thousands of trees, killing all the living things there, not to mention all the historical and natural attractions buried underwater. Now you’re telling us that we have a chance to generate electricity without disturbing nature’s balance. You give us examples from foreign countries where these plants are used. If the measurement results meet the expectations and the company is convinced about establishing the plant in our country as you have mentioned, what a wonderful thing that would be for both people and nature! We would be proud to be a part of this and to support you as the Friends of Nature Association. Plus, what’s wrong with taking money in return for work? You’re a young man and I assume you’re also trying to build a life for yourself.”

Swollen with pride at the elderly man’s words, Ali thanked each member for giving him such an opportunity and left after promising he would be on his way as soon as possible.

The young man, blithely looking at this girlfriend who waved at him from behind the glass doors at the airport, was more self-confident than ever before. “I will succeed,” he thought. “No matter how hard I have to work, no matter how much I need to struggle, I’ll do whatever I can to see this project bear fruit. What a great opportunity to be of help to people.” If everything went as planned, everyone in the region would be able to generate their own electricity in a couple of years. Moreover, this would also fix the problem for villages with no access to electricity and make sure there are no households whose electricity was cut off because they couldn’t pay their bill. As the elderly member at the Friends of Nature Association said, all this would be done without disturbing nature’s balance. Ali found it difficult to contain himself as he thought about this. Holding his bag in one hand and the book *Climb Your Own Mountain*, which Defne was surprised he was reading, in the other, and with all the dreams in his head, Ali was on his way to write a story that he would tell with pride all his life...

Kimin Ankara'sı?

Murat Mercan. Türkiye

Ustasının ilk gün öğrettiği şekilde dükkânın bereketini kaçırmamak için sağ ayağıyla besmele çekerek dükkâna girerdi. Ona kızdığı günlerin ertesinde ise dükkâna sol ayağıyla girip bir bakıma intikamını alırdı. Bugün sağ ayağıyla girdi. Geç kalmış sayılsa da ustasının gelmesine yarım saat vardı. Matbaadaki baskı malzemelerinin kokusunu artık hissetmiyordu. Başlarda garip ve ağır gelen bu kokuya alışması bir aya yakın sürmüştü. Oysa babasının evden gidişini bir hafta, annesinin ölümünü de on günde atlatmıştı. Neyse ki zamanla alışılmayacak hiçbir şey yoktu bu dünyada.

Benzi soluk, boyu ve boynu uzundu. 15 yaşında olmasına rağmen elleri hasır gibiydi. İki yıla yakındır bu küçük atölyede, malzeme kokusunun arasında baskı işleriyle uğraşıyordu. İşten arta kalan vaktinde Altındağ'daki Baraj mahallesinde geceleri köpek dövüşlerini izlemeye gidiyordu. Yirmi otuz kişinin toplandığı bu gecelerde kavganın daha uzun sürmesi için dişleri sökülen pitbulllar alkış ve küfürler eşliğinde can havliyle birbirlerine saldırıyordu. Burası filmlerdeki gibi mafyanın elinde olan sırtı ceketli, gömleği kravatsız tiplerden ziyade bozkırın ağzı sigaralı, ağzı bozuk, ağzı yamuk delikanlılarının sözünün geçtiği yerlerdendi. Başlarda açık alanda yapılan köpek dövüşleri, polis baskınları sonrası derme çatma eski bir barınağa taşınmak zorunda kalmıştı. Kavgaların müdavimleri genelde asgari ücretle çalışan ya da hiç çalışmayan insanlardı. Mekân, referans usulüyle çalışıyordu. Selim bu mekâna ilk defa işlerini yaptığı Apo sayesinde girmişti. Apo da sağ olsun küçük olmasına rağmen kırmamıştı Selim'i, mekân sahibine "bizden" diyerek onu içeri aldırılmıştı. O günden sonra Selim haftada bir iki kez buraya gelmeye başladı, bahis oynamasa da sıkı takipçisi olmuştu. Dövüşleri izlemiyor adeta kendi dövüşüyordu köpek hırıltılarının is kokusuna karıştığı gecelerde. Apo'yla Selim köpek dövüşü bitince barınağın arkasında iki bira içip kendi yollarına ayrılıyorlardı. Apo'nun tuttuğu Arap isimli köpeğin kazandığı nadir gecelerde ise biranın yerini plastik bardaklarda içilen votka ya da viski alıyordu. O gecelerde Selim'in kafasındakileri açıklamaması için hiçbir sebep yoktu. Defalarca provasını da yapmıştı evde, ama bir türlü lafa giremiyordu.

Selim dışarıdan bakıldığında ortalama bir insandı ancak onu diğer ortalama insanlardan ayıran önemli bir özelliğe de sahipti. Buna özellikten ziyade takıntı da diyebiliriz. Selim'in takıntısı Ankaralı olmayıp da Ankara'da yaşayanlardı. Öğrenciler, memurlar, bürokratlar, işçiler, kahveci Emin, dönerci Orhan, kons Mehtap ve diğerleri. Ona göre tüm bu Ankara'ya sonradan gelen insanlar Selim ve Selim gibilerin fakir kalmasının sebebiydi. Bütün güzel işleri, güzel yerleri hep bu insanlar kapmıştı. Hem babası Sivaslı yan komşusuyla kaçmamış mıydı buralardan? Annesini hastaneye götürdüklerinde acildeki doktor odasında heyecanlı heyecanlı Samsunspor maçına bakmıyor muydu? Allah kahretsin tüm bu insanlar Ankara'nın öz kaynaklarını tüketip burayı koca bir metropole çeviriyordu. Ne vardı kendi memleketlerinde kalıp orayı geliştirmek yerine Ankara'ya göçüp birden hazıra konuyorlardı. Daha geçen gün Rıza usta anlatmamış mıydı, artık her ilde üniversite, büyük hastaneler, duble yollar vardı. Gayet de kendi evlerinde kalıp memleketleri için bir şeyler yapabiliirdi bu üniversiteli güzel kızlar, yakışıklı oğlanlar.

Hepsinin gözü vardı başkentte ama artık buna birisinin dur demesi gerekiyordu. Bu ülke her dönemde kahramanlarını çıkarmıştı. Evet, belki 15 yaşında olabilirdi fakat Ankara şehrinin ve öz Ankaralıların kendisine ihtiyacı vardı. Bu şehir artık kurtulacaktı; Çorumlulardan, Çankırılılardan, Kırıkkalelilerden, yurtta kalan öğrencilerden, Dikmen'deki gecekonduların üstüne çöken iyi giyinimlilerden, Karanfil'de tüm gün bildiri dağıtanlardan, yuva yıkan saçları dalgalı konslardan... Hepsinden, ama hepsinden. Buraya sonradan yerleşen kim varsa... Tek. Belki bu zaman alacaktı fakat sonuçlarına değecekti. Tüm bu insanlar sürüldükten sonra ise boşalacak mevkilere Selim önderliğinde kurulacak komisyonla atamalar yapılacaktı. Atamalar yapılırken adayların fakir ve Ankaralı olması temel ölçüt olacaktı. Sonraki süreçte de matbaa da öğrendiği tekniklerle bir gazete çıkarabilirdi, adı da *Başkent Hür Ses* olurdu. Başına da küçük puntolarla "Ankara Ankaralılarındır" yazardı. Bu gerçekten kafasına yatmıştı.

Dedesini içerdeki kanepenin üstünde televizyonun karşısında sızmıştı. Ankaralı olmayanları Ankara'dan kazıma fikrine son halini vermek için doğrudan odasına geçti. İster istemez Ankaralı olmayanları buradan sürme işi kanlı olacaktı. Bunun için önce kendisini kan tutmamalıydı, bayılmalara son vermeliydi. Bunu aşmanın tek yolunun daha fazla kan görmek olduğunu düşündü. Odadan çıktı, televizyonun altındaki dolaptan dedesinin eski traş takımını açtı. İçindeki perma sharp jileti çıkardı. Kullanılmıştı, ama işini görürdü. Tekrar odaya geçti. Efkârlanacak bir şeyler düşünmeye koyuldu. Annesinin öldüğü gün, babasının kaçıışı, ustasının hırpalayışları, parasızlıktan aç açına yürünmüş yollar... Hiçbiri fayda etmedi. Ta ki ilkokulda Ayşenur'un çığlık çığığa "Öğretmenim Selim'in kafasında bit var" diye bağırmasını hatırlayana dek. Oysa o gün Selim, komşularının bahçesinden eriğe dalmış, ağaçtaki pas gübür ne varsa hepsi kafasına düşmüştü. Öğretmenine bunu anlatmak yerine o ağlamayı seçmişti. Okul çıkışı öğretmeniyle beraber eve gitmişlerdi. Öğretmeni çocuğuyla ilgilenmediği için annesini de bir güzel azarlamış, annesi el pençe divane özür diledikten sonra evden ayrılmıştı. Annesinin o mahcup hali Ayşenur'un çığlıklarından daha üzücüydü. Tüm bu utanç anları aklından geçerken Selim'in sol kolundaki ilk jilet darbeleriyle sıcak kan da akmaya başlıyordu. Sonrası baygınlık...

Sabah uyandığında çarşaf kanla kaplamıştı. Hemen onları toplayıp bir köşeye savurdu. Saat 10'a yaklaşıyordu, işe geç kalmıştı yine. Ustasını aradı bugün işe gelemeyeceğini dedesinin ağrılarının arttığını, hastaneye götürmesi gerektiğini, Pazar günü çalışarak telafi edeceğini anlattı. Ustası yalanına inanmasa da küfürle karışık 'iyi, bak işine' dedi. Selim de aynı şekilde içinden küfür ederek telefonu kapattı. Hemen evden çıkıp Siteler minibüsüne bindi. Apo'nun şirketinin önüne geldi, aradı. Apo beklemesi gerektiğini hemen yanına gelemeyeceğini anlattı. Ama Selim kan ter içinde kalmıştı. Yerinde duramıyor, ardı ardına sigara yakıyor, sürekli kafasını kaşıyordu. Tekrar Apo'yu aradı, karşıdaki kahveye geçmesini yarım saate kalmadan geleceğini bu sefer daha sert bir tonda söyledi. Selim çaresizce kahveye geçti. Kahvedeki kasanın arkasında Ankaragücü arması ile Atatürk posterini vardı. Şükür kahveci bari Ankaralıydı. Biraz rahatlamıştı. Çayını içmeye başladı. Üçüncü çayın şekerlerini atarken Apo kapıda bitti:

-Ne var lan bu saate dat çaldırıyorsun?

-Abi konuşmamız lazım

-Gece konuşurduk boka mı girdi lan geceler?

-Abi ben kötüyüm

-Başlarım abime. Çalışıyoruz diyorum, bak bu koca yerin seceresini ben tutuyorum, kırmadım seni geldim buraya utanmasan ağlayacaksın karşımda. Ne derdin var oğlum senin?

-Abi yarım saat izin alsan. Bira da içeriz. Benden

-Oğlum ben sana ne anlatıyorum, kalk git şuradan. Bira diyor hâlâ, alkolik mi oldun başımıza. Akşam konuşuruz, git yüzünü yıka sonra ikile

Apo, Selim'in içtiği çayın parasını masaya atarak tekrar iş yerine geçti. Selim de yüzünü yıkayıp dışarı çıktı. Saat daha 11 buçuktu. Akşama kadar yapacak bir işi yoktu. Eve gidip uyu-maya karar verdi. Uyuyunca vakit daha hızlı geçer diye düşündü.

Uyandıığında saat 8'e geliyordu. Bir şeyler atıştırmak için mutfığa geçti. Sabah Siteler'de içtiği karbonatlı çayın tadı tekrar ağzına geldi dolabı kapattı. Altındağ'daki Baraj mahallesine doğru yola koyuldu. Bu gece Arap'ın maçı vardı. Kazanırsa muhtemelen viski içerlerdi. En son bir buçuk ay önce viski içmişlerdi, Neşet eşliğinde, sisli ve ışıklı Ankara'ya karşı.

Apo'ya karşı biraz sinirliydi sabah resmen iplenmemişti fakat Apo ikinci adamdı. Ona tahammül etmesi gerektiğinin bilincindeydi. Sabah hiçbir şey yaşanmamış gibi kafalarını tokuşturup maçı izlemeye koyuldular. Arap günlerdir ışık görmemiş gibi gözlerini ufak açılıyordu. Mücadele sert geçiyordu ama Apo bu sefer dirayetli çıkmıştı. Mücadele sonunda son bir darbeye rakibine alt etti. Apo'nun keyfi yerine geldi. Tabi Selim'in de. 300 TL kazanmıştı Apo bu maçtan. Doğruca tekelin yolunu tuttular. Büyük viski küçük çikolata eşliğinde her zamanki mekânlarına geçtiler. O ana dek sabah yaşananlara dek hiç konuşmamışlardı. Apo ilk bardağı doldurup Selim uzatırken söze girdi:

-Ne derdin var oğlum senin, sabahın köründe iş yerime geliyorsun, utanmasan racon ke-seceksin?

-Estağfurullah abi

-Anlat dinliyorum

-Abi içelim şunları önce

-Hay abinin şarap çanağına. Haydi şerefe!

Selim ikinci yudumdan sonra dökülmeye başladı:

-Abi biliyorsun, babam Sivashlı orospu yüzünden bizi bırakıp kaçtı. Annem o Samsunlu doktor yüzünden öldü. Yani Ankaralı olmayan tüm bu insanlar bize sadece ıstırap çektiriyor. Eğer biz fakirsek bunlar tüm iyi yerleri kaplığı için. Ankara'yı mahvettiler, bizi mahvettiler. Bize yaşam alanı bırakmadılar. Sen asgari ücretle koca şirketin muhasebesini tutuyorsun, ben 600 liraya milletin ağız kokusunu çekiyorum her gün. Niye? Ankaralı olduğumuz için. Reva mı bu? Atatürk bunlar için mi başkent yaptı Ankara'yı. Hayır, bizim için yaptı, bizim kurtuluşumuz için. Kimse bunun bilincinde değil. Birilerinin elini masaya vurması lazım artık.

- Oğlum sen ne içiyorsun lan benden habersiz. Baban o orospuyu silah zoruyla kaçırdı, anan da kendi kaderiyle öldü. Allah'ın takdiri, bize arkasından Fatıha okumak düşer. Dünyadan gram haberin yok. Rüyada yaşıyorsun. Seni öksüz yetim diye aldık karşımıza oturttuk. Koruduk kolladık. Sen adam sürmekten bahsediyorsun. Kimi nereden sürüyorsun lan sen o küçük kafan-la. Hasta mısın oğlum sen?

-Abi sen Ankaralı değil misin?

-Haymanalıyım oğlum ben bilmiyor musun?

-E o zaman?

-Ne e o zaman. Kötü bir şey mi yaşadın oğlum sen. Bak varsa bana anlatmadığın bir şey varsa tek adam gibi anlat

-Yok abi. Ben sana yıllardır kafamda olan şeyi anlatıyorum. Sen benimle dalga geçiyorsun

-Ne yani yıllardır Ankaralı olmayanları öldürmeyi mi düşünüyorsun?

-Yok abi süreceğiz hepsini. Direnen olursa kan akabilir. Ben kansız devrimden yanayım. Adil olan da bu zaten. Ama kan akacaksa ona da hazırım

-Lan seni kan tutuyor dalyarak. Neye hazırsın? İki faça atsam şurada iki seksen bayılacaksınız. Neye hazırsın?

-Abi çalıştım evde, sen rahat ol, artık bayılma yok

-İç şunu da seni eve bırakayım

-Ben giderim abi sağ ol keyfini bozma sen

Selim kapıyı hızla çarparak arabadan çıktı. Hayal kırıklığına uğramıştı. Oysa hayalinde bu durumu Apo ya açıkladığı zaman önce alnından öpüp sonra ‘kardeşim seninle gurur duyuyorum, tüm Ankaralılar adına’ diyordu. İşler beklediğinden ters gitmişti. Bu saatte araba da yoktu eve giden. Tüm bozkır soğuğunu burnundan ciğerine çeke çeke yola koyuldu. Küfür ede.

Ertesi gün işe gitti erkenden. Ustasının dedesiyle ilgili, merak etmese de ‘deden nasıl oldu?’ sorusuna, ‘bugün biraz daha iyiydi’ diyerek çalışmaya devam etti. Ama aklındaki tek soru Apo’nun neden ters yaptığıydı. O olmadan bu iş olmazdı. Akşam tekrar konuşmak en iyisiydi.

İş çıkışı eve uğramadan doğruca Siteler’in yolunu tuttu. Şirketi önünde beklemeye başladı. Aramadı. Arasa kızacağını biliyordu. Aynı kahvede, aynı karbonatlı çayı içerek gergin bir şekilde beklemeye koyuldu. Kahveci, Selim’in davranışlarından rahatsız olsa gerek yanına geldi.

-İyi misin yeğenim?

-İyiym abi. Nerelisin sen?

-Ankaralıyım

-Ben de Ankaralıyım. Merak etme sen de kurtulacaksın. Bu boş gezen Çorumlulara çay vermeyeceksin vakti gelince. Gitsin köylerinde içsinler çaylarını. Apo’yla konuşup seni daha iyi mevkilere getireceğim. Bu konuda bana güvenebilirsin. İcini ferah tut. Şimdilik sana bu söylediklerimi kimseye anlatma. Vakti gelince herkes duyacak zaten. Sen en güzeli bu çöplükte son zamanlarının tadını çıkar

-Lan sen kim oluyorsun da benim ekmek tekneme laf ediyorsun it. Kalk git. Vursam yarısı boşa gidecek. Kalk git.

Cebini yokladı. Bozuklukları eline verip kahveden çıktı. O sırada Apo da iş arkadaşlarıyla servisi bekliyordu. Selim’in sesine irkildi. Arkadaşlarına ‘yarın görüşürüz’ diyerek yanlarından ayrıldı.

Selim’in kolundan tutup köşeye çekti

-Sana buraya gelme demedim mi lan ben dün gece?

-Abi dün yaşananları unutalım. Rüzgârdan dolayı arabanın kapısını hızlı çarpmış olabilirim, kusura bakma. Gel baştan oturup konuşalım dediklerimi.

-Sen hastasın. Dedenle konuşup seni doktora götüreceğim

-Ne doktoru abi? Ben her zamanki Selim’im

-Yürü dedene gidiyoruz

-Gelmiyorum ben! Gidip köpekçilere anlatacağım planı. Onlar beni dinlerler en azından. Senin gibi deli muamelesi yapmazlar. Bu Haymanalılar da yamuk adamlardı zaten, biliyordum.

Apo sağ elinin dışıyla Selim’in gözünün altına bir tokat yapıştırdı. Lafları ağır gelmişti. Baş başa olsalar affedebilirdi belki. Ama iş arkadaşları hala servisi bekliyor, bir taraftan da kendilerine bakıyordu. Yere yığılan Apo ağlamaya başladı. Bağıra ağlıyordu. Oğlunu kaybeden

anneler gibi ağlıyordu. Farkında olmasa da 15 yıllık hayatını 30 yıllık yaşamış olmanın verdiği ağırlığı atıyordu vücudundan. Şirketten çıkanlar hemen olay yerine üşüştü. Durup izlemeye başladılar. Durup izlemeseler eve gidip televizyon seyredeceklerdi birkaç saat. Sonra da aynı kişiyle yüz yıldır aynı yatağa girmiş hissiyle birbirlerine sırtlarını dönüp uyuyacaklardı. Neyse ki sevdikleri dizinin başlamasına daha vardı. Bu malzemenin kaçırılmaması gerekir.

Selim Apo'nun dediklerini duymuyordu. Ağlaması durmuştu ama taş kesilmişti vücudu. Elleri yumruk şeklinde, dizlerini karnında, tepki veremiyordu. Gözleri açık dişleri sıkıktı. Apo endişelenmeye başladı gidişattan. Olayı camın arkasından izleyen kahveci çoktan ambulansı aramıştı. Çok geçmeden olay yerine polis eşliğinde sağlık ekipleri geldi.

Sağlık görevlileri Selim'e birkaç soru sordular, hiçbirine tepki vermedi. Doğrudan ambulansa yerleştirdiler Selim'i. Hemşireler Selim'in telefonundan bir yakınına ulaşmaya çalıştı. Sırayla babası ve annesini aradılar, cevap veren olmadı. Selim'e sakinleştirici vurulduktan sonra serum bağlandı. Apo da o sırada polislere yazılı ifadesini veriyordu. Apo zamanında yasa dışı işlere karışsa da amirlerle çok işi olmamıştı. Karakol ortamı daha şimdiden onu boğmaya başladı. Polisler olayın gerçek nedenini biraz da sert üslupla sorunca Apo anlatmaya başladı:

-Amirim bizim şirketin baskı işlerini Selim'in çalıştığı matbaada yaptırıyoruz. Ben de şirketin hem muhasebe hem de ayak işlerini bakıyorum. Matbaaya gittiğim bir gün Selim'le tanıştık. Selim öksüz yetim bir çocuk. Ben de bunu koruyup kolluyorum hayrına. Efendidir de. Ta ki şu bir kaç güne kadar öyleydi.

-Noldu o birkaç günde?

-Geçen gün geldi 'Abi ben bu Ankaralı olmayanları öldüreceğim. Sen de bana destek ol temizleyelim buraları' dedi. Önce şaka yapıyor sandım. Üstelemedim, git dinlen dedim. Ertesi gün geldi şirketin kapısına dayandı. Bas bağılıyor insan içinde. Dayanamadım tokat attım ben de. Bayıldı kaldı. Elimden kaçtı amirim yoksa şuncacık çocuğa niye vurayım ben.

-Öldürme meselesini aç biraz daha

-Amirim tutturmuş 'biz fakirsek Ankara'ya sonradan gelip bizim buraları dolduranlar yüzünden' diye bir laf, sayıklayıp duruyor. Kafasında plan kurmuş. Neymiş Ankaralılar birleşecek, Çorumluları Çankırılıları öldürüp gömecek, sonra buralar bize kalacakmış.

Apo'nun sorgusu son bulurken Selim de hastanede yeni kendine gelmeye başlamıştı. Başındaki gözlüklü ve kilolu doktor kendisine sorular sorup duruyordu. Bu kaç? Alkol uyuşturucu kullanıyor musun? Ailen nerede? Cevap yok. Doktor saatine baktı, nöbeti bitmiş sayılırdı. Uzatmaya da niyeti yoktu, Selim'e biraz daha uyumasını söyleyip odadan çıktı.

Ertesi gün Selim ilk defa gördüğü cihazlar ve resimler eşliğinde bir takım testlere tabi tutuldu. Öğleden sonra psikiyatrin odasına getirildi. Nasıl olduğunu sordu doktor.

-Nerelisin abi sen?

-Ankaralıyım

-Şükür. Beni kader buraya getirdi. Şanslı kişi senmişsin meğer. Apo'yu boşverelim. Bence o Ankaralı değil. Ama sen gerçek bir Ankaralısın. Yüzünden belli. Ayaz işlemiş yüzüne. Artık sabahlara dek Kırkkalelilerin salak hastalıklarını dinlemeyeceksin. Seni beyin takımında düşünüyorum abi

-Seve seve. Biraz daha açarsan daha faydalı olabilirim Selim. Tam olarak ne yapacağız?

-Ankaralı olmayan ne kadar adam varsa onları süreceğiz buradan. Önce güzellikle söyleyeceğiz. Direnirlerse kan akacak. Onlardan boşalacak yerlere de bizler yerleşeceğiz. Hak ettiğiz-

miz maddi manevi her şeyi geri alacağız. İlk Apo'ya anlattım ben bunları ama o ters yaptı. İşler karıştı. Bana tokat attı. Artık sen benim abim sayılırsın. Sen ne diyorsun. Bıkmadın mı sen de onları tedavi etmekten?

-Haklı olabilirsin Selim'cim. Ama bunları yapmadan önce senin burada kalıp biraz güç toplaman gerekecek düşüncesindeyim. Ben sık yanına geleceğim. Sanırım annen baban yokmuş. Burada olduğunu haber verebileceğimiz bir akraban da mı yok?

-Dedem var, gerek yok haber vermeye. Ben yatmak istemiyorum. Bir an önce sahada olmamız lazım seninle

-Tabi olacağız, olacağız ama dediğim gibi önce güç toplaman gerek. Bunun için sana düzenli olarak çeşitli ilaçlar vereceğiz. Aynaya bakmıyor musun hiç? Çorumluları o sıksa kollarınla mı döveceksin Allah aşkına. Biraz kendine gel sonrası kolay.

-Kabul. Sonra beraber gideceğiz o zaman

-Evet, evet. Hadi süre doldu. Sıradaki hastayı almam lazım. Kapıdaki kadın yardımcı olacak sana.

Selim hasta bakıcı kadın eşliğinde oldukça uzun süre kalacağı 401 numaralı odaya doğru yola koyuldu. Yüzü gülüyordu. Doktor aradığı kişinin tam da kendisiydi. Plan düzgün işleyecekti. Buradan çıktıklarında herkes onları gösterecekti parmakla. O kahraman ikiliyi. Selim ve doktoru. Selim yeni yatağına uzanmış mutlu ve anlamsız bir surat ifadesiyle tavana bakarken birkaç asistan öğrenci ve hemşire odaya girdi. Acil bir durum olduğu zaman basması gereken düğmeyi gösterip test ettirdiler. Sonra hemşire Selim'den kolunu sıvamasını istedi. Hemşire damarlarına ilk ilacı gönderdi. Gözleri küçülmüştü. Uykuya dalmadan önce Selim'in iki yana uzamış dudaklarından iki kelime dökülüyordu: Ankara Ankaralılarıdır...

Whose Ankara?

Murat Mercan. Turkey

He used to enter the shop stepping in with his right foot and reciting *bismillah* so as not to bring misfortune to the shop, just as his master taught him on the first day. But when he was mad at him, he used to step in the shop with his left foot the next day, taking revenge in his own way. Today, he entered with his right foot first. He was rather late, but there was still half an hour until his master arrived. He had stopped smelling the printing materials at the print house. It had taken him almost one month to get accustomed to this odour, which he found strange and overpowering at first. It had, however, taken him only one week to get over his father leaving them, and ten days to get over his mother's death. Fortunately, there was nothing in this world that one could not get used to.

He was pale and tall, with a long neck. His hands were rough as straw despite his fifteen years. For almost two years he had been struggling with printing works in this small workshop amidst the smell of materials. In his free time, he went to watch dogfights at night, in the Baraj neighbourhood in Altındağ. On these nights, pit bulls, with their teeth torn out so that the fights took longer, attacked each other for life, accompanied by claps and curses of twenty or thirty spectators. This was one of those places ruled by lads of the steppes with foul mouths – lopsided and always containing a cigarette – rather than those mafia types wearing jackets and shirts without a tie that you see in movies. Initially held in outdoor areas, dogfights had to be moved to an old makeshift hut after the police busts. The regulars were generally mini-

num wage earners or unemployed. The venue operated on a referral basis. Selim had first gone to this venue thanks to Apo, a guy he worked for. Apo had not turned Selim down despite his young age and had him accepted by the owner of the place, saying he was “one of them.” Thereafter, Selim began to visit the place once or twice a week; he had become an ardent fan, although he didn't place bets. On those nights when the dogs' growls blended with the sooty air, he wasn't just watching the fights. It was as if he was fighting himself. Apo and Selim had two beers behind the hut when the dog fights were over and then went their separate ways. On those rare occasions when the dog named Arap that Apo supported won, beer was replaced by vodka or whiskey and drunk in plastic cups. There was no reason preventing Selim from disclosing what he had on his mind on those nights. He had rehearsed the moment several times at home, but he just couldn't get to it.

Selim was an average person on the outside, but he had an important trait that distinguished him from other average people, an obsession if you will. He was obsessed with people who weren't originally from Ankara, but who lived there. Students, public servants, bureaucrats, workers, Emin the coffee shop guy, Orhan the kebab guy, Mehtap the hostess and others. According to him, all those people who came to Ankara later were the reasons why Selim and people like him were poor. They had taken all the nice jobs and all the nice spots. Wasn't that the next-door neighbour his dad ran away with from Sivas? Wasn't that doctor in the emergency

room enthusiastically watching the Samsunspor game when they took his mum to the hospital? God damn, all those people were consuming Ankara's resources, turning it into a huge metropolis. Instead of staying in their hometowns and improving them, they immigrated to Ankara to find everything on a silver platter. Hadn't master Rıza told him the day before that there were universities, huge hospitals and double highways in every province now? They might as well have stayed at their hometowns and done something good for their homes, those beautiful college girls and handsome young men. They all had their eyes on the capital, but some had to stop that now. This country had raised its heroes in every age. He might be 15, but he was what the city of Ankara and the real people of Ankara needed. The city would be saved now, from those people of Çorum, Çankırı, Kırıkkale, those dorm students, those fancy-dressed people who had laid hold of the slums in Dikmen, those who handed out bulletins all day at Karanfil, the home wrecking hostesses with their wavy hair, each and every one of them. Whoever had settled here later. One by one. Maybe that would take some time, but the results would be worth it. The positions vacated after the banishment of all those people would be filled again, with people designated by the commission established under Selim's leadership. The principal criteria for designation were poverty and being from Ankara. Afterwards, he could issue a newspaper using the techniques he learned at the print house and name it *Başkent Hür Ses*.¹ He would write "Ankara belongs to the people of Ankara" in small letters under the title. This sounded really plausible to him.

His grandfather had dozed off on the couch. He walked directly into his room to

finalise his idea of ridding Ankara of people who weren't from Ankara. It was inevitable to shed some blood while banishing the non-Ankara people. To do that, he had to stop getting sick from the sight of blood and end those blackouts. He figured that the only way to overcome this problem was to see more blood. He left the room and opened his grandfather's old razor set in the cupboard. He took out the perma sharp razor. It was used, but would do the job. He walked in his room again. He started to think about depressing things. The day his mother died, his father running away, all the abuse he got from this master, all the long walks he had to take when he was starving from poverty. None of them was of any use, until he remembered Ayşenur screaming wildly at elementary school, "Teacher! There are lice in Selim's hair!" What really happened that day was he had ravaged the plum tree in their neighbour's garden and all the grime and smudge in the tree had landed on his head. He had preferred crying to telling his teacher about this. They had gone home together with the teacher after school. His teacher had told his mum off for not taking care of her child and left after his mum apologised, bowing and scraping. His mum's embarrassment was more upsetting than Ayşenur's screams. As all these moments of shame passed through his mind, warm blood started to flow with the first razor cuts on Selim's left arm. Then came the blackout.

When he woke up next morning, his sheets were covered in blood. He piled them up and threw them in a corner. It was almost ten now and he was late for work again. He called his master and told him he couldn't come to work because his dad's pain was worse, that he had to take him to a hospital and that he would make up for his absence by working on Sunday. Despite his disbelief,

¹ Free voice of the Capital.

the master said “fine, take care of that” with a few swear words sprinkled in the sentence. Selim hung up, also swearing silently. He left the house immediately and got on a minibus to Sitelер. He got off in front of Apo’s company and called him. Apo explained that he had to wait, that he couldn’t come to him right away. But Selim was sweating buckets now. He was fidgeting, lighting cigarette after cigarette, scratching his head all the time. He called Apo again, who told him, in a more authoritative voice now, to go sit at the coffee shop across the street and that he would be there in half an hour. Selim had no choice but to go there. The banner of Ankaragücü and a poster of Atatürk were hanging on the wall behind the counter at the coffee shop. Thank god, at least the coffee shop guy was originally from Ankara. He was a little relieved now. He started to drink his tea. Apo appeared at the door while he was putting sugar in his third tea:

“What the hell is the reason for ringing me at this time of the day?”

“We need to talk brother.”

“Why the fuck don’t we talk tonight?”

“I’m not good, brother.”

“To hell with your brother. I was working, I told you. Look, I keep all the records of this huge place and I didn’t turn you down and came here. Here you are, on the brink of crying. What the hell is with you boy?”

“Could you just take half an hour brother? We’ll have a beer too. It’s on me.”

“What have I just been telling you? Off with you! Still talking about beer and shit; are you an alcoholic now? We’ll talk tonight, now go wash your face and get going.”

Apo threw the money for Selim’s tea on the table and went back to his office. Selim also washed his face and walked out. It was only half past eleven. He decided to go home and sleep. He thought time would go by faster if he did that.

It was almost eight when he woke up. He went to the kitchen for a snack. He felt the taste of the poor-quality tea he had at Sitelер that morning again and closed the fridge. He was off to the Baraj neighbourhood in Altındağ. Arap was fighting that night. They would probably have whiskey if he won. The last time they had whiskey was one and a half months ago, accompanied by Neşet’s songs and facing the foggy and illuminated Ankara.

He was a little mad at Apo, as he hadn’t really given a shit that morning, but Apo was the second guy. Selim was aware that he had to put up with him. They bumped their heads as if nothing had happened that morning and started to watch the fight. Arap’s eyes squinted as if he hadn’t seen the light for days. It was a tough fight, but Arap persevered this time. He knocked down his opponent with a final blow at the end. That put Apo in a good mood. Selim too, of course. Apo had won three hundred liras from this fight. They went directly for the liqueur shop. They then proceeded to their usual place, with a large bottle of whiskey and a small bar of chocolate. They hadn’t talked about what happened that morning until then. Apo started the conversation as he filled the first cup and gave it to Selim:

“What the hell is the matter with you boy, appearing at my workplace at the crack of dawn? You acted like you owned the place!”

“I would never do that, brother.”

“Ok, spill it.”

“Let’s drink these first, brother.”

“Cut the brother shit! Cheers!”

Selim started to spill after the second drink.

“You know, brother, my dad left us and ran away with that whore from Sivas. My mum died because of that doctor from Samsun. I mean all those people that aren’t from

Ankara bring nothing but pain to us. We're poor because of those people snatching all the good jobs. They ruined Ankara, they ruined us. They left us nowhere to live. You keep the books of a whole company on minimum wages and I have to put up with people's shit every day for six hundred liras. And for what? It's all because we're from Ankara. Is that fair? Is that why Atatürk made Ankara the capital? No, he made it the capital for us, for our salvation. No one is aware of that. It's time someone banged his fist on the table."

"What the hell have you been smoking, boy? Your dad kidnapped that whore at gunpoint and your mum's death was just fate. It's Allah's will and all we can do is to pray for her. You don't know anything about the world. You're living in a dream. I became friends with you because you were orphaned. I stood by you and supported you. Now you're talking about banishing people. Who do you think you are banishing people, with that little head of yours? Are you out of it boy?"

"Aren't you from Ankara brother?"

"I'm from Haymana, don't you know that, boy?"

"What then?"

"What do you mean, what then? Has something bad happened to you boy? Look, if there's something you haven't told me, tell me now."

"No, brother. I'm telling you something that's been on my mind for years and you're just messing with me."

"What do you mean? Have you been planning to kill everyone not from Ankara for years?"

"No brother, we'll just banish them all. If anyone resists, then there may be bloodshed. I'm for a revolution without bloodshed. That's only fair. But if blood's gonna flow, then I'm ready for it."

"You faint at the sight of blood, you dickhead. What do you think you're ready for? You'd fall head over heels here, if I gave you a scratch. What are you ready for?"

"I practised at home, brother, don't worry. No more fainting."

"Drink up and I'll take you home."

"I'll go myself brother, thank you. Don't worry."

Selim slammed the door and left the car. He was disappointed. He had imagined that Apo would first kiss him on his forehead and then say "I'm proud of you brother, for all the people of Ankara," when he explained his plan to him. Things had gone worse than he had imagined. There were no cars going to his house at this time of the night. He hit the road, inhaling all the cold of the steppes. He cursed.

The next day, he showed up early at work. His master inquired after his grandfather, despite his lack of curiosity, and Selim continued to work after he replied "he was a little better today." But the only question in his mind was why Apo had slapped him down. He couldn't carry on his plan without him. It would be best to talk to him again that night.

He went straight to Sitelер without stopping by his home after work. He started to wait in front of the company. He knew that Apo would be mad if he called him. He started to wait nervously, sipping on the same tea at the same coffee shop. The coffee shop owner, probably bothered by the way Selim acted, walked up to him.

"Are you ok, kid?"

"I'm fine, brother. Where are you from?"

"Ankara."

"Me too. Don't worry; you'll be saved as well. When the time comes, you won't be handing out tea to these good for nothing people of Çorum. Let them have their tea

in their villages. I'll talk to Apo and assign you to a better position. You can trust me with this. Don't you worry. Don't tell anyone about what I just told you yet. Everyone will hear about it anyway when the time comes. Just enjoy your final days in this shithole."

"Who the hell do you think you are, bad-mouthing my bread and butter, punk? Get out. I would hit you if you weren't so scrawny. Get out."

He checked his pocket. He gave the guy some coins and left the coffee shop. Meanwhile, Apo was waiting for the shuttle bus with his co-workers. He was startled by Selim's voice. He said "see you tomorrow" to his co-workers and left them.

He grabbed Selim by the arm and pulled him over.

"Didn't I tell you last night not to come here?"

"Let's forget about last night, brother. I may have slammed the car door because of the wind, sorry about that. Let's talk everything over again."

"You're sick. I'll talk to your grandfather and take you to a doctor."

"What do you mean a doctor? I'm the same person I ever was."

"Come now, we're going to your grandfather."

"I'm not coming! I'll go to the dog-fighters to talk about my plan. They would listen to me at least. They wouldn't treat me like a lunatic like you do. I knew that no one good ever came out of Haymana."

Apo slapped Selim under the eye, with the back of his right hand. He was offended. He could have forgiven him, if they were alone. But his co-workers were still there waiting for the shuttle bus and watching them. Apo was lying on the ground, crying. He was crying loudly. He was crying like a mother who lost her son. Without being aware of it,

he was releasing the stress of the thirty years he had lived despite being only fifteen. Those from the company gathered around the scene. They stopped and watched. If they hadn't, they would have gone home to watch TV for a couple of hours. Then they would go to bed, turn their backs to each other and sleep, feeling like they had been going to bed with the same person for centuries. Fortunately, their favourite show would not be on soon. The scene there was not to be missed.

Selim was beyond the reach of Apo's words. He had stopped crying, but now his body was as stiff as stone. He laid there with his hands made into fists, his legs pulled to his stomach, unable to react. His eyes were open and his teeth were clenched. Apo was starting to get worried. The coffee shop owner, who had watched the whole thing from behind the glass, had already called an ambulance. Before long, the medics arrived at the scene, accompanied by the police.

The medics asked Selim a couple of questions, but he didn't react to any of them. They put him directly in the ambulance. Meanwhile, the nurses tried to reach Selim's family on his phone. They called his dad first, then his mum, none of whom answered. Selim was given sedatives and put on an IV. Apo was giving a written statement to the police at the time. Despite his involvement in illegal affairs at the time, Apo had not got involved much with the officers. The atmosphere of the police station had already started to suffocate him. When the police inquired about the actual reason for the event, a little roughly, Apo started to tell the story:

"Sir, my company uses the print house where Selim works. I'm in charge of the company's accounting and office affairs. I met Selim when I went to the print house one day. Selim is an orphan. I've been protecting and supporting him, for charity. He is

also well-behaved. At least until the last couple of days.”

“What happened in the last couple of days?”

“He came to me the other day and said ‘Brother, I’ll kill these people who aren’t from Ankara. Work with me and we’ll cleanse our city of them.’ First I thought he was joking. I didn’t take it seriously and told him to go get some rest. The next day, he turned up in front of the company. He was shouting at the top of his voice, among all the people. I couldn’t help but slap him. He just fainted there. I really lost it, sir, why would I hit a small child otherwise?”

“Elaborate on that killing thing.”

“Sir, he’s obsessed with this idea that he’s poor because of people who came to Ankara and took all the jobs. He made a plan. All people from Ankara would join forces, kill everyone from Çorum or Çankırı and bury them and then we would have the whole city to ourselves.”

As Apo’s interrogation came to an end, Selim was just starting to regain consciousness at the hospital. The overweight doctor with glasses kept asking him questions. What number is this? Do you use alcohol or drugs? Where’s your family? No response. The doctor looked at his watch; his shift was almost over. He didn’t want to prolong it. He told Selim to sleep a little more and left the room.

The next day, Selim went through some tests that were accompanied by devices and pictures he saw for the first time in his life. He was taken to the psychiatrist’s room in the afternoon. The doctor asked him how he was.

“Where are you from, brother?”

“Ankara.”

“Thank God. Fate brought me here. You’re the lucky person then. Let’s forget about Apo. I don’t think he’s from Ankara anyway. But you’re a real man of Ankara.

I can tell it from your face. It is moulded by the cold, dry weather. You won’t have to hear about the stupid sicknesses of Kırıkkale people all night. I’m thinking about having you in the brain team.”

“My pleasure. I could be of more help if you could elaborate, Selim. What exactly are we going to do?”

“We’ll banish anyone who isn’t originally from Ankara. First we’ll tell them nicely. If they resist, then blood will be shed. We’ll take over the positions they leave. We’ll take back everything we deserve, material or immaterial. I told Apo about this plan first, but he slapped me down. Things went south. He hit me. You’re like a brother to me now. What do you say? Aren’t you tired of treating those people?”

“You may be right Selim. But I think you’d have to stay here a while and regain your strength first. I’ll visit you frequently. I heard you don’t have a mum or dad. Don’t you have any kin we can let know about your stay here?”

“I have a granddad, but no need to let him know. I don’t want to stay here. We have to be in the field together, as soon as possible!”

“Of course we will, but first you need to regain your strength as I said before. To do that, we’ll give you different drugs every day. Don’t you ever look in the mirror? Will you beat up the Çorum people with those scrawny arms, for God’s sake? Once you recover, the rest will be easy.”

“Deal. We’ll go together then.”

“Yeah, yeah. Come on now, time’s up. I need to take in the next patient. The lady at the door will help you.”

Accompanied by the nurse’s assistant, Selim walked towards room number 401, where he would stay for quite a long time. There was a happy look on his face. The doctor was exactly what he was looking for. The

plan would go well. Everyone would praise them when they got out of here. The two heroes: Selim and the doctor. While Selim was lying in his new bed and staring at the ceiling with a happy and empty expression on his face, a few assistants and nurses entered the room. They showed him the button he was

supposed to press when there was an emergency and had him test it. Then the nurse asked Selim to roll up his sleeve. She shot the first drug into his veins. His eyes narrowed. Before falling asleep, a few more words escaped his drooping lips. “Ankara belongs to the people of Ankara.”

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Laudy dei. honore / vnae vni vnae n gfultray ammy infideliu - quia llo vna papo ad hoc gdnis fuis ppa n de ppa vna
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vno vno vero gradone melio vnae / vnae q honorabil vni confilio n cor vno vnae / Ego magr paymund. Lul cathedra traf
a Evandine vna. Sa fupphico q vnae vni dij pconis vno pofte hie vfyu de qo gdnis vbi pluvine / Lexus gra
vno vno vero gradone melio vnae / vnae q honorabil vni confilio n cor vno vnae / Ego magr paymund. Lul cathedra traf
Laudy dei. honore / vnae vni vnae n gfultray ammy infideliu - quia llo vna papo ad hoc gdnis fuis ppa n de ppa vna
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