

## Where We Belong

I walk through the sliding doors and take a step into the airport. I squint as the cool air hits my face. I'm still sweating and it's not the heat this time. It's been about a month since the coup attempt and our president has barely started to take his revenge on people. One of my paternal uncles and my friends are in prison, my family managed to flee, and I'm the last one in my family to leave Turkey. The only people left around me are the husbandless wives and fatherless children. None of us are crying though; we are still in shock. I'm dragging my big luggage behind me in this vast space. I feel as if my walk is getting slower but my feet know where to go. I used to fly home from college often so I know my way around this airport. I'm on autopilot. But I hadn't realized how cold and grey it was before.

Metal surrounds me while a strange woman in a uniform checks my bags. I'm not a terrorist. Well not the kind that you are looking for anyway. I'm not sure what I have in there though. I've read the books of the Muslim scholar that the president had put the blame of the coup attempt on. Because unlike you, he tells me to keep reading. That's what makes us terrorists in this country. I read and I question. That's one thing a dictator wouldn't want.

My other paternal uncle is walking beside me. He supports the dictator that wants to lock me in a jail cell. That's right. He is the companion I'm stuck with as I say goodbye to either my country or my freedom. I smile and keep chatting about the weather. I need a witness around to let my friends and family know in case I'm arrested. "Oh yes uncle, it's very warm." All I feel is the cold sweat running down my back. "Yeah, I'll say hi to mom and dad for you." Sure. If I don't get arrested in the next ten minutes.

There is something new in the airport. Police put tables in the middle of the hall and check passports. Not all passports though. Government employees and their children have

special passports that allow us to travel to Europe without a visa. In normal conditions, all I need to do to go to Europe is to buy a plane ticket, but now I need to pass an extra check. Obviously no European country will give a Turkish person a visa after our military coup. Nobody wants a refugee.

Don't ask me why— I don't know what to tell you. I can't think of a reason why an eighteen year old should not have a home. That's just how it works in this world. A storyteller and an advocate, Clemantine Wamariya says in her memoir that "It's strange, how you go from being a person who is away from home to a person with no home at all. The place that is supposed to want you has pushed you out. No other place takes you in. You are unwanted, by everyone. You are a refugee" (Wamariya & Weil, 2018). This kind of homelessness is not that different from what you imagine. I am looking for a friend's couch to crash on and realize I am on my own. The frustration blends into anger while the tall ceiling of the airport gets higher and higher like it's forcing me to shrink in my own body. The sounds in my ears are muffled up and I can feel my blood pumping. There is no way out of here. It's too large in the airport and it's too tight in my skin. I want to scream and shout that everyone here is a coward. You voted for him. You support him. Why do I have to pay for your sins? Who in their right mind would think I'm part of a plot that attempted to take down our government anyway? I can't even schedule a doctor's appointment without my mom, but these people are questioning my motives. Regardless, the government has all the power now. I can't leave my home anymore if they don't let me.

I get in the line in front of the huge flag and the redness of it hurts my eyes. A symbol that is supposed to set me free only traps me more. I'm not wanted here and I remember a couple lines from Robert Frost: "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / they have to

take you in” (122-123). Who is going to take me in now? Who will accept me as their own? If I cannot belong somewhere, I must belong to someone. Places don’t welcome me, so people have to. I grew up here and all this place has done for me is make me an enemy of my own nation.

I do not want to be attached to this place forever, but it is hard to let it go. Does my country have to be my home? Where do you go when you have been kicked out? Hugo Hamilton says:

Maybe your country is only a place you make up in your own mind. Something you dream about and sing about. Maybe it's not a place on the map at all, but just a story full of people you meet and places you visit, full of books and films you've been to. I'm not afraid of being homesick and having no language to live in.

The land itself means nothing to me. The pavements of my hometown would be just stone if I didn’t skip on them holding my grandmother’s hand, or the train station wouldn’t be worth a thing if I hadn’t hugged my brother goodbye there. I called this place home because this is where my loved ones were, but now I’m the last one. I don’t miss places, I miss people.

Even though I’m isolated, I’m not in exile. I still have a family who is worried sick waiting for some good news. If I get arrested today I know for a fact that the police will threaten my parents into returning back to Turkey. That’s what they do. They use the children to lure the parents in. And it’s not like they let go of the children once they get the parents— they keep both. But I certainly know that my parents wouldn’t think twice. All they want is for no one to touch or harm me and all I want is for them not to come back for me. You don’t just say these things over the phone. You just simply know.

It suddenly strikes me that I’m not leaving home but going home. I'm going to my family and they have to take me in. I'll lie my way out of here because I have to. Please God, let the

police be too lazy to check my family background. Please don't let them see their arrest warrants. Otherwise where we all will belong now will be no bigger than a single square meter.

The redness of the flag is brighter than ever now. I realize my hands are shaking. They always do when I'm nervous. My turn has come. I can feel my pulse pounding. I can only comfort myself with the truth now. I have done nothing wrong. I did no harm to anyone. The buzz in my ears starts to fade away with the policeman's first word. "Documents!" The robotic tone of the policeman sends chills down my spine. I hand the files with my sweaty hands and start to blurt out sentences. "Wow it's hot outside huh?" Is my smile too creepy? No of course not. He seems bored. My mind is everywhere. I need to focus. I rub my wrist with the other hand. Just let me go. "Oh I'm so excited I'm going for an exchange program in Europe for a semester." Or maybe ten years. I just keep talking for some reason. "Sorry what did you say? Oh yes both my parents are retired." I'm getting the hang of this constant lying. Just please don't fact check me. "Oh I'm going to Slovakia. I've heard it's really pretty" Except I'm going to Paris to my parents and if you look at the dates on the paper I just gave you, the program doesn't even start for another three months.

He doesn't react to any of my comments and finally stops typing and clicking. "Whatever, you can go." I freeze for a while and he finally looks at me for the first time. I ask "Really?" in disbelief. Oh my god why am I so dumb? I just grab my passport from his hand and almost run towards the planes. My steps are heavy and my shoulders are light. I get dizzy and can't walk straight for a while. I can see my uncle texting others that I'm going home. I'm going to see my family in a couple hours. The joy of running towards the sky shadows the obscurity of the future. I look back at the crowd and find my uncle in there. He is waving at me. I even wave back at him. And this time it's not because I need him, but because I'm finally leaving. My

genuine happiness transforms itself to a crooked smile. This almost feels like a break up. I'm not mad, I'm disappointed and sad because I have to leave the one I love, but I'm also happy to be free.

I slowly start to realize that I won't see this place or anyone in it for a very long time again. Warsan Shire says:

No one leaves home until home  
is a damp voice in your ear saying  
leave, run now, I don't know what  
I've become." (64-67)

I don't want to leave my country. But this is not my country anymore. I don't recognize the hatred, the violence or the unquestioned convictions. This is not the street where I learned how to ride a bike. It's not the school where I had my first crush. This is not the place I grew up in. Istanbul sold its soul and now the body is rotting without it. There are more walls and fewer trees. The waters of the Bosphorus seem quiet and undisturbed but the Maiden Tower is breaking into parts right in the middle of it. Everyone hears the creaks that sare coming from the sea and they just let it be. I'm no longer accepted anywhere except the arms of my parents. They are my home now.

The place I was born in no longer welcomes me. It turns out that a home is a luxury. I didn't realize this when I was just handed one for free. Sometimes life makes you fight for the things you thought you would never lose. I had to find my way back home, and sometimes, figuring out where you belong takes some effort.

## Works Cited

Frost, Robert. "The Death of a Hired Man." *North of Boston*, Henry Holt and Company, 1915, retrieved at [www.bartleby.com/118/](http://www.bartleby.com/118/). Accessed 2019.

Hamilton, Hugo. *The Speckled People*, A&C Black, 2011.

Warsan, Shire. "Home." *The Globe and Mail*, 4 December 2015.

Wamariya, Clemantine, and Elizabeth Weil. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*. Doubleday Canada, 2018.