

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

H. Takken Bush for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing presented on May 3, 2006.

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Keith T. Scribner

This thesis is the first half of a novel in progress called Things I Lost In Istanbul. In the selection, Simon Wells, an American expat living in Turkey, is trying to ignore the changes taking place in his life and in Istanbul—his adopted home and sanctuary. The novel tracks Simon's adventures as he tries to continue living the easy, carefree life with which he's grown accustomed, and outrun the failures and tragedies he experienced as a younger man living in America.

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Things I Lost In Istanbul

by
H. Takken Bush

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APPROVED: **Redacted for Privacy**

Major Professor, representing Creative Writing

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of the English Department

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of the Graduate School

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H. Takken Bush, Author

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Chapter 1..... | 1 |
| Chapter 2..... | 18 |
| Chapter 3..... | 26 |
| Chapter 4..... | 32 |
| Chapter 5..... | 47 |
| Chapter 6..... | 60 |
| Chapter 7..... | 65 |
| Chapter 8..... | 73 |
| Chapter 9..... | 83 |
| Chapter 10..... | 94 |
| Chapter 11..... | 99 |

To my mother, father, and stepparents for their unflagging love and support. This work is dedicated to the memories of Roger Short and Alex Weathers. Parts of Alex's unpublished poem, "Of All My Dominant Cravings", appears in abstracted form in Simon's thoughts on page 15. Thank you, Alex.

Things I Lost In Istanbul

Simon Wells was teaching a class of eight-year-olds in Etiler, Istanbul's richest neighborhood, when the first bomb went off. He was wondering whether to meet Melis or Nora that night, when suddenly the whole school shook as though coming alive, and the next thought in Simon's mind had been: if these windows break, I'll never get all the glass out of the children's faces. The boy in the front's eyes went huge and dark, and he reached out his arms, pleading to be picked up, and the girl with the braids in the back fell out of her seat and busted her lip open on the edge of her desk. Smoke as thick as mud rose up around the school, and the screaming in the street began. Simon stood frozen in front of his young class, as blood dribbled down the little girl's starched white shirt.

He didn't know any of his students' names. He could barely hold the chalk in his sweating, shaking fingers, he was so hungover from the night before. But finally Simon made himself move. He picked the girl with the braids up off the floor and wiped the blood from her mouth with the sleeve of his shirt. She coughed and spat into his hands, and then he yelled for the students to leave, to get as far away from those windows as they could, and when they didn't move he yanked them up from their seats by their stiff shirt collars. They scurried from the room silently, and Simon followed after them. But when he reached the door himself he couldn't hold it any longer: he threw up in the trashcan in the corner, as the children raced down the hall, away from him, away from those windows.

This was his first day of work in two months. He'd wanted to call in sick, and would have, too, if Melis hadn't gone to such trouble finding him the job—teaching English one day a week at a Turkish private school. Even though he'd told her he was tired of being an English teacher.

“But what else can an American do in *Türkiye*?” she asked. She wasn't interested at all in his ideas of opening a jazz club. Then she reminded him that he'd make more money for one day of teaching than she'd earn in two weeks.

Mothers flooded into the school. A plump woman wearing a blue headscarf fell to her knees in the school lobby and cried into the clothes of her son. The boy rubbed his fingers in his eyes, and wouldn't let his mother pull his hands out of his face, as Turkish boys did when they didn't want others to see they'd been crying. Finally the boy hooked his arms around his mother's neck, and she squeezed him close to her chest, and they hurried away from the school.

After everyone had gone, Simon sat in the canteen, smoking and listening to the radio. Even his old radio station, where he'd had a spot playing jazz records on Tuesday night from midnight to four am, was reporting the news. No music. The news usually came from the rest of the Middle East, or from Washington, but today the news was all Turkish, and came from only a block away. A man had driven a white truck packed with explosives through the front of the two hundred year old synagogue down the street, just as dozens inside gathered to pray. That was the bomb that ended classes. But it wasn't the only one. Another truck smashed through a synagogue in Osmanbey minutes later. Two-dozen Turks lay dead, dragged from the synagogues into the streets.

The school's janitor, an old Kurd from the south, shook his head.

"Allah, Allah," he said. The old man pushed his broom over the canteen floor and under the chairs. Napkins and crumbs left from the children's lunch littered the floor, but the old man didn't sweep up a thing.

Simon gulped down his tea, trying to understand what he heard on the radio, but the man spoke too quickly, and the tea was so hot he choked, and spilled his cup all over the white shirt Melis had ironed for him the night before. But still the hot cup felt wonderful in his thin, cold fingers. He wished he were at the radio station then, sitting in that stuffy boxy room, spinning those old records with nobody else around. Smoking with his eyes closed.

Day old newspapers sat in front of him. A picture of American politicians shaking hands in Ankara. Simon folded the picture over, stuffed it in the middle of the pile. He hadn't voted since he'd left America nine years before, and he felt glad he hadn't. Whatever they do over there, he told himself, I'm not a part of it, and it's not a part of me.

Melis was at home. But Simon wanted to see Nora. She was leaving Istanbul soon, in less than a week. And they'd had a fight over the phone, just that day, because she'd told him that Robert had asked her to go away with him for the weekend, her last weekend before returning to London, down to Bodrum on the Mediterranean coast. Simon couldn't believe it. He had to find her before she left, talk her into staying in Istanbul, so he could see her as much as possible before she was gone for good.

Simon had been sleeping with Nora the past six months, which was not quite as long as he'd been living with Melis. His first couple of nights with Nora had been drunken, spontaneous things, which justified them in a way. Then he and Nora began

planning to meet, around Nora's nearly nightly calls from Richard, her boyfriend in London, and Simon's dinners with Melis. He had always known that Nora would leave, that the affair would come to an end. When with Melis he often told himself that Nora had already left, that he couldn't remember a thing about her. And when he couldn't make himself believe that he told himself that when she did leave he wouldn't cheat on Melis again. Of course he wouldn't. As a younger man, back in the U.S., he'd had little success with women. This was one of the first chances in his life to catch up. It was hard to let the opportunity pass.

But hadn't Miles Davis always had other women? And Picasso as well? Probably, yes. Simon was at least sure that his own father had. Before and after Simon's mother's death. And as far as Simon knew his father felt no guilt. Sometimes Simon felt the guilt swelling up inside of him, in some moment, maybe when he was alone with Melis, then he'd think of his father and tell himself to stop being a child. Maybe his father had been angry as well about his mother getting sick and leaving them. At least Simon did not have any children. And so far Melis didn't know a thing about Nora. Nobody was getting hurt.

Things had been easier with Nora when she'd still had Richard back in England. But Richard had broken it off with her a few weeks before, and since then things had not been as smooth. He'd met another woman apparently, while Nora had been overseas.

Simon unknotted his tie, stuffed it in his coat pocket. He ran his fingers through his thick black hair. He hadn't shaved for over a week, but his beard grew so lightly across his round face that you couldn't tell he'd gone more than a day. Simon had twenty

million Turkish lira in his pocket—worth about eight US dollars. Enough for another long night out on İstiklâl. He switched off the radio, grabbed his cigarettes, and left.

Police lights flashed in the street, and soldiers sat on the hoods of cars, guns propped across their knees. Smoke dirtied the air, and Simon put his hands over his mouth. He walked around the block to avoid seeing the synagogue and took the Metro to İstiklâl.

İstiklâl Street was the longest pedestrian street Simon had ever seen. Starting in Taksim Square, where the children played naked in the fountains in the summer while the older boys sold bottles of water to tourists, İstiklâl weaved all the way down to Tünel, with its steep, dark alleys, cramped, decaying houses, and old Greek bars. Only the red tram traveled its whole long distance, dinging its bell to clear the crowds off its tracks. Little boys chased after everyone, begging to shine shoes, and silent little girls pulled at random elbows, selling packets of tissues, or roses. University girls wore sleeveless shirts, despite the November weather, and walked arm in arm, giggling into each other's long dark hair. Men in cheap dark suits stood in doorways, smoking cigarettes meanly, or spitting pistachio shells at the feet of the crowd, and they talked about Turkish *futbol*, and cursed every generation of politician since the late, great Atatürk.

That night, there were lights strung up above the street and the lights were in the shape of stars. Simon loved walking under the soft warm glow of those stars, and losing himself along İstiklâl's side streets, which curved into so many mysteries nobody could ever learn them all, though he had tried his best. Some nights he'd walk up and down İstiklâl maybe a dozen times, his pulse racing, his hands warm and swinging at his sides, forgetting plans he'd made with others. A week before he'd found an abandoned café.

The windows were small and dark and he peered inside, aided by the light from the stars. He wiped the dirt off the glass with his hand. Every night for the past week he'd walked past this old, forgotten place and wiped a clean spot on the window and looked inside. Paint peeling off the walls like dead skin. A dusty bar lined the sidewall, and tables were stacked atop other tables in the back, and chairs cluttered the stairwell.

A silver chandelier hung from the ceiling, and the floors were black and white tiled. He wanted to break in, and clean the dust off all the chairs, and unpack all of the boxes in the back. What was in them? Glasses? Bottles? Maybe records. Simon had plenty of records, though.

His mother used to sometimes sing at clubs. Nights when she could have been home with him.

Simon put his hands flat against the glass. More than ever he wanted to believe it might come true. Opening a club had been Nora's idea. At least she'd given it to him. A jazz club off Istiklâl Street. She'd suggested it after the radio station he'd worked at had closed down, which had depressed him terribly, though he'd been working there for months and the owner had never managed to pay him. All the other expats in their group said it was crazy, that he could never do it. Nora said, why not? Let him try.

Now he needed to show her his find. This was a beginning.

He held his hands against the window, and suddenly the glass shook. Simon jerked back, listening for screams. But he realized his own hands had made the glass shake. Not another bomb at all. His hands hadn't stopped trembling since that afternoon. He tried to laugh as he walked to Pano. He needed to find Nora.

Stale beer and cigarette smoke engulfed him as he entered the bar. The room was dark and people everywhere swayed and danced. Simon began to sweat, and slipped off his black jacket. Three musicians played in the corner, and the music pulsed through him. Women in long, light dresses danced as a man beat madly on a drum he held between his thighs, and he wagged his whiskered face from side to side. He'd tied a string of bells around his ankle, and stomped to the rhythm. Another man worked his big hand over the thin neck of the Turkish *saz*, plucking at strings with his long fingers. They wore bright red shirts, with big collars pressing into their necks, and Simon stopped and leaned against the bar and listened.

He'd been a musician, too. Years before. In a different life, or so it now felt. When he'd told Melis he'd been a musician once, she'd made the assumption that he must have been good, and though he hadn't intentionally been trying to show off, he let her believe it was true. But he knew he'd always been mediocre. Still, he had loved making music and thought he'd be involved in playing it for the rest of his life. The first time he dropped out of Hamline he'd made his money giving piano lessons to kids and playing guitar at night in bars and restaurants. He'd had his own apartment, and could walk most anywhere worth going in St. Paul. That was the only time in his life he'd lived on his own. But his hands got worse and worse – the doctors told him it was tendonitis – and soon after playing only a few minutes his fingers would curl up in pain, and he wouldn't even be able to hold a spoon for the rest of the day. So he'd gone back to university, to be an engineer, like his father, but he failed out after a single term.

Then he'd come to Istanbul, where his friend Jon had heard any native English speaker could get a teaching job in a Turkish school and make easy money. Jon arranged

their plane tickets, visas, even a place to live. Then after only three months, Jon left. He'd become sick for America. Simon wanted to go, too, and begged his friend to wait until he had the money saved to leave with him. He didn't know what he'd do by himself. Jon left without him, and by the time Simon had saved enough money he had a girlfriend—more beautiful than any woman he'd ever been with in America. The girl smoked ultra light cigarettes, was studying to be a doctor, and hardly ever slept at all. She showed Simon that Istanbul had no rules. You could stay out all night, drink until dawn, and bargain for anything. The girl had not stayed with him long, but she introduced him to Istiklâl Street.

Simon never spoke to Jon again, and if ever anybody asked, Simon would say he'd come to Istanbul alone. Though the truth was that if left alone he'd never have done it at all.

He listened to the guitarist's fingers scraping over the old strings, and closed his eyes. Watching made Simon's knuckles burn, and he smiled. Then the singer threw back his head and howled. His teeth were yellow and wicked, and the women in the bar held up their hands and cheered as his deep voice filled the room. Simon straightened his shirt, and stepped through the dark crowd, looking for his friends. He saw Robert first, slouched over the bar, settling his tab. Robert had been in Istanbul three years, and had even opened up his own small language school. He had a friend in a government office, an old student, who'd helped him cut corners to get business permits. Simon needed Robert to put in a good word with this man, but Robert had resisted introducing them.

Simon walked over to him.

“You seen Nora?” he asked. Robert was tall, from South Africa, and the girls all loved him because of his blue eyes and blond hair—the opposite of dark Turkish looks.

“No,” Robert said, and wiped at his nose absently. “Not yet anyway.”

“She’s not here tonight?”

“I haven’t seen Nora in ages,” he said. “What of it? You got any smokes?”

Simon studied Robert’s face. The bar light made the thick stubble on his chin glow. Simon pulled his cigarettes out of his pocket, took one for himself, then placed the pack on the bar. Robert went for it quickly.

“You don’t know anything about her leaving Istanbul for the weekend, do you?” Simon asked.

Robert smiled uneasily, a smile that stretched up into his eyes. He lit a cigarette and took a long draw.

“Why would I know Nora’s plans?” he said.

Simon was nearly standing on his tiptoes, trying to equal Robert’s height. He put his cigarettes back in his pocket.

“You going away with her this weekend? Down to Bodrum?” he said.

Robert leaned back, laughed into the air above his head. Then looked Simon in the eye, and clamped his big hand down on Simon’s shoulder.

“We’re friends,” Robert said. “But what business is it of yours if I go away with Nora?”

It was true then. Nora’s last weekend. Spent away from him. Simon turned and faced the musicians. He recognized the tune, but couldn’t remember the name of the song.

“Anyway, how’s Melis?” Robert asked. “I heard you might get married?”

Simon stabbed his cigarette out into the dirty ashtray. Word in Istanbul traveled fast. Nora must know about that, too.

“Melis is wonderful,” he said. “She’s always wonderful.”

“Actually I’m quite glad you’re here,” Robert said. “I’m headed to Bulgaria tomorrow. Give me directions, would you?”

“A border run?” Simon asked. “Nobody does those anymore.”

Robert explained that his work visa had expired two days before, and that since the government had raised the fees on working permits again, he wanted to stay in Turkey on a tourist visa for a while to save money.

“You’ve done border runs before, right?” Robert asked.

“More than I can count,” Simon answered, though it had been a few years since his last one.

“Good,” Robert said. “None of that lot have. They couldn’t tell me a damn thing that’s useful.” He pointed to the expats sitting in the back. Their other friends.

Have I been in Istanbul that long? Simon wondered. Sweet fucking Christ. I’m the only one who knows how to do a border run anymore?

Robert got a pen from the barman. Simon held it in his hand, pausing, as though he couldn’t quite remember everything

“You seen that government friend of yours yet?” Simon asked. “You talk to him yet like you said you might?”

Without Robert’s friend’s help, getting the permit for a business would be nearly impossible, Simon knew. The fees and the waiting list for a foreigner to open a business

in Istanbul were monstrous. Having a friend was mandatory. In Turkish, they referred to such a friend as a *torpedo*. Robert didn't even look at him as he answered.

"Haven't seen him," he said. "Hurry up and write that border info down, would you?"

"Sure, sure," Simon said, and wrote the bus numbers, the times they left, and a few things to say on bar napkins.

"It's best to take a *dolmuş* to the border," he said. "And walk across. You'll only have to stay in Bulgaria until after midnight."

Robert put the directions in his wallet.

"If I cross the border tomorrow," he said. "I can cross back the same day, right?"

Simon paused for a moment. Then assured Robert that yes, there would be no problem at all. He could cross right back into Turkey, and be back in Istanbul by night.

"I'm off then," Robert said. He shook Simon's hand, and waved to the others.

Simon smiled watching him leave. Good luck at the border, he thought. Without a visa, and with a South African passport. Maybe he'd be fine, though. Robert could be a smooth character.

Simon made his way back through the crowd to see the others. He heard right away that they were talking about the bombs. Speculating about the number of dead. Istanbul was not known for this.

"How you been, friends?" Simon interrupted. He reached across the table to shake Wes's hand. Wes was wearing his black gloves, as usual, with the fingers cut off. He dressed as though he was still in Toronto in the dead of winter. He and Simon had been roommates until Simon lost his last job.

Simon hugged Michelle and asked her about her boyfriend, Ahmet, who was up visiting family on the Black Sea. She had met Ahmet at the Grand Bazaar, as she'd shopped for gifts for her mother and sister. Ahmet wooed her with bargains for necklaces and earrings. He gave her a deal for the gold, and she gave him her phone number. They were always talking about marrying and moving to Australia, but they didn't know what work he could do in Melbourne. So they stayed in Istanbul, where both of them had work and the rent was cheap.

Claire offered Simon a shy wave, and Simon had to squeeze his way back into the corner to reach her and give her a hug, too. Claire was the youngest of them all, even younger than Nora. Fresh from university. She drank white wine, and came out only when Michelle came out.

"Anybody seen Nora tonight?" Simon asked. He slipped his jacket off and put it over the back of his chair.

They all shook their heads.

He ran his eyes over the room. Smoke rose from crowded tables, and the singer cooed into the microphone, flashing his crooked teeth.

The waiter, Nüri, weaved his way over to their table, his shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows. Wet patches circled out from his armpits. Simon had taught Nüri some English when Nüri first began at Pano, so he could take the orders of the other expats. Nüri asked things in Turkish, and Simon wrote out the lines in English for him on bar napkins. For weeks the napkins poked out of Nüri's shirt pocket as he hustled through the bar, until he'd learned the lines by heart. Then he gave the napkins back. Nüri used to call him *Amerikan*, as a nickname, but since the Iraq invasion a few months before,

Simon had become nameless to the staff of Pano. Nüri stood silently over him, waiting for his order.

“Duble rakı alabilir miyim?”

Nüri nodded and brought over Simon’s drink. Turkish *rakı*—or ‘lion’s milk,’ as the locals called it. When mixed with water it turned chalky white, and made your throat and eyes and ears burn. It was a lot like the Greek ouzo, but Simon knew better than to ever tell a Turk that.

Simon spotted an empty chair at another table and squeezed it between him and Wes. He checked the door again: no Nora. Don’t worry, he told himself. She’ll come. She’d want to see him, too, of course. She was leaving soon. Their time together was limited, and precious. She wouldn’t go away with Robert.

“You ever think this would happen in Istanbul?” Wes asked him. Simon wanted to play dumb. But he knew they were talking about the bombs. He didn’t answer, and Michelle jumped in.

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Michelle said. “The Turks didn’t want the war. But America is where so much aid comes from. Haven’t you been reading the papers?”

Simon drummed his fingers over the tabletop. “When you live in a place long enough, you stop reading about it.”

“But Turkey has stayed out of it,” Wes said. “Why should there be any bombs here? It’s nonsense.”

Michelle looked at him, smiled. “But Turkish troops are lined up all along the border in the south. We don’t know what’s going to happen here.”

Claire cast her eyes around the table, looking sadly at each of them.

“I thought it was an earthquake,” she said. “All the way cross the city it was, but I felt the ground tremble. These old buildings scare me.”

Michelle rubbed her back, as Claire stared into her wine.

“Forty-two dead,” Wes said. “Hundreds more injured.”

“Enough of that,” Simon said to them. “I’ll buy a drink for everyone, as long as there’s no more talk about the bombs.”

Simon waved Nüri over again and ordered a round.

“What’s with you?” Michelle asked.

“I want to have a good time,” he answered, and coughed into his hand. If Nora were there it would be easier; she liked having a good time, too.

The drinks came and Simon made a toast.

“To Istanbul. Our beloved city.”

They clinked glasses in silence.

Claire asked him if he was working again, and he told her he was.

“How did you find a teaching job this time of year?” Michelle asked.

“Remember I’ve got experience,” he said. But it was Melis who’d arranged it all.

“I remember Turks just stopped me on the street,” Wes said, “asking if I’d teach them. The money used to just roll in, didn’t it?”

“I used to have classes so full, students were sitting on the floor, taking notes on their knees.”

Claire nodded along, though she hadn’t seen Istanbul in those days, during the big English teaching boom, when another school had been opening up, it seemed, every

minute. Be a native speaker of English and somebody in the city would put you in front of a class, have you teaching Turks for decent pay—decent, at least, by local standards.

“Things will get better,” Simon told them. He’d been around even before the big teaching boom. He knew how the city could change. You had to keep riding it, trust it. He looked over his shoulder toward the door. Surely Nora would be along soon. He’d wait all night if he had to.

The drinks continued coming and Simon swayed in his chair to the music. He smacked his knee to the beat, and shook his head when the singer wailed out a high note. He wished he could join them, be a part of the music they made. The *saz* player’s hand snaked up and down the neck of the instrument, picking through a solo, and Simon laughed madly with joy. The music rattled through the tables, the chairs, even the glass in his hand shook. This was as close as he could now get. Working at the radio station had its moments, but that was music with a fake pulse. Real music should not be predictable, but spontaneous, not planned out. Driven by hunger and lust. Like life. A real jazz club. That was what Istanbul needed. Simon felt certain. If only more Turks would listen to more jazz he could complete his happiness. A constant emotional ride into forgetfulness of the real world. That was important. Jazz was important. *Raki*, cigarettes, a crowded bar, and loud fast real jazz: it was the best. Every time a song ended he’d fidget, and look around the room, until the music began again, and he could lose himself in a rhythm wild and unknown.

Michelle finished her drink, and then she and Claire stood up from the table.

“Time for us to shove off,” Michelle said.

“How can you leave so soon?” Simon asked.

Claire yawned into her hand. Nüri and the rest of the waiters stood behind the bar, washing glasses and mugs. White work shirts pulled out of their black trousers, signaling the end of the night. All of them laughed together, as the bartender counted the emptied bottles of *raki* and wine.

Wes stood, too, and offered Simon his hand.

“I’ll see these ladies to a taxi,” he said. “You sure you won’t come with us?”

Simon swirled his drink, then finished it. He watched the drummer stomp his foot, making those bells jingle. He looked over his shoulder to the door. The bar was emptying out.

“Maybe Nora’s not coming,” Wes said.

Simon looked up at him. “Yes, she will. She always has before.”

Regardless, the music hadn’t finished. It was bad luck, the worst luck, to leave a bar before the music had finished. Unless, of course, the music was no good. Then it became bad luck to stay. Why didn’t everybody follow these same rules? Nora would come. How could she not? She must be on her way. She’d arrive any moment. Simon looked into his wallet and saw he’d spent all of his money, buying that cheeky drink for everybody else. He asked Wes to loan him a few bills.

“Just enough so I can buy Nora a drink,” Simon explained. “Then make my way home.”

Wes sighed and reached into his pocket.

“Don’t spend it all on *raki*.”

“What makes you think I’d ever do something like that?”

Then Wes was gone and Simon had the table to himself. The music played on.

When he'd been Wes's roommate, Wes had never left without him, though Simon had often made it difficult, because he rarely wanted to go home. Once, when out drinking alone, Simon had got so drunk he'd slept in the backseat of an unlocked car on a side street off İstiklâl. He awoke, curled up under his jacket, which was stiff from the cold, and he had no memory of how he'd ended up there. He'd stumbled home as bakeries were opening, men in white aprons stuffing ovens with mounds of dough, and children lined up for school buses, books stacked in their arms.

Not long after Simon was left, alone the musicians finished playing, and began packing up their instruments. Simon stood up from the table, clapped for the men.

"Çok güzel," he said. "Çok güzel. Doğru."

The *saz* player smiled at him, and gave a modest bow.

Simon sat, even though his drink was finished. He'd had the one he would have bought for Nora. He kept his eye on the door, and put his arm around the empty chair next to him. He stayed until he was the last one—only him and the bartender. Then the bartender came over and ushered Simon out into the cold street.

"İyi akşamlar," Simon said to the man, and then made his way down long İstiklâl Street. When he had his own club he'd never throw anybody out, no matter how late it got. He found a payphone then, and did what he should have done hours before: call Nora. He'd felt certain, though, that she'd show up. He would have gone straight to her apartment, but two weeks before she had moved in with two of her students, because she didn't want to sign a new lease since she was leaving so soon. The students she lived with were a married couple Simon had taught before her. They worked at the British

Bank, where Nora taught a class twice a week. It was too late to be calling, but Simon didn't care.

The phone rang and rang. Finally a man answered. Bozkurt, Simon's old student.

"Is Nora there?" He spoke in a near whisper, like a thief.

"Simon teacher, is that you?" Bozkurt asked.

"I'm sorry it's so late," Simon told him. "But could I speak with Nora for a moment?"

Bozkurt laughed. His laughter was always big and warm.

"Nora is not here, though," Bozkurt said. "She met with a friend."

Simon thanked him, and told him goodbye, and Bozkurt invited him to come over for tea sometime soon. He'd made the same invitation numerous times when Simon had been his teacher. Simon never went.

Then, just before hanging up, Simon remembered that Nora taught at the British Bank the next day. "Ask her to wait for me after her classes finish, okay?"

Bozkurt assured Simon he would.

Simon hung up and walked down the street. Istiklâl's stars hung over his head, lighting his every step.

Chapter Two

The yellow *dolmuş* bumped along over the Atatürk Bridge. Simon sat in the back, and the row ahead of him was full of passengers. The driver jerked through the gears, and the small bus hummed. Simon stared out at the Bosphorus below. During the day, ferryboats puffed back and forth from Europe to Asia, but at night the Bosphorus waters

were empty and dark, except for light that strayed from the city. The enormous domes of ancient mosques stood up from the night mist, and tall minarets towered along the shore like a line of candles. Simon sometimes still dreamed that it was his first year in Istanbul again, and he was riding a ferryboat to Asia for the first time, just as the sun set behind the huge domed roof of the thousand-year-old Aya Sofia. The mosque's walls glowed a pale orange in the light, and its minarets shined silver. A newspaper lay opened in his lap, as waiters in black shirts circled about, holding trays of golden tea above their heads. Little boys stood at the back of the boat, laughing and tossing pieces of *simit* to seagulls, and the birds dove into the wine dark waters for the bread. That was when he'd worked a full four days a week, and had his closet stuffed with money—envelopes full of ten million lira notes stuffed inside his shirt pockets, or hidden in his extra pair of shoes. There had been plenty of classes then, and no war in the south, and Turks had been eager to shake his hand, and sometimes said, "*Oh, Amerika. Demokrasi de çok seviyoruz.*"

We love democracy here, too.

It had been ages since he had last taken a ferryboat, even though he now lived with Melis in Asia. He kicked himself for that. The Bosphorus was too beautiful to not be enjoyed every day. He'd ride across it soon, he promised himself. He'd do it with Nora. The *dolmuş* bumped along over the bridge, and the Bosphorus disappeared behind them.

Simon slipped off his shoes in the hall, before stepping inside Melis's apartment. She worked early in the morning, six days a week at an import/export company. She translated correspondence into English for her boss, but the pay was bad and she wanted something else. After university she'd applied twice to be an au pair in England, but the

British Consulate turned her down both times, and kept her visa application fee—sixty pounds sterling.

Melis had recently applied for a tourist visa to go on holiday in France. She wanted to make drawings of the south of France, though her walls were already filled with drawings of her family, and scenes of Istanbul, and with scenes from the two holidays she'd been on her life. Done with bright chalks that dirtied her fingers. Drawing with chalks had been a love of hers when she'd been in school, and then after her divorce she'd taken it up again. The pictures were beautiful, and Simon liked looking over them when she wasn't home. She could do marvelous drawings of France. But the French Consulate wouldn't give her the visa, Simon figured. They'd want proof she wouldn't try and stay in their country and seek benefits or work. But she wasn't married, had no children. Only a low-paying job, and a nearly empty bank account. Not what the E.U. considered 'proof.'

"Screw the E.U.," Simon always told her. He suggested they get married. Then she could get a U.S. passport and travel anywhere in Western Europe. It occurred to him, too, that if they got married he could get the licenses for opening a business with less trouble. He would be a Turk. Melis said marriage was more serious than that. She was right, of course. But there were such positive advantages available for both of them if they married. One day he'd gone to the U.S. Consulate and ordered all the papers.

Melis spoke the best English of any Turk Simon had ever met. So many of his students never learned a thing. And Melis had been his student briefly, his best student ever, and she hadn't even needed him really. Simon started dating her after she'd been in his class only a few weeks, despite it being against his work contract with the school.

She was beautiful, and anyway he'd done it before, and he knew that the female students would never tell. They'd be too embarrassed. The owner of the school saw him with Melis in public one day, and, when asked about it later, Simon confessed that he was dating her. It was a dare, really. Simon never thought he'd be fired, but he lost his job the next day, and soon couldn't pay his rent at Wes's apartment. Melis had felt guilty, then responsible. So she'd invited him to move in with her, at least until he got back on his feet.

He hung his coat next to her row of coats and sweaters by the door, and ran his hands over the soft sleeves of her clothes. The smell in her clothes and her hair always caught him off guard—clean and sweet. Many Turkish women wore the same perfume, but it always made Simon think of Melis. Sometimes when he was walking alone in the street, he'd smell her and turn and look. Never was it her.

Melis was sitting up in bed, pillows piled over her feet. The curtains blew in the wind and Simon crossed the room and closed the windows, keeping his back to her. Whenever he came home late he waited for her to speak first.

“Was it close to you?” she asked.

He knew she meant the bomb.

“No,” he said. He didn't want to relive it in words or thoughts. The children flashed through his mind. Faces full of glass. He shut his eyes.

“Why didn't you call me?”

“I was teaching.”

“I worried about you.”

“Look at me,” he said. “I'm fine.”

“You’re drunk.” She rolled over and faced the wall.

He stepped out of his trousers, leaving them next to her bed.

“Don’t leave your clothes on the floor, okay?” she said.

“I’ll get them in the morning,” he said, and slid up close to her under the sheets.

He was a fool for not coming home sooner. He felt that way every time he got home and found her waiting for him. She was wearing a t-shirt, and a pair of Simon’s boxer shorts. She never slept naked anymore, not since the earthquake in the north of the country buried 20,000 in the middle of their sleep. She even wore thick socks, and kept a pair of shoes by her side of the bed.

“You never clean up,” she said.

“I’m tired,” he said, and ran a hand through her long dark hair. “But it’s good to see you. I’m sorry I didn’t call.”

She turned and he looked into her long, thin face, and the moonlight shined in her eyes. “My brother,” she began. “He didn’t call or anything, and he came here today. Just after I had called for you at the school. He saw all your clothes on the floor. Your cigarettes. Your messes are everywhere.”

“Did you tell him about me?” Simon asked.

“What could I do? He shouted at me. *‘Kimin şeyleri, Melis? Kimle oturuyosun?’*”

“But did you tell him about me?”

“What could I do?” she said. “He saw everything. I had to say, ‘yes.’ *Evet.*”

Simon sat up in bed.

“You’ve kept us a secret for a year. And there’s been no trouble.”

“He called me ‘whore’ because of you. You know how that feels? My brother calling me ‘whore?’”

She tried getting away from him, pulling her long legs out from under the sheets, but he caught her by her waist.

“Where even were you tonight?” she said.

He pulled her closer and covered her up again with the sheets and blanket. He thought of Nora sleeping completely naked, somewhere unknown to him. Robert, maybe, smoking up all her cigarettes.

“I even thought my brother might hit me,” she said.

“Did he?” Simon asked.

Her wet face mashed into his chest, and she stopped pulling away.

“Did he hit you, Melis?”

“No,” she said. “But I thought he might.”

Simon let out a long breath, and held her. He stroked the soft skin of her arm, one of the few bare parts of her body available to him then. He kissed the side of her face. He had heard stories about her brother—Kemal. How he’d broken dinner plates against the windowsill in her kitchen after he’d learned she was seeing a boy while in university. She’d married, and then later been divorced by that same man when he’d found out she couldn’t have children. Simon was the only man she’d met that didn’t care she’d been married before. It had taken her months to confess it to him, and then Simon had assured her it was no problem for him at all. Most everybody in his family was divorced anyway.

“Listen,” she said. “I called my mother. I told her about you, too. I had to, you know that, Simon. Before Kemal told something crazy. You know what my mother is to

me, don't you? Tomorrow night you must meet her, okay? Before my brother tells her about us. So I don't have to hide anything anymore."

"You can't be serious," he said.

"Don't make me a fool," she said. "You live with me now. You should want to meet them, okay? Please. Just meet my mother."

Simon lay flat on his back and stared at the ceiling. Small cracks from past tremors wrinkled up the corners of the room. Nora could be somewhere on Istiklâl. Laughing in the back of a smoky bar that never closed. Melis stayed close to him, and he kissed her and put his fingers through her long hair.

"You think this will make your mother happy?" he asked.

"We'll go early, okay?" she said. "I told her already what foods you like."

Simon stroked her hair.

"If you don't meet my mother," she said. "You shouldn't stay with me anymore."

He wanted a cigarette, but Melis didn't allow him to smoke in bed. That was the rule he followed best. At least when she was home.

"Do you want me to leave?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I want you to be serious about me."

He turned and looked her in the face, but the light had shifted and he couldn't find her eyes in the darkness. He'd almost not come home, and wouldn't have if he'd found Nora. Then he wouldn't have had to deal with any of this brother and mother business, which he was sure would blow over in a day or two, like those thick, heavy clouds that rolled in over the Bosphorus. When Melis was close to him like this, he couldn't tell her

no, even when he wanted to. This puzzled him greatly at times. Even frightened him a little.

“All right,” he said. “Then what should I wear?”

“Your white shirt,” she said. “That I ironed for you.”

He didn’t tell her the shirt was covered in blood from a little girl’s mouth. He didn’t want to know that himself.

Melis fell asleep in his arms, talking about how good a cook her mother was, and how much Simon would love her food. He lay awake for a long time, and eventually the morning call to prayer began. The imam’s smooth voice rolled out from the mosque down the street, and Simon let his eyes shut. Always the call began gently and softly, like a whisper meant for a child’s ear. But on the second ‘*Allah*’ of the prayer, the imam’s voice leapt into a high, shrill cry, pulling all of Istanbul from sleep. And that’s when you heard them, on that second ‘*Allah*,’ all of Istanbul’s imams, from a thousand mosques, singing and chanting together. Only in the morning could you hear them all, when the city was still deathly quiet. Istanbul in the early morning was a city of echoes and shadows, and dark, empty streets. A few months before, Melis had told Simon that the imams weren’t even there. She kept asking him if he really didn’t know the truth. The imams’ recorded their prayer calls once every year, and the mosques played them back at the right times and the imams stayed at home. He didn’t like hearing the prayer call so much after she told him that. He’d rather listen to musicians in a bar.

The call finished and Simon repeated, over and over again, that he would do what Melis wanted, that he’d meet her mother the next day, and that he’d have plenty of time before to meet with Nora. It was okay to go and meet Nora. She’d be gone soon. Then

it would be finished. Done forever. Finally Melis got up and Simon fell asleep watching her dress for work, slipping into a red skirt that hung just below her knees.

Chapter Three

Simon didn't let himself sleep too late, and left Melis's apartment without breakfast. A sharp winter sun shone down, but the wind was cold and blew bitterly through his clothes. Buses idled in the Kadıköy station, row after row of them, each with a line of people pushing their way aboard. He found a bus to the European side, and rubbed his cold hands together: he was going to see Nora.

He'd thought about leaving Melis a note, telling her that he'd been given a tip about another job, and that if he wasn't home on time she should go on to her mother's without him. But he changed his mind and left her nothing. He felt certain that he'd have time to see them both.

The bus filled up quickly and Simon had to stand in the back, next to a young boy holding a sack of dusty pomegranates in his arms. A businessman in a black suit was flipping through the newspaper. The front-page headline read: *Terör İstanbul'da!* And below were pictures of police carrying bodies away from yesterday's bombs. Below the bombs were pictures of the Americans smiling in Ankara. Continued meetings about military bases, soldiers and money. The businessman caught Simon reading his paper, and coughed hoarsely into a handkerchief.

Simon gazed out the window, looking for the yellow building on the European shore that Nora had lived in. He remembered the last night they'd slept together in Beşiktaş, before she'd moved to Bozkurt and Asena's. Her red hair and her white skin

shone in the morning sun, and they'd made love on the purple rug she'd bought the year before in India. He couldn't stay long, because he'd had to teach that day, and he'd left her naked on her stomach, wearing only her socks, an old wooden clock she'd bought at the Bazaar ticking away at her elbow. She'd needed him to leave anyway, because Richard was going to call from London soon. He slipped into his black coat, taught his lessons and went home to Melis, with an armful of purple wildflowers bought from the gypsy woman with the spidery hands always there on Melis's street corner. Dinner had been waiting. Red lentil soup, with bread and salad. That should have been his most perfect day ever, but a strange guilt had tingled over his skin the whole time. He'd not really relaxed enough to enjoy either woman.

The bus was speeding across the bridge when Simon saw the smoke. He pushed his way to the window, knocking the boy's sack of pomegranates to the floor. Simon apologized, and helped the boy pick them up, but kept looking out the window. Black smoke snaked through the sky, far off on the European side of the city. Simon groped for the fruit at his feet, and his heart raced.

Two blocks before reaching İstiklâl the driver pulled the bus over to the side of the road, and whispered into his CB radio. Then he stood and faced the passengers and pulled at his black moustache.

"Haydi, arkadaşlar," he finally shouted. "The bus stops here today. They won't let us get any closer. If you have business on İstiklâl, leave it until tomorrow."

People threw up their hands and complained, but the driver took his keys, sat down on the sidewalk, and lit a cigarette. People wanted to know if it was another bomb, but the driver shook his head and said, "They don't tell me anything."

Simon pushed his way off the bus. Already he was late. Nora never ended her classes early, though, unlike when he had taught at the bank, so there was still a chance he could catch her. Regardless of that, he'd asked Bozkurt to tell Nora to wait for him. If she was still there, close to the smoke, she could be in trouble, and because of him. He ran down the street.

He stopped when he reached Istiklâl. Sweat poured down his arms, and he couldn't take another step. The sky felt strangely huge, crippling even. He realized what it was: the stars strung above the street were gone, gutted from the sky. Glass and wire littered the ground. A woman stumbled into him, coughing and smearing ash into his clothes. A man took the woman by the arm, and wiped the dust out of her eyes with his fingers. The man yelled at Simon, but Simon didn't understand. He nearly fell over, but so many people were streaming past him that there wasn't room to fall. He stumbled and stepped on something soft, and saw it was a *simit* bread. Dozens and dozens of them lay on the ground, dropped by a fleeing vender. Finally Simon ran through them, glass crackling under his feet. Nora, he thought. What if she's not okay? She's fine, he told himself. It couldn't have been close to the bank. He had to find her.

A bald man stood in the doorway of an unlit shop, his arms folded across his chest, and a wet apron tied around his waist. A broom lay at his feet. He stared at the people rushing past, and at the piles of glass. A cigarette hung from his lips. He checked his watch and then crossed his arms again.

The closer Simon got the more tightly his hands curled up, his fingernails digging into the flesh of his palms. He ran toward the billowing black smoke. The news once

again would be filled with the talk of bombs and war. And the expats would all be talking about it. How many rounds of drinks would he have to buy to shut them all up?

Soldiers marched through the street, over a hundred of them at least, and all of them holding machine guns close against their chests. Never had he seen such a thing on Istiklâl before. The soldiers looked barely out of high school, and were as thin and lean as greyhounds. They wore black berets, and their bulletproof vests rose up and bumped into their chins as they marched. One of the boys flashed Simon a hard look, his cut cheeks jumping out of his face. A small tank rolled along behind them, on the tracks meant for the tram. It looked like a lost rhino, scary and pathetic. Simon looked away, thinking, You'll all be in Iraq soon. And the soldiers marched on.

Men milled around the barricades. They smoked and craned their necks to see farther down the street, but the police had blocked it off so far down that the bank was kept out of view.

Simon tried passing the barricade, but a policeman stopped him.

"*Ağabey*, my friend is waiting for me," Simon said.

The policeman shoved him hard with both hands, and Simon fell backwards, skinning his hands on the cold stones of Istiklâl. Two men lifted him by his armpits, and helped him to his feet. They asked him if he was okay. He put a cigarette in his mouth, but couldn't hold the match still enough to light it. Back streets and alleyways flooded his mind. He had to find Nora. How close had she been? More than one way existed to get to the bank. He spit out the unlit cigarette, squashed it with his foot.

Black burn marks scarred building walls, and windows that hadn't been broken were burned black. Simon snuck up a narrow alley, past cats hiding in a dumpster, and

saw it all suddenly right before him. Busted pipes poured water into the street, and glass fell from blown out windows, crashing to the ground. A car bomb had ripped open the British Bank.

Dead bodies lay in rows, newspapers covering their faces. The wind blew, clearing away some of the smoke and the rotten smell, but the blood was so thick it had turned black, and the newspapers stuck to the bodies. Was Nora one of them? He stumbled forward, grabbing his knees.

“Nora,” Simon managed to say, as he looked over the bodies. His voice felt broken. He began to choke, and his eyes burned. Medics ran past him, carrying a woman in their arms. Her head hung limp, but her arms twitched and shook. Her dress stirred in the wind, showing her young legs. A man lay on the ground biting into his fist. His gold watch shone in the afternoon light. Blood was left where his hair had been.

Nora’s narrow face grew inside him, and his chest hurt. He saw her leaning over a wine glass, red hair even with her chin. Hands covered in little rings, turquoise and silver. A cigarette fluttering in her fingers. She loved Istiklâl Street. As much as he loved it. And he was supposed to have three days left with her.

Simon screamed her name and stared up at the broken building.

“Nora! Nora! I’m here!”

What if she were dead? Waiting for him, running late as ever, when the bomb hit?

Two policemen grabbed him by the arms and dragged him away, blowing their whistles frantically into his face.

“I worked there, too,” he said.

The policemen threw him back behind the barricade again, into the crowd of men. Simon smacked into hard shoulders and elbows. The men in the crowd looked at him dumbly, and he wandered away. The wind blew through his wet hair. He tried every pay phone he found but none of them worked. Finally he ran to a main street and hailed the first taxi he saw. He sat up front next to the driver, as sweat poured down his cheeks.

"Beşiktaş'a, lütfen," Simon told the driver.

The man's dark eyes narrowed after Simon spoke, and he slowed the car. He looked at Simon and asked where he was from.

"İrlanda," Simon answered.

The driver pulled at his long chin, and his eyes relaxed.

"İrlanda," the man repeated. He looked at the sky for something to say.

"Çok yeşil bir ülke, değil mi?"

"Evet," Simon answered him. Yes, Ireland is very green.

The driver nodded, almost smiled. Simon wondered if the man read the papers. He wondered if he smiled like those Americans in Ankara when he shook people's hands.

"Bugün çok berbat. Kâbus gibi," the driver said.

"Evet," said Simon, agreeing with him. The day had been horrible. Like a nightmare.

The driver's foot hit the gas again, and they sped away from İstiklâl Street.

At the fish markets of Beşiktaş he found a phone that worked and he called Nora at Bozkurt's. Until that moment he'd forgotten that Bozkurt and Asena worked at the bank, too. Nobody answered, so he hung up and dialed the number again, squeezing the grimy receiver until his palm and fingers ached. A man was slicing up the white meat of

a fish, as an old woman in a gray coat waited. Street cats sat watching and licking their paws. Simon slammed the phone down, and kicked the ground. He called Wes next.

“Nora’s okay,” Wes said.

“Thank God.” He rested his head against the smudged glass, and let his body breathe.

“Where is she?” he asked.

“She’s with Robert apparently,” Wes told him. “So she’s okay.”

Simon’s chest tightened. If Nora was with Robert, that meant she hadn’t waited for him. He asked where they’d be that night and hung up. He stood in Beşiktaş, and looked out at the Bosphorus. Boats steamed across to Asia, and the waves sparkled in the sunlight, as though wishing to catch fire.

Chapter Four

Simon stumbled up the steps of Melis’s building in the dark, his hand on the wall to keep balance, because the hall light wouldn’t turn on for him. He’d visited two bars and eaten nothing all day and his legs trembled as he walked. Once he reached her door he searched in the dark for the lock, clawing at the old wood with his key.

Melis flung the door open. Her big dark eyes stared out at him, and the light shone through her thick hair.

“You’re making me a fool,” she said.

Simon pushed past her and went to the bedroom. He dropped his coat on the floor, and lay down in the bed and curled up under the blankets, still wearing his shoes.

He couldn't get the scenes from the bombs out of his mind. But in his thoughts he saw his young students under the newspapers, not bank employees.

Melis slammed on the light with the palm of her hand.

"Why do you do this?" she said.

She was crying and her breathing made her whole body shake. Simon sat up in bed, and looked at the clock but couldn't read the time.

"Your mother," he said. "I forgot."

He rubbed his eyes, and looked at Melis. She was wearing her gray dress that hung straight down from her shoulders, and her flat black shoes. Her 'pious clothes,' she always said. She'd brushed the curls out of her hair, so it hung mostly straight and kept out of her face. She had to walk stiff and straight, and not turn her head too quickly, or the wild curls would come back to her hair again.

"I can be ready in five minutes," he said. He'd been late for Nora, and he didn't want to do the same to Melis, too. He would not let her down. That was not who he was. He stumbled but couldn't quite stand up. "What should I wear?" he asked.

Melis's mouth hung open. She stared at him, and held up her hands.

"You're not coming like this," she said.

"You want me to meet your mother," he said.

She leaned over to look him in the face.

"Look at you," she said. "How could you be the person I met a year ago?"

He stood and reached for her. He wanted to show her he was who she thought he was—or who she thought he had been.

"Let's go," he said. "I want to meet your mother."

She pulled away from his hands.

“You’re not serious,” she said. “Why are you drunk?”

“Don’t talk to me like that,” he said. “You don’t know what I saw today.”

“What about me today?” She stomped her foot as she spoke. “You’re supposed to meet my mother. Not be drunk and late.”

He stepped around her and opened her closet door. He was already thinking about tying his tie. He might be too drunk to do it. Ask her for help.

“Today is important to me,” she said. “Do you know how many men I’ve taken to my mother in the last six years?”

Simon knew that she hadn’t been with any man since her divorce. Nobody had held her hand for six years, let alone met her mother. He looked through his shirts hanging close to hers in the closet.

“*Sıfır*,” she said. “Zero. Nobody for six years.”

“I know,” he said. “But she’ll meet me today, if you’ll tell me what to wear. And she won’t know I’m drunk. I’m not, anyway.” He’d faked his way through plenty of classes and meetings hungover or with a buzz. That had all been practice, he now felt, for meeting Melis’s mother.

Melis shook her head, and pulled at her hair.

“What are you thinking?” she said. She shoved the closet door shut, but missed his hands and he only pulled the closet back open. Melis reached past him then, her shoulder butting hard into his chest, and she yanked out all of his shirts from where they hung. Then she flung them across the bedroom, scattering them across the floor.

“*Git*,” Melis said. “*Evim’den defol. Pisnik!*”

Hair streamed down into her red face. She breathed fast and heavy.

Simon crouched to the floor and began slowly picking up his shirts.

"I'm doing the best I can," he said. But he wondered: when was the last time that had really been true? It wasn't easy anyway, balancing your life between two women.

"I sleep with you every night," Melis said. "And you've never met my mother."

Simon looked up at her. Her eyes shone with tears.

"You've hid me from her for over a year," he said, and he felt himself now growing angry. "Didn't you hide me? Why would I want to meet her now?"

His books were stacked on the bedside table, and Melis took several of them up into her arms. Simon was picking up his shirts when one of his books smacked into his back.

"*Git,*" she said. "I told you, *get out!*"

She hurled another book at Simon's head, but missed, and the book crashed into the wall.

"You're messing up your hair," he said. "Stop it."

But the books kept flying, smashing into the thin walls, and banging to the floor. Simon ran from the room, clipping his shoulder against the doorway, his shirts bundled up in his arms. Melis grabbed another armful of books and chased after him.

"And you don't even work!" she yelled.

"Don't work?" Simon said. "What did I do yesterday?"

He ducked and a flying book knocked over a vase, spilling flowers and water all over the wooden floors.

“You teach hungover,” she said. “People have nothing here and they have you to learn from. I feel sorry for them.”

“I taught you, didn’t I?”

“You never tried,” she said.

“I don’t want to teach anybody anymore,” he said. “I want to open up my own place. I never would have taken this last teaching job if you hadn’t been nagging and pushing me. And I never even wanted to meet your family. You hear me?”

She hurled her last book, and hit square in the nose. Simon dropped his shirts.

“You’re hurting me,” he said.

People were muttering in the hallway, speaking just outside Melis’s door.

“*Herşey iyi, abla?*” a man asked.

Melis brushed her hair from her eyes, and glared at Simon.

“You don’t want to meet my family?” she said. “Then I don’t want you living with me anymore. Okay?”

Simon reached for her, but she slapped at his hands, and he tried pulling her close to him, and she pounded her light fists into his chest.

“I want you to listen to me,” he said. “I want to tell you what I saw.”

“You never tell me anything,” she said. She was crying and her hair swung across her face and Simon caught hold of her by her wrists.

The man knocked on the door again, harder than before.

“Let me go,” Melis said. He felt her breath hot in his face.

“*Abla, yardım edebilir miyim?*” the man called from the hallway.

“Let me tell you what I saw,” he said.

“I don’t care.”

She pulled as hard as she could away from him, and Simon couldn’t keep hold of her. She slipped out from his fingers, and tumbled backward. Her eyes went wild, and her mouth froze in the shape of a scream, but she stayed mute as she fell, and the only sound came from her face smacking the cheap wooden arm of a chair as she twisted and sunk to the floor.

Simon dropped to his knees, but was scared to touch her.

The door rattled in its frame.

“You fell,” he said.

Her face rested on the seat of the chair, hidden from him, and he held her hand.

The man knocked again.

Simon shouted, “*Herşey iyi. Sadece kari-koca bir soru.*”

He’d heard it said exactly like that before in other buildings, when husbands and wives quarreled. Then neighbors kept to their own business.

“Tell me you’re all right,” he whispered to Melis.

She sniffled and he stroked her hair and squeezed her hand.

“Don’t say that to people,” she said. “Don’t tell people I’m your wife.”

“Tell me you’re okay, would you?”

“Don’t touch me,” she said. She looked up. Her right cheek was swelling, turning yellow and bruised, and puffing up into her eye. Simon’s own jaw ached from just looking at her.

“I’ll get ice,” he said. But Melis held his hand and wouldn’t let go.

“You’re not my husband,” she said.

“Okay,” he said. “I know.”

She shook her head, and didn’t blink or wipe clean her eyes.

“You’ve never known how scared I always was you’d leave me. Because you were a foreigner, and you were so different from anybody I’ve ever met. But I thought one day you’d just be gone.”

Simon tried to pull away, but she held him there.

“Turks can’t leave Turkey, you know. But you. You can live anywhere in the world you want. You only need a place to hang your shirts.”

She tossed his hand away.

“You’re never serious about anything, are you?” she said.

Melis stood up and wiped her hair out of her eyes. Simon’s books lay about the room, their covers ripped and bent.

“You don’t know what I saw,” he said, and looked at the floor.

“No,” she said. “I don’t care. I’m late.”

She grabbed her jacket, and opened the door. Simon followed after her. A man stood in his apartment doorway, shirtless. His dark hair was slicked back over his head, neat and shiny. He stared at them as they passed, and shook his head. He glared at Simon. Outside on the street Simon walked at her side, panting for words. She wouldn’t slow down. Her cheek was turning a bright, mean red, and Simon walked on her other side, so he wouldn’t have to look at it.

“You know this is an accident,” he said. “I didn’t want any of this.”

She waved for a taxi, and said, “I don’t care.”

If he let her go away this angry, he feared her anger might settle inside her, maybe even grow. Her anger might never leave.

“You can’t leave like this,” he said.

Two men were leaning against a concrete wall, selling cheap leather shoes. They saw Simon grab Melis, and took their hands out of their pockets.

“Why won’t you listen to me?” Simon pulled her arm as she tried to get inside the taxi.

“Get off,” she said, and clenched her teeth and hissed.

One of the men took Simon by the shoulder.

“*Abla, iyi misin?*” the other man asked.

Relief filled her face. Simon loosened his hold on her and Melis slipped out of his hands.

“*Evet,*” she answered, and slammed the taxi door. She looked at him once more through the half open car window.

“Leave tonight, okay?” she said.

“No,” he said, and reached for the car door, but the man held him back. These men know nothing about her, he thought. But what did he know? He’d spent half his time living with her trying to avoid her.

He watched as the taxi drove away, until it was lost in traffic. The man let Simon go, but both of them kept close by. One sucked at a freshly lit cigarette.

“*Yabancı,*” he said, shaking his head. “They can’t handle Turkish women.”

Simon kept his head down and walked. Stray newspapers blew into his feet and he kicked them. When he was back in her apartment, and saw the mess that they’d made

it began to sink in: Melis had told him to leave. He'd thought of leaving her before, but he'd never thought of losing her. For a long time he simply stood by the door, just inside her apartment, with the lights off and his eyes closed. Her perfume washed over him. She'd calm down, he told himself. Nobody stayed angry forever. He wanted to tell her about the bomb, how close he'd been to it, how scared he'd been. He should have told her he'd almost been killed. Show her the blood on his shirt. He knew she'd never call him a liar. In Turkish it was a much stronger word than in English: *yalan*. Funny how much it sounded like snake: *yılan*. Simon knew people who were honest, who prided themselves on telling the truth. Melis was one of them. Nora knew sometimes it was best to not tell a person everything. Especially with people that you loved.

He flicked on the lights and cleaned feverishly. He picked up his all books and stacked them in the far corner of her bedroom. He soaked up the spilled water with his own towel, and cleaned up the pieces of the broken vase. Then he made the bed, smoothing out the sheet and blanket, making sure they were without a wrinkle. He even washed the dishes that were left in the sink. He picked up his shirts last, and hung them back in her closet.

Then he went ahead and changed into his blue shirt with the thin red stripes. Melis had given him it for his last birthday, after finding his birth date in his passport. It was the only birthday gift he'd been given in the last nine years. Expat friends didn't remember holidays or birthdays. A person only got gifts when they were leaving the country for good. He finished with the buttons, and then wrote Melis a note.

Melis, how can I make today disappear?

He hadn't wanted to write in English, but he couldn't remember the Turkish word for 'disappear.' He'd given his old Turkish-English dictionary to Wes, because he'd had Melis. When he finished writing, he held the note up close to his eyes. It was a good note, he felt. He folded it up, left it on her pillow.

He paced through her apartment and rubbed his hands over her chairs, her coats. He had an hour before the other expats would be out. He closed her door gently behind him, put her key in his pocket.

As he walked down the street the wind blew into him, making his steps uneven. He passed the row of old men in wool hats, with bony crabby hands cupped together, reaching up for coins, and he didn't meet any of the old men's eyes. He rubbed and rubbed Melis's key between his fingers, as though maybe it could give him some sort of luck. She'd be at her mother's by now. All that *börek* and *pilaf* and homemade lentil soup set out on the table, and that mark growing and burning and settling into her cheek.

Simon took the bus back to Istiklâl Street. Once again, the bus stopped two blocks away, and he had to walk up the steep hill alone and in the dark. And as he walked giddiness grew inside him, and his steps were light and sad. Istiklâl would be empty, he thought. Deserted by the bomb. He'd have the street to himself. And Nora would have to come out. After a day like this, how could she not?

He was only a step away when he heard the dinging of bells--the red tram was operating again. A group of boys were chasing after it, too. Simon stood and watched. The boys ran and laughed, and one boy caught up with the tram, and clung to its thin black rails, and the tram carried him down the street. The broken glass had been swept into piles that were as high as his waist, and even taller and larger than some of the

children. The boys ran right past the glass, as though it were something only Simon could see. Men stood on ladders, cutting down the wires and the few lights that were still strung up above the street. The few that hadn't been blown down by the car bomb. People walked under and around the ladders, and three young soldiers strolled in a slow circle, smoking and talking, and carrying machine guns.

Vendors lined the sides of the street, too. Like any other night on İstiklâl. One man sold flashlights, and shined several of them at a time on the crowds that passed closest to him. Another man had a cardboard box filled with black umbrellas at his feet, and he chanted to the crowds that he'd sell two umbrellas for five million lira. Then he'd rub his stomach and lament about the family he had to feed, and his daughter in the hospital. Melis had told him never to believe any of their stories.

Simon walked around the first curve of the street, his feet smacking against the old stones in the dark, and he saw a pack of university students in the street, two dozen of them at least. A few soldiers watched them, and chewed gum. The students waved signs in the air, and chanted and screamed, their faces tipped up to the sky, as though trying to catch the night in their teeth.

Savaş'a hayır! No to war!

Yanki defol! Yankee, get out!

Amerikan dolar ≠ Türk kanı! Dollars ≠ Turkish Blood!

Simon avoided all the students' eyes, and sped past them, and they shoved the flyers into him, but he kept his face down. His hands went numb and dead, and his feet burned. Simon went faster, almost running, and then one of the students stepped into him

as he passed, putting a big shoulder right into Simon's chest. The blow knocked the wind out of him and he fell to the cold ground. The students all circled around.

"*Ağabey, iyi misin?*" asked an older woman who knelt beside him. She wore a headscarf and Simon could only see her dark eyes and her thin lips. He coughed and couldn't speak. The boy who'd hit him smiled, looking down at him. His hands swung at his sides, like meat in a butcher's window.

"Fuck you," Simon told him weakly, as he strained to breathe.

"No," the boy said. His was English perfect. "Fuck you. *Yanki.*"

Simon's palms trembled too much to make fists, and fear throbbed through his body. Two soldiers pointed and laughed.

The woman helped him to his feet, and the boy reached for him. Simon stumbled away, and he ran, not caring if he looked scared anymore, and he didn't look back. His lungs ached for breath, and his neck pulsed with pain and fear.

"*Yanki! Go home!*" the boy yelled and his voice hit like a curse, and Simon felt all the eyes of wonderful *Istiklâl* crawl over him. He heard Melis's voice mixed in, too: *You can't live with me anymore.*

Simon fled up the first side alley he saw and raced into the Bar Madrid. He sat in the back and watched the door, and the barman brought him a beer and a bowl of *çerez*-shelled, salty nuts. A man threw a pair of dice across a *tavla* board, then feverishly moved his pieces, while his friend sitting across from him laughed into his cigarette. At the other table a man and woman sat very close, staring deeply into each other's eyes, one beer sitting between them.

Simon had to find Nora. Her face swirled through his mind. Had she really made plans with Robert instead of him?

The beer tasted bitter and bad, but he couldn't drink it fast enough. Simon finished and called for another. Barman, *daha bira istiyorum, çabuk!* And the barman brought him more.

A little girl came in, selling flowers, her face thin and dirty. Probably no more than nine years old, an army of thin roses in her hands. She stopped at the table with the men playing *tavla*, and the man with the dice raised his thick hand, threatening a slap and he clicked his tongue. The little girl tried the next table. The couple didn't even look at her, and continued blowing smoke rings into the air above their heads. Then she came to Simon's table.

"Fife *milyon*," she said, reading his white skin as foreign. She held up five little fingers.

"*Yok, canım*," he said. Her eyes perked up when she heard his Turkish.

"*Ağabey, lütfen*, I got school tomorrow— art classes. I just want to go home."

"*Güzel*, then go home," he told her. He drew long on his cigarette, and stared into the ashtray on the table. Her hair was long and her shirt white, but wrinkled. He didn't want to look at her, and pulled at his sleeve. The little girl kept the flowers poked in his face.

"Can't go home yet," she said. "Got to make 20 *milyon* first. *Baba* says." She held the word *father* long and accented on her tongue.

"*Tamam*," he said. "Draw me a picture then and I'll give you 20 *milyon*."

Her eyes bulged, and she laid her roses down between them on the old cigarette burned seat. She stood on her tiptoes asking the barman for a pencil and a napkin.

“Draw me a picture of a jazz club,” Simon said.

“*Jaz kulüp?*” she asked. She wrinkled up her brow and leaning away from the table. “What does that look like?”

He described a long, shiny bar, and the musicians sweating and playing in the corner, and all the people who’d be packed in, moving to the music. The silver chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The black and white tile floors. Everybody having a good time. The girl set to drawing, leaning close to the table, her nose only two inches from the napkin, as she slowly made the lines. Her tongue poked out the side of her mouth.

“*Bakma! Bakma! Sürpriz olacak!*”

Don’t look! It’s a surprise!

So Simon looked away, and he got sadder. He asked the girl for her name.

“*Yeter,*” she said.

That was the name families gave when they didn’t want any more female children, in hope that the next child would be a boy. It meant ‘enough.’

She finished the picture and slid it across the table. It was of a little girl, wearing a long princess dress and dancing with her arms up in the air. The dress was full of carefully sketched jewels, and the little girl wore a crown atop her head.

“It’s me,” she told me. “I drew me. I can’t draw a *Jaz Kulüp*. You got that 20 *milyon?*”

“I wanted a jazz club,” he said.

The little girl shrugged, and held out her hand.

Simon gave her the money. She held it up in front of her face, staring at it with dreamy eyes. The bill was crisp and new. They'd only introduced the twenty million notes in the last year. It was the largest bill in the country. The girl may have not seen one before.

"You can have a flower, too," she said, and left a rose next to his beer.

She stuffed the money into her pocket, grabbed her flowers and bolted for the door. Simon held the picture up in his hands, admiring it, seeing more in it than there really was. Her lines, drawn slow and careful, making up the thin waify arms that were hers. The barman came over, sighing and shaking his head, and sat another beer before him.

"She's going home," Simon told him. "That's a good thing, isn't it? *Değil mi?*"

The barman sighed, and brushed cigarette ash off the chest of his shirt.

"She doesn't go to school," he said. "I see that girl all the time. You have money, but you don't know reality. So you don't lose that *yirmi milyon* altogether, I'll give you one beer for free. Let's say she bought it for you."

Simon drank the free beer, and took out Melis's key. It was long and thin, and still shiny in places, though mostly the brass had been rubbed dull. He folded the key in the napkin, and put it back in his pocket.

Another little girl entered, only five minutes later. She was carrying roses, too, even more roses than the girl before. Simon had to look closely to make sure it wasn't the same girl, and for a moment he couldn't be sure. This girl had shorter hair, and was

smaller, even thinner. She came straight to his table, as though she'd been drawn a map, and flashed her young pitiful eyes at him.

"Lütfen, ağabey. Fife milyon. I've got school tomorrow..."

He imagined the girl from before out in the street, talking to her little friends, flashing her twenty million note, and saying, "There's a foreigner in Bar Madrid, a real sad sap, and he's tossing out money like candy..."

"Where's that other little girl?" he asked. "The one before?"

The child shrugged, said nothing. Simon handed her the flower the other girl had left for him. The barman was smiling, nodding his head. Simon ran out into the street. He saw her in the shadows, just outside the bar. Flowers lay at her feet, as she held that bill up in front of her face, smiling at it.

"Why aren't you going home?" he yelled and started toward her.

She jumped up, scooping her flowers into her arms and bolted away.

"I don't want the money," he said. "I want you to go home." He ran after her, thinking she couldn't possibly get away, that he knew Istiklâl and all its side streets better than she ever could. But he lost sight of her quickly along the dark edges of the alley. He stopped running to catch his breath. Why didn't she go home? I told her to go home. Why didn't she listen to me?

Chapter Five

Simon walked down the side streets. His back and elbows still stung from smacking into the street. Wind whipped through his shirt, putting him in shivers, and he dug his hands deep into his pockets, but that didn't help. He tucked his head down into

his shirt collar, and didn't look into the dark doorways he passed. The eyes of the boy who'd pushed him down burned through him, taunted him. *Yanki, Go Home!* The words and voice echoed so strongly through his thoughts that he couldn't even hum or sing to himself, until he turned the boy's line into a melody. How about, *Yanki, find Nora!* Maybe even: *Don't hurt Melis.* Simon shivered and walked faster, the rhythm of his feet pounding the uneven stones made the only sound he had. Beer bottles left like bled corpses lined the curb. His fingers ached, and he could barely hold the cigarettes he smoked, one after another, coughing and smoking into the night.

Simon pushed his way inside of Exit Bar, where Wes had said they'd all be. Thick bar heat met his face, and he ran his hands through his hair. A large woman in a purple dress sang by the bar. The dress clung tightly to her round belly, and she sang slow songs, whispering half the words. Her cheeks were painted bright red, and her eyelids coated in blue. Behind her, in the shadows, a skinny man timidly strummed a guitar. Every time a song finished the bartender clapped frenziedly.

"Simon," Wes called out. "Come on over here, you devil."

Wes stood in the corner, waving from a table crowded with foreigners. He wore his black wool hat, and his black jacket hung down to his knees.

"Nora's all right?" he asked Wes.

"Everybody's fine. Don't worry."

"She's been here?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Where is she?"

Wes put his arm around him, squeezed his shoulder.

“I’ll get you a drink. There’s something I’ve got to tell you. You want a drink?”

Simon nodded. He scanned the tables in the room. The faces were all unknown, covered up with blinding smoke. He saw newspapers stuck to all of them. He couldn’t shake the sight from his eyes. Outside the streets and the night were so dark nothing could be seen even out the windows. All the women in the bar seemed to be leaning away from their men, curled up in the evil arms of their chairs. Every time the singer’s voice sank to a deep note in a song the old thin wooden floors rattled under their feet as though they might give away at any moment. The whole world might shatter, split right open. Simon pulled a chair up next to Michelle. He wouldn’t believe Nora was okay until he saw her.

Somebody new sat at the end of the table. A man with stringy blonde hair and a pale smile. A new teacher, no doubt. Simon grinned and reached his hand across the table. The Istanbul expat scene could use some new blood.

“Nice to see somebody new joining the crowd,” he said, and they shook hands. His hands were small and cold.

“This is Ray,” Michelle said. “Ray’s from New Zealand. Isn’t that right, Ray?”

Ray nodded his head, and his stringy hair bounced. “I finally got my arse in gear to do some traveling,” he said, “And look how I’m greeted? Bombs going off my first two days in the city.”

The grin fell from Simon’s face. “Istanbul’s a great city,” he said. “Everybody knows that, don’t they?” He leaned forward in his seat, looked around the table.

“As long as it doesn’t stay like this,” the new man said. “Or I might not be around long.”

Simon hit his fist against the table.

“They even got the British Consulate,” Michelle said. She shook her head, and everyone else lifted their drinks into their faces. “Who’d have thought that they could get away with that?”

Simon hadn’t heard about the Consulate. He tried picturing it in his mind, even shut his eyes for a moment. All he saw was the Bank—glass tumbling down from blown out windows, newspapers flapping over the faces of bodies. The Consulate would look just the same. How many times had Melis waited there in line? Dressed up in her best red dress for another rejection stamp to be smacked into her passport? The skinny man plucked through all the strings on his guitar, and the noise from the amplifier shook the whole room, reverberating through the table and buzzing through their bodies.

“My mother called me today,” Claire said. “She saw the bombs on the television. She asked me, ‘Are you coming home now, dear?’ She sounded so worried. I told her maybe I will.”

Simon laughed out loud. “Has your mother even been to Istanbul? What does she know about anything?”

Claire stared at her hands lying in her lap.

“Ahmet and I are thinking of shoving off, too,” Michelle said. “Don’t know where we’ll go. But I sure as hell didn’t come to Istanbul to be put through all of this.”

“It won’t last,” Simon told them.

“But it’s not just that,” Michelle said. “Surely you can see that.”

Simon took a long hit of his *raki* and looked to the door.

“The way we’ve been living,” Wes began, “It might be over, too.” He nodded glumly, and Simon stared at him, shocked that Wes was talking like the rest of them.

“Don’t say that,” he said. “It’s not true anyway.”

“You just found work,” Michelle said. “Maybe we’ll all be scraping by soon.”

Simon turned to the new man. “Once you get steady teaching somewhere, the cash will just flow in.”

The new man nodded.

“The longer you stay here,” Michelle said, “the more the rest of world disappears.”

“Who needs the rest of the world?” Simon said. “We’ve got Istanbul.”

“I’m starting to remember again there are other places. That’s all.”

Simon sighed loudly. He hated all of this talk. He turned again to the new man, pleading with him. “You’ll be hard pressed to find any other city in the world with as much as Istanbul,” he continued on. “Have you walked along the Bosphorus yet? Eat a nice fish dinner along the Bosphorus. It’s fantastic. And the Sultan’s old palace. Have you been to the Sultan’s old palace yet? You’ve really got to see it.”

“To be honest,” the new man said. “I don’t know anymore if this is where I want to be at the moment.”

“Not after those bombs,” Claire said.

“I’m not talking about the fucking bombs,” Simon shouted out at them. He jumped up from his seat, and his glass rattled to the floor, smashing to pieces. “This city has been here for thousands of years, hasn’t it? What hasn’t it seen? This is just another thing to live through. That will make it even better in the end.”

Wes grabbed Simon's arm and led him to the bar.

"What's wrong with you?" he said.

Simon looked into Wes's eyes. Everyone in the room was watching him.

"Where's Nora?" Simon asked.

"I don't know. But maybe you should go home."

"I don't care about any of them," he shouted back at the table. He looked at Wes again. "You told me Nora would be here."

Simon looked at the door. He patted his pockets, and realized the last few bills he had were in one of his shirt pockets at Melis's.

"Get me a drink, would you?" Simon asked.

Simon held his cigarettes out to him in exchange.

Wes took two and put them behind his ear.

"I've got to tell you something," he told Simon. "Sit down, all right? I'll get you another drink."

They sat at the bar. The drinks came and Simon took a long hit off his *raki*. The bass notes of the guitar made his glass tremble in his fingers. Simon played with a dead match he'd picked up out of the ashtray. "Istanbul's a great city," he said. "We've had good times here. How can people forget that?"

"Listen," Wes said. "I've got to tell you about the bomb today." Simon rolled his eyes. He didn't want to hear anything about it. As though it was a made up story, and he were the only one that knew its untruth. Wes explained to him, though, that when he'd seen Nora earlier she had told him someone Simon knew had been killed. The manager of the British Bank. Bozkurt.

A cold pain hit Simon's chest. He couldn't believe it. No. Couldn't be. He rubbed his eyes, and lifted his drink to his lips. When had he last seen Bozkurt? He thought back past his phone call of the other night, and saw Bozkurt, three weeks before, leaping into a taxicab, his baldhead shining like a smooth, polished dish. Bozkurt saw Simon on the sidewalk, and ordered the driver to stop. He jumped out of the taxi just to shake Simon's hand and talk, despite running late for work.

"You were my teacher," Bozkurt said. "It would be impossible for me not to stop and say hello."

Simon wished he gone over to Bozkurt's at least once for *çay*. He been invited many times, but never went.

"If this music were any good," he said to Wes, "it could make a person cry."

The woman in the purple dress sang and shook her big belly. The man behind her sat with his guitar in his lap and did nothing but watch her dance slowly before him. When the woman finished her song, she did a little bow, and the bartender whistled for her and clapped. The guitar player yawned and stared at his hands.

Simon rubbed his fingers against his temples. The narrow shelves behind the barman were stuffed with glowing bottles, which looked as though they might slip and crash to the floor at any moment.

"Nora wants me to meet her tomorrow," he said.

"Nora wants *you* to meet her?" Simon asked. "What the hell for?" Good God, was she going to run away with Wes now?

"She thinks they might have the funeral tomorrow," Wes said. "Not that I really want to go. But what could I say?"

Simon had forgotten about the Muslim tradition. Bury the dead before the sun set on the day after death. Such a rush to get them in the ground. So that the family could say goodbye while the body still looked as it had in life. But how did bodies look after car bombs? He shivered and squeezed shut his eyes. The little girl's bloody lip. That had been bad enough.

"She told me to ask you to come along if I saw you," Wes said.

Come to the funeral? How sweet of her, Simon thought. Inviting me to a funeral party before she goes. How could he go to Bozkurt's funeral? He'd rather pretend it hadn't happened.

Wes pulled out his money and ordered two more drinks. Two drummers joined the woman and the man on stage and the crowd began to clap as the music picked up. "I can't sit here anymore," he said, and took his drink and went to the front. Where were the old expats? From those years long ago? The nights when they'd danced and moved together, and nobody ever went home alone? In a deep, locked up part of himself, he feared those nights had never been. How good had the past been? How bad? Sometimes he wondered if he loved things not for what they truly were, but for what he wanted them to be.

He danced and the music filled his body. Simon remembered asking Bozkurt once what he liked doing at the weekends, and Bozkurt had answered, "I like to go to the Bosphorus and sway with the water." Who'd taught him that? Sway. A completely useless word for a man working at a bank. Not anywhere in any of their course books. But a beautiful one to know. Answering a dull, standard teacher question with a real and unusual answer. He couldn't be dead. Couldn't. The drummers smacked the hard skins

of their drums with fast, bare hands, and sweat rolled down their cheeks. Nobody ever smiled like a musician enjoying himself. The big woman shook her hips and stuck her belly into the sitting men's faces.

Simon danced his way over to the table where the others sat.

"Come on," he shouted, and he grabbed Michelle's hand, and then Claire's. But they shook him off.

"Why are you sitting there? Get up and fucking enjoy yourselves!"

Michelle slipped on her coat, and Claire did the same. Ray went over to the bar and chatted with Wes. Simon bumped his way back into the crowd dancing up close to the stage. He stumbled into a woman and his nose went into her soft hair, and she turned and smiled. Wes came over to him, holding both their jackets over his arm.

"Let's go," he said.

"I'm waiting for Nora," he said, and spun with his arms over his head.

"It's late. I don't think she's coming."

Simon stopped and said, "I'm not leaving until I see her." He leaned into Wes's face. Then spun away from him, and danced up close to the woman in purple, dancing under the shadow of stomach.

Wes sat and waited for him, watching him dance as the bar grew more and more empty. Even the barman had stopped clapping, and after the musicians finished Simon walked up on to the stage, and picked up the skinny man's guitar. The strings glistened in the weak bar light and Simon sat on his knees. The drummers and the woman watched him motionlessly.

"It's beautiful," he said. The whole body of it shone. He tapped the top string with his thumb, then shut his eyes.

"Çok güzel," he said.

"Play something," the man said.

Then Simon quickly handed the man back his guitar.

"No," he said, and stumbled off the stage.

They were the last two there, and the barman asked them to leave.

"But Nora hasn't come yet," Simon said.

Wes slipped Simon's jacket over his shoulders.

"We'll see her tomorrow," he said. "And you can tell her whatever you want."

"Okay. Fine. Tomorrow."

Simon staggered to the door, and opened it with the full weight of his body. They walked to Istiklâl Street, and when they reached it, the cold wind bit straight into them. With the stars gone from overhead the night was darker, meaner, and Simon felt lost. He wasn't actually in his city at all. Where had it gone?

"You want to see where I'm going to open my club?" Simon asked, and put his arm around Wes. He wanted to show it to Nora, but Wes would do for now.

"You're drunk," Wes said. "You talk crazy when you're drunk."

"I'm not crazy," he said. "I think I just dream more than all of you."

They reached the street, and saw that, like most of the side streets around the British Bank, it had been barricaded off. Simon felt panicked suddenly that maybe it had been hurt, too. He stopped and leaned up against a hard cold wall. His breath was short, and his empty chest ached. The street was empty, but the flyers from earlier remained:

bright reds and yellows littering the street with specks of glass. The door of a nearby restaurant flung open, and a man hobbled out with a bag of trash, and dropped it next to a pile of glass. Two cats dove into the sack, poking around for scraps.

“Won’t Melis be happy to see you tonight?” Wes said.

“I’ve got to get home to see her.” He wondered about the dinner at her mother’s, how it had gone. She probably needed somebody to talk to now. He should be there.

“You should stay at mine,” Wes said. “You can’t make it home like this.”

“She tried to kick me out,” Simon explained. “I’ve got to get home to see her. I can’t let it happen.”

“What?”

But then Simon couldn’t hold it any longer. He leaned over and threw up. Clear-white alcohol leapt out of him, splattering in the street and over his shoes. Wes jumped back. Hot tears shot out from Simon’s eyes.

Two Turks were walking behind them, and Simon tried to stand up straighter. He heard their voices, and hoped they weren’t police. One of them, though, was Nüri, the waiter from Pano. He came over, and put a hand on Simon’s shoulder.

“Soldiers are walking the streets tonight,” he said. “You should know better than to let them see you like this.”

Wes didn’t understand a word of what he said, and Nüri didn’t try speaking to them in English. Simon’s head pounded and felt empty of Turkish. He could hardly speak. Nüri and Wes both took one of Simon’s arms and walked him to a taxi at the end of the street.

“To where you go?” Nüri asked Wes.

Wes answered and then Nürî spoke to the taxi driver for them.

“Goodnight, *Amerikan*,” Nürî said, and ran off to rejoin his friend, waiting on Istiklâl. The driver took a long look at them from over his shoulder, then turned on the radio, and drove off into the night. A droning Turkish voice filled the car, and drums made everything pulse. Simon cracked open the window and kept his face in the wind.

“You should see Melis tomorrow,” Wes said. “Wait till you’re sober.”

Simon didn’t answer. His head pounded, and he kept his eyes shut. The radio station was bothering him. Too modern, too disco. Evil music. He wanted to hear his radio station, forgetting that it had been closed down.

“*Ağabey*,” Simon said to the driver. “Could you change the station?”

The man told him the radio was *bozuk* and this was the only signal he got. Simon leaned back in the seat, shut his eyes again.

They arrived at Wes’s apartment, where Simon had lived three months before, and he went straight for the sofa. Wes spoke with his roommate in the hall. Eventually Wes brought him blankets, and a pillow from his room.

“These are yours,” he said. “Remember? You left them.”

Simon held them close to his face. They smelled old and abandoned, and nothing like Melis. He tried running his hands through his hair, and Wes helped him take off his shoes.

“I should call Melis,” Simon said. He struggled to stand and Wes put his hands on his shoulders.

“Call her tomorrow,” Wes said.

“She’s worried, I know.”

Wes held him from standing. "She's asleep. You can call her tomorrow."

"No," Simon said. "I know how much she hates being alone." He lay down finally and gave up moving.

Then Wes left him there on the sofa, and turned the hall light out, but Simon couldn't sleep. He remembered the funeral. Seeing Nora the next day. So many things he needed to do. He threw the blankets to the floor and stumbled down the hall to Wes's room.

"I want to see Nora tomorrow," he said.

"What are you talking about?" Wes asked.

Simon sat the edge of his bed. He'd forgotten how small Wes's room was. The bed blocked the door from opening all the way, and the clothes and shoes left on the floor took up almost all the space there was.

"Without you," he said. "I'll see Nora and you don't have to go."

"You want to go to the funeral?" Wes asked.

"Yes," he said, and rocked forward as he spoke, pushing the word at Wes through the dark. "I knew the man who died."

"But what the hell will you wear?" Wes asked. "You can't go like that."

He hadn't thought about clothes yet. Everything was at Melis's.

"I'll wear my black sports coat," he said. "I'll look nice."

He stood up from Wes's bed, and went back to the sofa. He needed his sleep. The next day he would see Nora, go to Bozkurt's funeral, and then find Melis in the evening. He'd take care of them both, of everyone, and he'd make everything up to Melis. For a long time he lay on the sofa and stared into the darkness that met his face.

Chapter Six

Simon woke once during the night after dreaming he'd lost Melis's key. In the dream he was crossing the Bosphorus on a boat, and her key slipped out of his fingers. He reached over the edge, but all he saw was Melis sinking. Her wild hair curling up like long reeds of grass in the waves, and her face bloated and white. She twisted in the water, looking up at him, then reaching for him, and he woke. He sat up on Wes's sofa, his stomach reeling. His palms were sweaty and cold, and he smacked his fists into the sofa's worn-out cushions. He couldn't believe he was here. After nine years in Istanbul he no longer had a bed.

Simon searched for Melis's key in his pockets, but it wasn't in any of them. Then he swept his hands over the floor until he found the key under his shoe, wrapped in the picture by the little girl from the Bar Madrid. He left the picture on the floor, and curled up under the blanket. Still wearing his pants, and his long black jacket. He held her key under his nose, and the stiff brass smell cleared the pain from his head, but only for a moment. The Turks had a phrase for bad hangovers: *diin akşam'dan kalma*, which meant 'last night was invited, but now it's stayed too long.'

Gray morning light crept in through the windows, putting holes in Simon's sleep. Finally he got up and paced through the poorly lit kitchen, tapping his fingers over the counters and chair tops, breadcrumbs sticking to his bare feet. Today was Bozkurt's funeral. It felt very different to know that as the sky became light outside. At least Muslim funerals were always before sunset. Then he could find Melis afterward, when

she'd be home from work. But he'd have to change his clothes beforehand, stopping by before she got home.

Wes wasn't up when Simon left. He wanted to be early for Nora, to be sure that this time he wouldn't miss her. In the kitchen he found a loaf of bread and cut off the end piece, and he ate that as he walked down the Bakırköy streets, the long sleeves of his jacket flapping against his fingers. A stray dog lay close to the curb, whimpering in its sleep. The dog didn't have an orange tag in its ear, which meant the government hadn't given it its rabies shot. There were bald patches in the animal's fur, exposing shiny, red skin. If it weren't for the whimpering, Simon would have believed the animal was dead. Usually it was dead cats you saw, though. Rarely dead dogs for some reason. Thank God for that, Simon thought. Cats were too majestic, too graceful, to ever be seen dead. It's bad luck to see a dead cat. Istanbul knew that. It knew everything.

Children stayed close to their mothers' legs, and men zipped up their jackets, and everyone walked far into the street to keep a safe distance from the unmarked animal. Simon tossed over his last bite of bread. It landed in front of the dog's trembling nose. But nothing pulled it from its drooling sleep.

Simon took the bus to Taksim Square, to İstiklâl Street. Pigeons pecked at the cold, stone ground, and a man in an orange suit slowly swept up cigarette butts and glass and bottle caps. Nora was nowhere to be seen. The Bank loomed over İstiklâl, only two blocks away. Simon felt relieved that he was far enough away to not see the damage. Beneath the tall bronze statue of the marching Turkish soldiers sat a man begging for change. The man's pant legs were rolled up, exposing the stumps of his legs—nothing but tips of bright wet bone and meat hanging below his knees. Simon had seen the man

before, when out with Melis. Don't give him any money, she'd said. It only encourages his family to drag him out here again the next day. As a child she'd wanted to give them coins too, but her mother and brother had taught her better. Simon fumbled through his pockets, found his smallest bill, and dropped it into the man's cup. The man mumbled prayers in Arabic as Simon walked away.

What the fuck am I doing here? Simon wondered to himself. His and Nora's time together had been good, even sweet. And Melis had never found out—all those nights he'd told her he'd stumbled back to Wes's. But why Robert? Simon couldn't make it away for weekends because of Melis. Nora had always been accepting of that. She'd had Richard in London. Twice he'd come to visit and Simon had left her alone, which had been the right, considerate thing to do. Nora understood that you could not always be with the person you wanted. But she should have stayed in Istanbul her last weekend. They should have their last night together on Istiklâl.

A newspaper blew into his legs. Black and white pictures of a soldier in Iraq, holding a handful of bullet shells up to his nose and smiling. Below that a close up of the Bank. Gutted open like a dead king's tomb. One word was printed below the picture: *harap*. Ruined.

Simon kicked the paper, and the wind swept it across Taksim Square, straight into the feet of the young woman approaching him: Nora. Sunlight filled her short, red hair and the wind blew her hair into her face. Her face had always been thin and narrow, but she was thinner now than he'd ever seen. As though she hadn't eaten for a week. Silver bracelets jangled at the ends of her wrists, more than he remembered she used to wear. In

her hand she carried a small, tan suitcase. Seeing that suitcase in her hand made him burn. Meeting Robert. Leaving Istanbul.

“Are you leaving Istanbul?” he said. “Without even seeing me again?”

“Is that why you’re here?” she asked.

“Yes,” he told her. “Because I don’t want you to leave.”

She’d still hardly looked at him. Her eyes were caught on the pictures on the ground. Pigeons fluttered around them. The crippled man shook his cup of coins. Simon reached out, took hold of Nora’s arms, and made her move enough to let the picture blow away. The wind carried it quickly across the square.

“Please,” she said. “Don’t make me deal with this as well right now.”

She pulled her arm from him, the suitcase banging into her leg as she walked. Simon chased after her. Pigeons flapped their wings, hopping out of their way.

“Listen to me, would you?” he said. “I don’t want you to go. This is your last weekend.”

“It’s a favor to you that we stop seeing each other,” she said. “I heard you were getting married.”

He cringed. He wished she hadn’t heard that. He should have been wiser and not mentioned anything until Nora had left. Maybe she was right, too.

“All right,” he said and stopped. “I’m sorry. I’m not even here to talk about any of that. I’m here for Asena. And for Bozkurt.”

Nora froze but didn’t turn around.

“I knew Bozkurt, too, you know,” he continued. His jacket flapped at his sides, swaying in the wind. “I even knew him before you. Let me help out somehow.”

He walked up to her softly and put his arm around her.

“You mean that?” she asked. “You care?”

“Of course,” he said. “The funeral’s today?”

Two little boys wandered up to Nora’s side, begging in hushed voices. Their hands were small and covered with dirt.

“No,” she said. She raised her thin hands to her face. She covered her eyes, and her bracelets pressed into her cheeks. “His family lives in Eastern Turkey. Urfa? Ever heard of it?” Simon nodded. It was close to the Syrian border. “Anyway, they can’t make it to Istanbul until late tonight. They’re on a bus now.”

The Bank poked through the sky. The tallest building on Istiklâl. Ruined. Simon lowered his head, and shooed the two boys away from Nora’s side.

“But I have another mess to deal with today,” she said. “Maybe you could help?”

Robert had called her that morning from Bulgaria. He was stuck at the border. Simon smiled. Nora wanted to go and see him, take him money and clothes. But she’d never been on a border run before, since Simon had helped her obtain a work visa soon after she’d arrived in Turkey.

“Forget it,” Simon said to her. “I’m not helping you out so you can sneak around with somebody else. Sunday is our day, isn’t it?”

Nora shook her head.

“Not anymore,” she said. “And I’m not sneaking around with anybody.” She looked at Simon closely. “It’ll be easier on me if you’re there. When I tell him I can’t go away with him now.”

“So you’re staying in Istanbul?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

But she was. The feeling was wonderful and terrible. How could he ever make things better with Melis if Nora was staying in Istanbul?

“Robert’s quite angry with you,” Nora said. “He said something about you not being straight with him about crossing the border?”

“That’s ridiculous,” Simon said. He remembered Robert’s smarmy hand clamping down on his shoulder. It killed Simon that he needed help from him. Now Robert needed his.

“I want to make the run quickly,” she said.

“Of course,” Simon agreed. “Then we come back and go out in Taksim. I bet we can find good music out on İstiklâl tonight. I’m sure of it.”

“No,” Nora said. “That’s not what I mean at all. Asena’s alone now. Well, her neighbors are with her. Neither she nor Bozkurt has any family in the city. We can make it back by evening, can’t we?”

He assured her that they could. If he was going to have time to see Melis they’d have to.

Chapter Seven

They reached the bus station in Aksaray. The bus ride from there to the Bulgarian border took three hours. Ticket booths for all the different bus companies were squeezed into row after row across the endless black pavement. At each booth sat three or four men, all smoking, with little glasses of golden *çay* sitting at their elbows. Nora walked close to Simon’s side, and they weaved through the crowds, and past the rows of idling

silver buses. Exhaust and smoke circled them. Nora coughed into her sleeve. Simon loved the maze of it. How Istanbul so often felt endless, unconquerable, as though it might spread over the whole world.

“Good God,” Nora said. “This is like another entire city.” She hooked her arm through his, and his body tightened. “Don’t get us lost, all right?”

They passed a man selling baby ducks outside one of the ticket offices. He had a cardboard box full of them at his feet. All the children pulled from their mothers’ arms to come closer and look. Occasionally the man dropped seed down on the ducks’ heads, and the ducks would shake, then peck at their feet for the fallen food.

“When we get back, will you come and see Asena with me?” Nora asked.

Simon thought of Melis, how if he didn’t show up for dinner she’d cook nothing. Only cherry tomatoes and a slice of bread before curling up for sleep. If he couldn’t make it back in time for a meal with her, he’d buy something. Almond cakes, that she loved so much.

“You know how rotten my Turkish is,” Nora continued. “And Asena’s English never was so good, but now she seems to have forgotten it all. Understandably. And she’d be so happy to see you.”

Nora squeezed his hand. Only three nights left together. Then gone for good.

Crows fluttered along the top of an empty bus. Teenagers threw rocks at them.

“She told me about your lessons. How you played music. Lots of songs.”

Yes. He’d tried teaching grammar through David Bowie songs. For two lessons he’d done it, then somebody complained to the school and he’d had to stop. That had been Simon trying his best.

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll come see her.”

How could he not? Then he’d go after Melis. The cake shops were open late.

Nora, he knew, was a good teacher. Everybody knew that. She often met with her students out of class. She wore colorful dresses to teach in, because, she said, the students were going to have to look at her for an hour, sometimes even two or three hours, and she wanted to provide them with something pleasant to look at. She and Simon used to come home to her place, after a long night on Istiklâl, and Nora would sit up in bed for an hour, a textbook between her thighs, making notes for lessons, as she munched on a green apple. She always craved green apples after nights of beer drinking. Simon had gone on midnight searches, seeking green apples and cigarettes. He’d learned all the places to get green apples on Istiklâl.

“You’re teaching again now, aren’t you?” Nora asked him.

“Yes. Children.”

Windows on all the buses shone around them, into their faces.

“You used to enjoy teaching children.”

“I know.”

A man with pockmarked cheeks leaned close to Simon and pushed a bottle of perfume into his face. French stuff, the man said, smuggled in from Greece. The smell Melis wore.

“Five *milyon*, okay? Five *milyon*?” the man chanted.

The smell filled Simon’s nose, burned his eyes. Melis slipping out of his hands. As he held Nora’s arm in his.

“That’s cheap, isn’t it?” Nora asked. “I’ve always liked that scent.” She dug into her pocket. The perfume man smiled, holding out a bottle, and stepping closer to Nora. Simon shouldered the man away. He couldn’t let Nora buy Melis’s perfume. Maybe a month ago it wouldn’t have mattered so much. He’d yet to let Melis down. Now he needed to stand up for every chance he got. He could not let the two women mix.

The man glared at Simon, then muttered meanly under his breath.

“What’s the matter with you?” Nora said.

“Nothing.” Simon ran his hands through his hair. “I know a cheaper place along Istiklâl. You can’t trust anything you buy here.”

Nora tried to stop walking and buy the perfume. “I’d just as soon buy this. It’s cheap enough.”

Simon put his arm around her. “Come on. The bus is leaving soon. You want to get back quickly for Asena, don’t you?”

Finally he saw the ticket booth he’d been looking for, and dragged her along. Simon bought the tickets and then he and Nora waited in the crowd. Two men were ogling Nora, as they sipped their tea, speaking loudly about her in Turkish. They spoke about her red hair, wondering if she were red everywhere.

“*Terbiyesiz, ya!*” Simon shouted at them. “*Haydi git!*”

One man dropped his glass of tea. They both stared at Simon. He knew they’d assumed neither he nor Nora knew any Turkish. He was used to that. The men laughed and walked away.

“What was that about?” Nora asked.

“They were talking about me,” he said and cleared his throat. “You don’t want to know.”

The bus driver emerged from the office, tucking in his shirt. He wiped his lips with a napkin, then opened the bus door, and took his seat behind the wheel. Passengers filed on, and he silently ripped apart their tickets.

Nora and Simon boarded the bus last. In the front seat a soldier polished the gold buttons on his jacket, making them shine like stars. A woman pulled a loaf of flat bread wrapped in that day’s newspaper out of a cloth sack, and passed it on to the other veiled woman sitting beside her. There was one man who kept turning around and leaning over the seat to whisper into his wife’s ear. He’d pull at his thick black moustache, whispering all the while, and his wife would smile into her lap. Everyone broke off a small piece of bread in their fingers, then passed the rest on as they chewed.

Nora and Simon sat in the very last row, the seats they had been assigned. As soon as the bus pulled out of the station, the driver began to smoke, puffing out clouds that muddied the windows, and every few minutes he’d wipe the glass clean with his fist.

“I hope we’re back soon,” Nora said.

Simon nodded. His neck was hot and sweaty. He hated being away from Istanbul. Two years before, back in St. Paul, he’d felt a step behind everybody, everything. When his mother spoke he drifted off, heard nothing. They talked about where to have dinner. He couldn’t suggest a single restaurant. He knew none of them anymore, and the ones he knew somehow were no longer the same. But in Istanbul he knew the streets and the language, the bars and restaurants. Others had to ask him how to get around. He helped people. He moved with the rhythm of the city, never offbeat.

Somehow he couldn't recognize himself while he was away. Or didn't want to. He squirmed in his seat, wishing he weren't so much older than Nora, that he was younger, fresh like her. Simon tried resting his head against the window, but the glass shook too much and wouldn't allow him to relax.

Across from their row sat a little girl. She sat in her mother's lap and her hair was long and wild and hung into her face. Like Melis's hair. Simon stared at her as she bounced along on her mother's lap. Then her mother began fighting with the girl to make her take a pill. Her father held her face still, and her mother put the white pill onto her tongue, and she swallowed, bitterly. Nora would be gone soon. He'd stop doing all this running around. Truly it was almost over. He pulled his eyes away from the girl, and focused on Nora. She was here still. He needed to enjoy her before she was gone. Melis would never leave Turkey. She couldn't. Nora would be gone in only a few days.

"Is that a new bracelet?" he asked.

He took hold of her hand, held it in both of his.

"No," she said. "None of them are new."

He slid his fingers up Nora's wrist. He looked at the little girl. Her father had let her go. The bus roared through the cold, bare Turkish countryside, the mostly flat red earth. Scraggy olive trees scattered over the tame hills. Their ashy leaves and branches rattled in the wind. The land begged for a river, for rain. Simon would have killed for a drink. He pulled at his chin, then ran his hands through his hair.

"I've found the perfect place for a jazz club," he said. "You'd love it. You've got to see it before you go."

Nora's face wrinkled up for a moment. "Oh yes," she said. "Your jazz club. Well, that's grand. I'm happy for you."

"I'll show it to you tonight," he said. "When we get back to Istanbul we can go for a spin on Istiklâl."

He hoped it was all cleaned up. The glass, the broken windows. All side streets opened again. Soldiers gone.

"I don't want to go to Istiklâl anymore," she said. "Don't you remember that's where the bomb was? Where Bozkurt was..." She couldn't finish her sentence.

Simon smacked his knee, tried to laugh. "But Istiklâl is our street," he said. "Bozkurt loved it, too."

"Regardless," Nora said. "We've got responsibilities. Don't you know that? We've got to see Asena."

"Asena's with the neighbors." He touched her knee with his. "You told me that yourself."

"Maybe we've had enough fun, you and I."

"Come on now. You haven't left Istanbul yet. You're still here. With me." He ran his hand over her thigh.

"What about your Turkish girl?" she asked him.

Simon looked out the window. He counted the trees flicking past. He saw one.

"I suppose you could say she and I have been having some problems."

"So you've lost her." Red hair flared out from behind her ears. "That's why you're after me again."

He had to look at her. Why would she say he'd lost Melis? He felt his first pang that it might be true. Melis's key, at least, was nestled safely away in his pocket. He'd never give it up. He and Nora used to have a rule to not talk about each other's relationships. He wished Nora would continue abiding by it, even if things were over between her and Richard.

"I just want to spend time with you before you go," he said. "Your last days shouldn't be with Robert. They should be with me."

She stared closely into his face. As though she weren't sure if he were real or not.

"Are you crazy?" she asked.

"No, I'm not."

"You know," she said. "You used to excite me when you talked crazy. I used to love it. But now it just makes me feel more and more eager to go. To get away from what we've been doing. Can you understand that? Maybe a little bit?"

"Did Richard ever find out about us?" he asked. "I know Melis doesn't know. I bet Richard never found out a thing."

"That only makes it worse," Nora told him.

"Why didn't you ever move to Galata? You know. That apartment building you always talked about. The one you liked so much?"

"That was a year ago."

He leaned closer to her. It occurred to him that if he could make her happy, put her in a place she'd love to live, then she might stay. And he'd see her as often as he could. If she were happy she might not mind him not being around all the time. They'd walked through Galata several times. She'd loved it.

“Think about it,” he said. “We could find you something. I know people. Some Turks who’d love to help us out.”

“Us?” she said. “What on earth do you mean?”

She put hands over her eyes. Her bracelets slid down her wrists.

“For you,” he said. “Of course. But I’d help.”

“I’m leaving Istanbul. You know that. You’ve known it for ages. And we both know you never will.”

“I could leave,” he said. “I just don’t want to. And I want you to be happy.”

He remembered for a moment when he’d first come to the Imperial City. He’d simply been glad to have left the life he’d been living. In Istanbul he seemed to shed his skin as a failed university student, and as a musician whose hands had frozen up. But that old skin was waiting for him every time he went back, even when he only thought of going back. He’d tried living his life the way his father wanted, and then he’d tried his own way. He’d failed at both. Then he’d found Istanbul.

He wanted to rent that apartment in Galata that she’d talked about a year ago. That was his new plan. Once his school paid him he could probably rent something decent for a month. At least for half a month. He thought of Melis, how wonderful it was she had a home she loved in Kadıköy. He wished he could give her something like that. Something that she’d love to have. If only he’d been the one to find that apartment for her, she might believe in him a little more.

If only he made enough money to rent places for her and Nora both.

Chapter Eight

They took a *dolmuş* from Edirne as far as it would take them, then walked the rest of the way to the border. Wind cut across the low, dusty hills, and they walked huddled together and silent. He didn't want Nora to know it, but he was nervous. Crossing the border always made him nervous, and he began to sweat and the wind made him shiver. Clouds hung over them. Huge and streaked with light. Like something Melis might draw with chalk.

The guard put down his cigarette and Nora and Simon handed over their passports. Smoke curled up into his face. Slowly he counted the pages, rubbing his fingers over each old stamp.

"*Çalışıyor mısınız?*" he asked.

Simon pointed to their work visas, the valid employment dates.

The man read over them carefully.

"I've got four brothers out of work," he said. "But foreigners always find work in Istanbul."

Simon shrugged. Nora stood straight and quiet, smiling.

The man stamped exit dates on to the last pages, then handed back their passports.

"He didn't appear to like us much," Nora said as they walked toward the border.

"They never do."

Soldiers leaned against their guns, watching them closely. A line of bright red flags flapped in the wind, and Simon and Nora stepped through the tall, iron gate, past the soldiers' white helmets, and into Bulgaria.

Glodzny, the Bulgarian border town, had no sidewalks, so they walked along the edges of the wide, straight streets. Nothing long and winding, with mystery around the

corner. Nora and Simon passed a one-floor concrete building, nothing but dirt for a yard, and its street number spray-painted across the front door—17. A frail dog barked and chased after a paper sack blowing about in the wind, and Nora changed to Simon's other side, so he'd be between her and the stray animal. The wind was blowing harder, hurting Simon's lungs. Istanbul never felt so cold, so desolate. Two men sat on plastic buckets outside a shop, holding cigarettes in their greasy fists, smoking right down into the filters.

"You know where to find him?" Nora asked.

"There's only one place to look."

Simon knew the only restaurant in town. A small place, well lit and clean, and the old woman who owned it spoke some English. Nora and Simon strolled through the cold streets, dust circling their steps. Robert's suitcase swung at Nora's side, her exposed fingers turning red from the cold. Simon took the suitcase from her and carried it himself. He could give it to Robert. Try and show there were no hard feelings. Or, even better, he could hold it ransom maybe. Insist Robert give him the contact information of his old student. Or else he'd never see a clean shirt again.

"You think they have English teachers here?" Nora asked.

"They can't afford it," he said. "Only in the bigger cities."

Nora shivered. "Maybe that's not such a bad thing."

Across the street a group of boys kicked a worn-out ball through an empty lot. No private schools, no synagogues just down the street. No parents working in foreign banks. A little girl with long hair and rosy cheeks crept after a black cat that sat in a patch of dirt. The boys ran and laughed and their breath clouded out in front of them, like smoke lifted into the wind.

“Let me talk to Robert alone, all right?” Nora said. “For a minute, at least. I feel quite dreadful for him.”

Holding the suitcase made Simon’s fingers stiff. One of the boys shouted and fell, and the cat the little girl wanted darted away.

“This town depresses me,” he said. “We have time maybe for one beer. Then we should cross back over for the bus.”

Before he’d even finished speaking Nora saw Robert and began to run. Simon called for her, but she didn’t stop. She ran straight into the restaurant and into Robert’s arms. Simon watched through the dusty windows as Robert lifted her off her feet. He spun her around in his arms, and the ends of her hair bathed his face. She was laughing.

Simon looked back down the street. They’d walked far enough that the Turkish border was now out of sight. Clouds hung above him in the sky. He thought it might rain. He hoped Melis was having a good dinner. Maybe with her mother. Something more than cherry tomatoes and bread.

Then Robert put Nora down, and she stepped away from him, her hands and bracelets hidden by her sweater’s long sleeves. And Simon reminded himself of what she’d said: she wasn’t going anywhere with Robert. Simon picked up the suitcase and pushed open the heavy restaurant door. The heat from the restaurant stung his face. The old Bulgarian woman, plump and gray-headed, looked up from her newspaper. Pictures of tanks and American flags, and headlines in Cyrillic he was happy he couldn’t read. He smiled at the woman, but she looked away. Not as friendly as a Turk would be. Thick black glasses sat at the tip of her nose, and music quietly played from a small black radio sitting next to her elbow. Twangy guitars and a fiddle, and a flat foreign voice singing

Bulgarian words. He wanted to be back in Istanbul. Back on Istiklâl. Where he knew the words of the songs.

Robert saw Simon and the warmth went out of his eyes. He took his hand off of Nora, and Simon dropped the suitcase at Robert's feet. Nora stood between them, pulling at the ends of her sweater.

"Enjoying Bulgaria?" Simon asked.

Robert's mouth hung open, but he said nothing.

"Simon helped me get here," she said. Her cheeks were red. "I'd never been on a border run."

Robert rocked back on his feet, a sweaty, nervous grin spread across his face.

"Why don't we all have a seat?" he suggested. "And maybe the nice woman will bring us some food?"

They sat in the booth and Robert told them that the night before he'd walked the street until dawn, freezing and flinching at every shadow, because he didn't have the money with him for a hotel room. Simon had to stare out the window as he spoke. That's not what he'd wanted: he'd only wanted Robert out of the way for a few days, so he could be with Nora more easily before she left. He'd never get help with his club now. The Bulgarian woman came to their table, bringing three beers in thick glass mugs. Robert took one sip from his beer, then kissed Nora on the cheek, and went to the bathroom with his suitcase to change his clothes. The wind was picking up, and every minute or two the door rattled in its frame.

“Why’d you run to him like that?” Simon asked her. He watched her face and took a long drink from his beer. Nora had yet to touch hers. “A minute ago on the street. You left me there and ran into Robert’s arms.”

“I was happy to see him,” she answered. “Happy that he’s all right.”

Simon stretched out in the booth, putting his feet up, and blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling. A trick his father had taught him.

“It didn’t look like he was somebody you wanted to say goodbye to,” he said.

“Maybe it’s not him,” Nora said. “You ever think of that?”

“No, I didn’t,” he said. “Then what is it?”

Nora tapped her long fingernails on the table. She was breathing through her mouth, which was a sign, Simon knew, that she was either nervous or angry. She looked quite beautiful, and her hair fell into her face, just long enough to reach her thin lips, and be moved by her breath.

“Please, can we not talk about this here? Now?” she said.

Let it go, Simon told himself. She’s leaving. Which is good for you.

Robert came back in fresh clothes, his blonde hair wetted and neatly combed back. He sat in the booth next to Nora.

“Did you know that this would happen to me?” Robert asked.

“What are you talking about?” Simon coughed and looked out the window.

Robert’s big hands rested on the table.

“That I’d get stuck here at the border?” Robert said. “That I’d have trouble with my visa because I’m South African?”

“How could I know what might happen to you?” he said. “I haven’t been on a border run for years.”

Robert leaned forward. His blue eyes glowed, angry, turning red. He didn’t even know yet that Nora wouldn’t be going with him. It was almost beautiful. If only Simon didn’t need to talk to him about the club.

“How could I’ve trusted you?” Robert asked.

“Of course you can trust me. I know more about Istanbul than anybody.”

Nora bowed her head, and pulled her sleeves up over her hands. Simon looked at her. Did she understand this was about her?

“That’s how I know you set me up.” Robert wagged his finger at Simon.

“We’ve only got a bit of time here,” Nora said. “Can’t we act like friends?”

Robert snorted, and leaned back in the booth. “And this guy thinks he can open a jazz club on Istiklâl. What a laugh! Couldn’t happen in a million years. You can’t even keep a job.”

“I don’t keep jobs I don’t want,” he said. He wiped his hands on his napkin and wadded it into a ball. “I will open my club. I’ve even already found a place.”

Robert clapped his hands, and leaned close to Nora. “Yes! That’s all there is to it. He’s found a place! Now if only he had money, and the ability to get a permit.”

“Go to hell,” Simon said. He kicked Robert’s suitcase. “I don’t need your help for a permit. I’ll figure out how to get it myself.”

“And I will block you,” Robert said. He leaned over the table and he and Simon were nose to nose. “I will tell my friend to watch out for your name, and to make any applications you fill out disappear.”

Simon's throat tightened. How on earth could Robert know somebody he didn't? Istanbul was his city. He shook his head. He didn't know whether to punch Robert in the face, or grovel at his feet.

"Don't do that to him," Nora said suddenly. Her arms were crossed over her chest. "Let him at least try something new."

Simon watched her speak.

"Why do you care?" Robert said.

Simon listened for the answer.

"Just let him try," she said. "Maybe he needs it."

Good God, why did she have to leave?

Robert's face turned as red as his eyes, but he said nothing. The Bulgarian woman arrived with sandwiches. Thick slices of ham, with brown bread and yellow mustard. Things hard to find in Istanbul. Simon picked up half of his sandwich and ate.

"At least Nora's staying with me," Robert said. He eyed her sitting next to him. "We'll have fun here together, don't you think? We've got a few days before my visa is ready. Maybe we can shoot up to Sofia." He put his arm around her, and she didn't move. She'd yet to touch her food.

"I can't," Nora said.

"Can't what?" Robert asked.

"I've only come to help you out, you know? Bring your things, make sure you've got the money to get back to Istanbul."

"What?"

Simon ate and listened to them. The ham was heavenly on his tongue. He resented missing it, because it was so hard to find in Istanbul. If Istanbul didn't have it, he wanted to think it must not matter. Nora then gave him a long look, and he knew that his was his cue to leave them alone. She began explaining to Robert about Bozkurt and Asena, and about the funeral they'd be going to the next day as Simon finished his sandwich.

"A Muslim funeral?" Robert looked stunned. "That's wise for an American and a Brit. Going to a funeral for a man killed by a car bomb that wouldn't have happened if it weren't for your countries bullying Turkey into war."

Simon took the last bite of his sandwich, and pushed his plate away.

"Fuck off," Simon told him. "This has nothing to do with that."

"He was my student," Nora said. She had her sleeves pressed to her lips, muffling her voice.

Simon wiped the mustard from his lips and stood up from the booth.

"Nora," he said. "We've only got a few minutes." He stood over Robert. "Enjoy Glodzny. It's a wonderful place to spend a week of your life."

He left them and went outside.

Night was coming on now, covering up all the clouds. Most of the little boys were still out, but their ball was gone. They stood in a circle talking and breathing into their blue hands. Where were their mothers? Their families? Simon lit a cigarette and coughed into the wind.

He saw the little girl again, too. She had a friend with her now. No longer alone. A girl with hair even longer than hers. And the two of them had a gray cat trapped

between them. One girl held the cat in her lap, so the other could pet its body. How had Melis slept the night before, with her bruised cheek hidden against a pillow? Had she slept at all? Would a bruise like that get better or worse after one day? Simon kicked at the ground, watched the dust rise under the weak light of a streetlamp. The girls never noticed he was there.

Soon he'd be riding back to Istanbul with Nora, leaving Robert in Bulgaria. Robert's words stuck with him, though. Maybe a jazz club was just a foolish dream. He couldn't even remember now how long he'd been talking, dreaming about it. He imagined the silver chandelier, spinning above him, how beautiful it could all be. If he couldn't do it, he feared Istanbul would become another St. Paul. Another place he'd have to do what other people wanted, instead of pursue what was in his heart.

Nora approached him, and the restaurant door swung shut behind her. Robert sat in the booth, empty beer glasses surrounding him. The light from the streetlamp barely reached Nora's face, leaving her red hair looking sadly gray in the night.

"Thanks," he said.

"For what?" She swept her hands over her sweater, brushing off the thick Bulgarian dust. She seemed to actually think he could open that stupid club. Maybe more than he believed it himself.

"Nothing," he said, and turned toward the border. Turkey was only a simple walk away. "We should go. The bus leaves soon. Isn't Asena waiting?"

He wanted to take her to Istiklâl. Show her the spot he'd found for his club. Maybe only Nora would enjoy seeing it.

Chapter Nine

Asena lived in Fatih, one of Istanbul's more traditional neighborhoods. Simon had never been to Fatih, but knew it was referred to as *küçük İran*—little Iran. The streets were dark and empty, and a *hurdacı* climbed into a dumpster, so he could search for metal and pieces of iron. Things to build with, or sell.

Mosque domes stood in the horizon. Minarets rising like stiff dragon tails. Silver from the glow of the moon.

"All these woman were hanging around Asena all morning," Nora said. Her arms swung at her sides. "And I don't know what to say to any of them."

"Don't say anything," Simon told her. "Be there for Asena. That's all." He put his arm around her, and the *hurdacı* jumped out of the dumpster, holding a smashed up clock over his shoulder. He placed it gently onto his wooden cart, and didn't look at Nora or Simon as they passed.

"Thank God your Turkish is better than mine," Nora said.

"Maybe it's easier sometimes," he told her. "When you know less."

"I hate it," she said. "I feel can't help out as I want."

"You know things," he said. "I taught you some." He'd rarely heard her use it, though.

"I suppose you did," she said.

Asena lived in the basement apartment of a tall building squeezed in among many. The buildings were nearly identical, except for color. Asena's building was white, and even at night, seemed to glow. Visitors had left shoes lined up in the hallway outside Asena's door. Simon and Nora slipped their shoes off, too, then stood on the cold

concrete floor, as Nora pulled the key out from under her shirt—she had the key on a long string around her key, to be sure she didn't lose it, as she easily did with keys.

Simon felt a sadness that he had not been to Nora's new place. Since she'd moved in with Bozkurt and Asena he had seen less of her, and they had spent their few last nights together in hotels in Beyoğlu, which had not been the same. In a cheap, rented room it felt much more like cheating. When Nora had her own place it felt more like he had two different lives that existed in different worlds that would never meet. How wonderful it would be if she got an apartment in Galata, and he could go and see her there.

A large woman with short, highlighted hair rushed to the door and met them. She squinted, looking meanly at them, until Nora said, "It's me, Nora."

The woman then took Nora's hands, kissed them, and pulled her inside.

"This is Merve," Nora said. "She lives next door."

Simon introduced himself, and told Merve that he was Asena's old English teacher. Merve squeezed his hands and smiled.

"*Memnum oldum,*" she said, and gave a little bow.

Dozens of flowers, most of them tall and white, crowded the entryway, making the small room reek. Cards hung from their stems. Nora sneezed and wiped her nose with her sleeve.

Asena sat at the kitchen table, wearing a yellow robe. Her face was red, but her eyes were hard and dry, and hardly looked like eyes at all. Simon crossed the room quickly, the thin floors creaking under his steps, and Asena stood up, holding her robe

shut up to her neck. Simon hugged her. She moved slowly in his arms, back and forth. Swaying.

“What can I do?” he asked her in Turkish.

She shook her head and sat down again. Two other women were at the table with her. A cousin, named Nihan, who’d just arrived, and another neighbor from upstairs, whose name Simon didn’t catch. When Asena sat both women reached out and touched her softly, one rubbing her cheek, the other stroking her back, and Asena’s head dipped to the floor. She had been a quiet student, and never liked speaking in front of the class. Unlike Bozkurt, who was good at making the others laugh, and even at making up words. When he’d come to lessons, which hadn’t been terribly often, he’d speak and speak, stumbling through grammar. He was the kind of student that made teaching easy. He was willing to work hard, and all Simon had to do was sit back and listen. Asena only spoke when she’d thought a sentence perfectly. And even then she’d blush when she spoke.

“*Çay ister misiniz?*” she asked Simon, but when she tried to stand up, the two women pressed her down.

Merve raced over instead. She struck a match, and lit the fire on the stove. Blue flames licked the sides of the silver kettle.

“Rest,” Merve said to Asena. “You shouldn’t do anything now.”

Nihan put tea glasses in front of them, but her hands trembled. The table was set with forks and knives and spoons, and Asena picked up a knife and ran her fingers absently over the knife’s blade. Simon took the knife away from her.

“I have to check on my son, Asena *canım*,” the upstairs neighbor said. She stood up from the table. She bent over and kissed Asena on the cheek. Asena’s eyes squeezed shut. “I’ll come see you tonight, *tamam mi, canım?*”

The woman left, and Simon motioned for Nora to come and take her empty seat.

“Has she eaten yet today?” Nora whispered in English.

The women looked at her.

“You can say that in Turkish,” Simon said. He’d taught her a few words and phrases and felt certain she could say that much.

“Just ask, would you?” Nora tried smiling as the women looked at her.

Simon translated, and Merve told them she had a pot of stew simmering next door, but, no, Asena hadn’t eaten. She wouldn’t eat. She hadn’t cried either.

“It’s worse when you wait so long to cry,” Nihan said.

Merve nodded, agreeing. The kettle’s lid began to rattle. Merve poured tea for everyone. Asena held the glass in her hands, steam rising, bathing her face like smoke. Simon wanted to hug her again, make her move at least a little.

“Let’s make a big dinner,” Simon said to them all. He himself was starving.

“We’ll get some food and make something nice. A feast for everyone.”

He put his hand atop Asena’s and she looked into his face. “*Bu akşam sultan gibi yiyeceğiz, tamam mı?*” he said. Her skin was cool and dry and she turned her eyes slowly toward him. She tried making her tired face smile. She put her hands over her stomach and told him she wasn’t hungry.

“*Saçma*,” Simon said to her. “Just wait until you see what we cook for you.”

He looked at the clock on the wall. After ten o'clock. Much later than he'd expected. His knees knocked into the table. He smiled the best he could and kept himself still. I'll have to be a magician to see Melis tonight, he thought. But I'll make it. Cakes and sweets crowded over Asena's entire countertop, and Simon thought that maybe he'd take a slice of something to Melis. Wrap it up in a napkin and carry it carefully in his jacket pocket. Feed her bits in his fingers.

Then Asena asked him for a favor. All day, she said, she'd wanted a hot shower. But the gas canister in the bathroom had run out. Another container sat in the hallway. She asked if he'd carry it for her and connect it to the water pipes.

"*Tabii ki,*" he said and went to the hall.

The container chilled his hands—cold from sitting in the hallway—and he struggled lifting it since it was full. He carried it into the bathroom, and slid the empty one out from under the sink. He hadn't learned enough yet about how things were done in Turkey. Gas pipes didn't run through most of Istanbul, and containers were bought off the backs of trucks in the street. He hooked the hose for the gas up to the water and the gas hissed as he turned it on. The smell hit his fingers, burned his nose. He did this often for Melis. One of his few chores.

Asena was waiting in the kitchen. Standing up and holding a spoon in her hands. He told her the gas was ready, and squeezed her shoulder. She lowered her head. She looked away from him.

"I'll go check on my stew next door," Merve said and went to the door. "Have a nice long shower, Asena *canım*. Then we'll eat together. A nice big meal."

Nihan held Asena by the arm and led her to the bathroom.

“I’ll go out and buy some more food,” Nora said. “We should contribute something to the table. I’d feel rude not to.”

Simon fished in his pocket for his wallet. But the end of his money was under Melis’s bed. His jazz money dwindling away.

“Get some wine, would you?” he said.

Nihan came from the bathroom and said she wanted to go, too. She’d come quickly from her town outside of Istanbul and brought nothing with her.

“But we must be very quick,” Nihan said. “I want to be back before Asena is finished.”

Simon told them he would wait. Nihan knocked on Merve’s door and told her they were going out for a moment. Then Simon watched Nora walk up the stairs, her white ankles flashing out from the bottoms of her bright red corduroys as her legs rose with each step. He stood and listened until the door slammed shut.

Once he heard the water running, he used Asena’s phone to call Melis. The line rang several times and Simon paced as far as the phone cord would let him and finally she answered.

“I want to come see you,” he said. He couldn’t stay still. He heard water splashing in the bathroom. Then Asena opening and shutting the door several times, before firmly fixing it shut. Simon could smell the gas still on his fingers.

“Why do you do this?” Melis whispered harshly. Barely loud enough to be a whisper. Her voice made him worry. Something was wrong. He spoke louder, wanting to make her speak louder, too.

“I’m coming over. You’ve got to let me talk to you.”

“No,” she said. Her voice was barely there. “I won’t be here.”

“What are you talking about? Where are you going?”

It was late, even dark out. Melis never went out at night. At least never alone.

“Why have you ruined everything?” she said.

“Don’t say that,” he said. “Don’t say that’s what I do.”

“But it’s true,” she said. “Look around you. What do you see?”

His hands burned and pulsed. Glasses sat on the table, their bottoms stained dark with tea. Water surged through the pipes, the thin walls. Someone shouted in the street. The room around him was empty.

“I’ll be there in ten minutes,” he said. “Just wait.”

She was silent. Which cake should he bring her? He looked the countertop over.

Melis sighed. “Be careful with yourself,” she said. A phrase that should have been in Turkish. She hung up on him, as he dug through his pocket, finding her key.

Surely Nora would be home soon. Asena wouldn’t be alone for long. The shower was probably the best place for her. Safe and private and warm. He could catch Melis, get his clothes for the funeral, and not slow Asena and the others down in the morning by running an errand across the city. Maybe he could stay with Melis for the night. If not he’d come back and knock on Nora’s window.

He wrapped up four pieces of baklava in a napkin, stuffed it into his shirt pocket, and was halfway out the door when he heard something fall in the bathroom. A solid thump. Like a sack of flour dropped on a basement floor. He stalled in the doorway, squeezing Melis’s key in his hand. The water ran continuously, a solid stream.

Where was Nora? Why had Melis been whispering?

Simon stepped back inside and knocked at the bathroom door. The weak wood rattled under his knuckles, but there was no answer from inside.

“Aseña. İyi misin?”

Only water. Constant and unbroken.

He knocked again, and then tried the knob, but the door was locked, and the metal was slippery in his fingers. What if she’s dead? he thought. No, she couldn’t be dead. He called out again, saying her name over and over, and he knocked louder and harder, but she didn’t answer or come to the door, and his voice shook in a way that made him scared to hear it. He struggled with the knob again.

“Aseña! Bana konuş, şimdi!”

Nothing. Pipes rattling in the walls. Water sucked down the drain.

He stepped back, ran his fingers through his hair. When would Nora be back? Then he smelled gas. He sniffed his fingers, but the gas on them wasn’t fresh. He dropped to the floor, and smelled the gas streaming out. Into his face, burning his nose.

“Aseña! Lütfen...”

Simon took a deep breath, and rammed his knee into the door. The thin wood splintered, and the door open partly. He pushed his way inside, splinters jabbing into his palms. The lights were turned off and the room was dark, and the gas so thick it stung his eyes and made him choke.

Aseña lay in the tub, her arm over the side, water streaming down her fingers, puddling up on the floor. Her face bloated like a fish and her eyes closed. It’s my fault, he thought. The gas. The heat was gone from the water, but she wasn’t shivering at all, and he pulled her out by her arms, and her feet smacked the edge of the tub, and he

dragged her out into the kitchen. Hair clung to her face and she was naked and her skin freezing to touch. Flesh hung loosely from her arms. Her cheeks were gray, and her breasts sagged against her body, her small, dark nipples stiff and pointed. He grabbed two red towels and covered her body.

“Wake up,” he screamed.

Where was Nora? Where were the others? Why was he alone to deal with this?

“Don’t die. Come on now.”

Bozkurt would never let this happen. He was a good man who took care of the people in his life. He didn’t make messes.

Asena’s tongue flopped purple and limp over her teeth, and Simon shook her wildly, making her head swing and hit the floor.

“You fucking awake up!” he howled into her face.

Simon stood. He looked at Asena, wet and limp as a fish on the floor. He bit his fingers, then threw open the front door. He needed help, but he didn’t want to leave Asena. Where was Nora? Why did he have to do this alone?

He grabbed Asena under the arms and dragged her out of the kitchen, but the towels fell off again, and her round thighs rolled open, naked. Simon quickly looked away. He left her on the floor, ran out into the hallway, and banged on Merve’s door until she answered. He pulled her arm, sweating and panting.

“Gel,” he said. “*Gaz. Banyo’da çok problemi Asena’lı.*”

Merve saw Asena and screamed. She fell to her knees, and grabbed the towels and flung them over Asena’s body. Simon knelt and reached for Asena’s arm, but Merve pushed him, her hand striking his face.

"Bakma," she said, and adjusted the towels so Asena was covered at least from her neck to her knees. "What have you done to her?"

The gas. Sickness filled Simon as thought of all the times he'd hooked up Melis's gas. He could have killed her, if he hadn't done it right. He choked and put his hand against the wall to balance himself. All of this was his fault.

"Kaza yaptı," he said. "Accident. *Anladın mı?*"

Merve didn't answer, and hovered over Asena, smacking her face and breathing into her mouth. Simon ran to the bedroom, his jacket wet, clinging to his arms, and he yanked the yellow quilt off her bed. The neighbor covered Asena more fully, and then they carried her to the sofa. Asena moaned, but didn't open her eyes.

"Doktoru telefon ediceğim," Merve said, and ran to the kitchen.

Simon squeezed Asena's hands, wishing he could make them feel warm, alive. She whimpered in her sleep. He rubbed her cheek, lightly.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Merve hung up the phone and pushed him out of the way. She cradled Asena's face in her hands.

"Hospital'a gidiyor mu?" Simon asked.

Merve clicked her tongue, and said, "yok."

Turks wanted things kept private. Hospitals were public, and the last resort, he remembered. Simon paced through the room, watching them. Gas still hissed away in the bathroom, water pounded into the tub. He wished he could check Melis's now, to be sure it was done correctly, even though she'd used the gas many times since he'd carried in the last container. Simon turned on the light in Asena's bathroom and looked around.

He shut the water off, and checked the gas: the hose had been cut. A knife lay by the drain in the tub. He turned the gas off at the base, and sat on the edge of the tub. He told himself to feel relieved, that he hadn't done anything wrong, that she'd been the one to cut the hose. It wasn't his fault. But it hadn't worked. He'd been so close to leaving. He had almost left Asena alone, and if he had she'd now be dead.

Nora and Nihan entered the open apartment door. Nihan saw Asena and dropped her sack of groceries. Black and green olives scattered over the floor. She ran toward them and they all gathered together around Asena.

"I knew I shouldn't have left," she said.

"Good God, what has happened?" Nora asked Simon. "She was only taking a shower when we left."

An accident, Simon told her. He told her wasn't really sure.

Then the doctor arrived in a long white coat, with an assistant, quite young, who must have been his son. He gave Asena oxygen through a plastic mask until she fully woke up. He asked all of them to step back, but Simon and Nora were the only ones to do so.

Simon looked from face to face. His hands shook, and he crossed his arms over his chest. Nobody knew how close he'd been to leaving, how close he'd been to going to another woman's home, wanting to stay with her, and be in her bed. He didn't want them to know either. In some way, though, he felt maybe that they did know, or at least wouldn't be surprised. Maybe that's what people expected of him.

Asena's eyes suddenly shot open and she looked up at all of them. A fence of people standing around her. She screamed and kicked her legs, and tried pulling her arms

free, and the doctor tried to keep her covered with the blankets, but she bit at him, almost catching his white collar with her teeth.

“Neden?” she screamed.

Her body shook and thick veins rose up in her face and neck.

“Neden? Neden? Neden?”

Nihan stroked her hair and her face, and Asena cried and screamed. Merve whispered into Asena’s ear, though Asena was carrying on too much to hear any of her words. She spoke too quickly and her voice was too broken and slurred for Simon to understand much of anything. But the one word he heard over and over again was *Bozkurt*.

Chapter Ten

Nora and Nihan took Asena to her bedroom and were calming her for sleep. Simon called Melis again, despite it being quite late. He let the phone ring and ring, because he did not like thinking that she was not there. Finally he hung up, and went to the bedroom Nora had been using at the back of the apartment and waited. In the morning he’d go and see Melis. Before the funeral. Even if she’d already left for work he could change his clothes and head to the mosque for Bozkurt’s burial.

Someone had turned the television on in the living room and it mumbled through the walls. A thick wool blanket hung over Nora’s window as a curtain, which made the room quite dark, with only the dim light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Her bed was

small, the size of a child's bed. Packed suitcases sat at the foot of the bed. Books beside them. Ones he'd taught with dozens of times and hated the sight of.

Simon lay down on Nora's little bed, and he tried having the lights off, but it made him think of Asena in the shower in the dark, and he had to have them on. He sat on his hands, but that couldn't keep them from shaking, and he stood up and paced through the small room again. He snuck out to the kitchen. Nora had bought him no wine. He longed for a radio, for headphones and cigarettes, and records of Coltrane. Cole Porter. Miles. Bowie. He wished he were on Istiklâl, exploring a side street he'd yet to find the end of, losing himself under the lights and strings of stars that hung in Istanbul no more. At first he thought how nice it might be to look inside the vacant building he'd found for his club. Then he thought, no, it would be dreadful to see the place unchanged from the first time he'd seen it. The building still was empty. He'd yet to even open its door.

He looked inside Nora's closet. Only three skirts hung there, alongside a row of bent up hangers. She was leaving Istanbul. She really was. No, she hadn't yet. He wanted to unpack everything, put all her clothes and her books back where they belonged. If only he'd seen her room before, and knew where everything had gone. He touched all three skirts. He couldn't remember Nora wearing any of them. How well had he known her? She him? Maybe the skirts were new. He held them up to his nose. The fabric was rough and thick, something good for cold, rainy weather. England. He wanted to know her smell like he knew Melis's. But there was nothing. Only a near empty closet, and the scent of gas on his fingertips.

"What on earth are you doing?" Nora asked. "Are those my skirts?"

She'd snuck up on him touching her clothes. Good. Maybe this was a good way to show her how he cared, how he'd miss her.

"You've already packed," he said. He let her skirt fall from his fingers.

She crossed her arms over her chest, lowered her face. A red scratch hung under her eye. From where Asena had got her. Flailing under the doctor's mask.

"Three days," she said. "I'll be gone after three days."

The television still rumbled through the wall. Far better than the sound of running water, the hiss of gas. The rattling of windows, or screams from kids. Nora closed the door and sat on the bed. The frame jingled and she rested her face in her hands.

"Is Asena asleep?" he asked.

Nora nodded. "I sat up with her all last night. Me and Merve. I've only got a moment before I'll check in on her again."

I had almost left, Simon thought. I was on my way. Running out the door. Chasing two women. He paced the length of the room.

"You won't see Robert again," Simon said to her. "He won't be back in three days."

"No," she said. "I've told him as much."

An apple sat on her bedside table. Simon picked it up, tossed it in the air.

"So why Robert?" he asked.

Nora looked up at him.

"Why go with him? Why not stay here with me for your last weekend?"

Nora sighed into her hands. "You're making me dizzy, you know? Stop walking around me like a madman."

He sat down on the bed.

“Tell me. Why him?”

“You should care more about Asena now. All that happened between us, between you and me, it was special, but it never really mattered. You know that? The same with Robert. He got me excited for a moment. That’s all. No big secret to it.”

She leaned back and her hair fell over her left eye.

“But don’t you want to spend your last moments here? In Istanbul? With me?”

Nora turned to the window.

“No, I wouldn’t,” she said. “The bombs happened. It’s different for me now.”

“I’m not talking about the bombs. I’m talking about you. And me.”

“I won’t stay here and play with you for another year,” she said. “I wake up every morning and think of being somewhere else.”

“I woke up today and thought about you,” he said.

He leaned closer to her. Melis’s key in his pocket, pressed into his thigh.

Nora touched his chin with the tip of her finger.

“You are a complete and utter fool,” she said. “And you live with another woman.”

“I don’t really live with anybody any more.”

“So your Turkish girl has wised up to what a fool you are? Good for her.”

“No,” he said. “I’m not a fool at all.” He kissed her then, and her lips spread open against his. He tugged at her sweater and felt her soft skin, and her breath filled his mouth, and her smooth hair swung briefly into his eyes. He tried to lie down on top of her on the bed. She breathed against him, her body pushing up against his.

“Don’t go,” he said. “Don’t leave Istanbul.”

She opened her eyes and let him kiss her.

She spoke against his dry neck, “You don’t really mean that. I know you think you do. But you don’t.”

Then they heard water running. Dishes and cups clinking together. Knives raced through his mind.

“I can’t stay in here,” Nora said. “I’ve got to help out.”

She tried to stand and Simon pulled at her shirt. She slipped away from him, like a cat from a fire.

“Don’t go,” he said. “You’re leaving so soon.”

“Asena never even got to eat,” Nora said. “I’ve got to see what I can do.”

“Come back when she’s asleep again, would you?” he said.

Nora said nothing and left. Simon lay on the bed with the light on. He took off his shirt and slipped under the covers. He listened for Nora, and he heard mumbled voices and couldn’t tell whose was whose. He remembered being told that this grandmother had died the month before. The news reached him when he’d been with Nora. A phone call from his father. Immediately he’d wanted to be with Melis, because it was what he should share with her. Family mattered to her, and she’d share his sadness. He told Nora about the death, and she told him she was sorry. He felt like crying, but held it back. When he saw Melis that night he told her, and he’d been right, she’d been very upset by the news. She’d kissed his cheeks and eyes, squeezed his hands and told him that everything was going to be okay. Simon hadn’t been able to cry then at all. He’d felt empty. He’d felt nothing.

He lay without moving in Nora's little bed, staying awake, waiting for her to return from seeing after Asena. But she didn't come back to him that night.

Chapter Eleven

Asena's family arrived early. Her mother, her sister, and her father. And that's when the true wailing began. Her mother wore a black headscarf, and Asena crumbled into her arms. Her father was a tall man, as thin as a spider. His face was long and sad, and he blinked his eyes continually. He shook hands with Nora and Simon, and thanked them for staying with Asena, for looking after her. Nora told him that it had been their pleasure. Simon couldn't look in the father's eyes.

Nora went to the kitchen to make tea, but Asena's sister, Miray, stepped in and took the kettle and matches away from her. She asked Nora to sit down. Miray would make the tea. Simon took Nora's arm and led her to the sofa.

(The next couple scenes have been cut in consideration of length. So, let's skip ahead to Simon and Nora leaving Asena alone with her family, agreeing to meet them later on at the mosque for the funeral. Please proceed to the next scene. There is nothing more to see here.)

A block from Melis's apartment Simon stopped and asked Nora if she'd wait for him in the tea garden around the corner. Melis went there every few days to buy her little almond cakes.

"Your Turkish girl lives around here?" Nora asked. "Rather dreary, isn't it?"

“No,” said Simon. “It’s a good place to live.”

“Then why aren’t things working out for the two of you?”

Simon looked down the street. Men were carrying chairs out of a carpenter’s workshop, loading them into a white van. One of the men slipped, and dropped a chair into the street. His boss shouted at him, and the man picked the chair up and tossed it into the truck.

“Wait here,” Simon told Nora.

He left Nora in the tea garden, and couldn’t look in the faces of the people he passed. He felt empty and thin, as though maybe there was nothing inside him at all. As much as he’d wanted to see Melis the night before, he felt relieved to know that she should be at work. He could change clothes, be alone for a moment, then go to the funeral.

Outside of her building the tailor, Jelal, was having a cigarette, as his son swept the sidewalk outside their shop. The tailor was a large man, who always wore a stiff white shirt and had three or four days of stubble covering his face. Sometimes Simon and Jelal smoked together in the evenings, because Melis never allowed him to smoke inside. In his youth, Jelal had served in the Turkish Navy. He had traveled to Denmark and Norway, and he always wanted to talk with Simon about his experiences, because Simon was a foreigner, and Jelal felt Simon could understand the things he’d done and seen better than others.

“Is Melis here?” Simon asked him. “Have you seen her today?”

“*Yok*,” Jelal said, and shrugged his shoulders. Good, Simon thought. Then she must be at work.

He left the stairwell light off, and took each step slowly and quietly, rubbing her key in his fingers. He put his ear against her door and listened: nothing. Get your stuff and go, he told himself. Even if she is here. The quicker you do it, the better it is for the both of you. He opened the door a crack. Melis's scent washed over him, and he almost turned away. He felt he couldn't go on like this anymore. He couldn't face her, or even any of her things. With Nora just below, waiting in the street. Then he peeked inside and noticed none of her sweaters or jackets hung by the door, as they always had. Why had she moved them? He pushed the door open all the way and stepped inside. Boxes filled her kitchen. The cabinets and drawers pulled open and left empty, and her plants gone from the windowsill.

His body went weak, and he raced to the living room. She'd unhooked all of her chalk drawings from the walls. Her furniture still sat in its normal places, but her rugs as well had been rolled up and were ready to be carried to a new place. He ran to her bedroom. It had been untouched, so far at least. The packing had yet to begin there.

Simon paced through her rooms, his arms wrapped around his chest. She didn't want him to find her again. She was going to hide. Was he so bad? He rubbed his temples, trying to think. It had been an accident. His skin went quickly from cold to hot, and he kicked over the chair that had hit Melis two nights ago. The chair smacked into the wall, but didn't break, and he picked it up, and smashed it into the floor, cracking its two front legs. Christ! he thought. What have I done? Has a man ever won a woman back by smashing up her furniture? Maybe he could be the first. Maybe she'd see this, and sense his rage, his anger, his disappointment with himself, and she'd understand that he was going to change. Was it possible? He picked the chair up, with the intention to

smash it again into the floor, but he stopped. He couldn't do it. There was no reason, nothing he could win by doing it. How could he show her his regret?

He pulled her key out from his pocket and put it on the kitchen table. She could have it back. As long as she wouldn't leave. A letter addressed to him lay on the table. From the U.S. Consulate. He ripped it open. The marriage applications, for visas, passports, citizenship. All that he had lost. He put them in his pocket.

Cigarettes sat on the kitchen countertop. Unfiltered *Samsuns*. The brand Melis's brother smoked. It's him, Simon thought. Melis wouldn't do this. Regardless of whatever he'd done. He could feel that. She loved her apartment too much. The slim view of the Bosphorus she had from her bedroom window. The cake shops. The boat docks only a block away.

Where would Melis go? Back to her mother's house, and live like a child, buttering her brother's toast, and putting eggs on the table every morning. And Nora was waiting down the street. She wanted to pack up and leave him, too. Suitcases stacked up in her bedroom. And Bozkurt was dead and gone, and the bank where Simon used to teach had been blown to pieces. Ruined. He realized that maybe, for him, Istanbul was not only *Istiklâl*, not only the Bosphorus. It was Melis. He'd never thought she would change. All anybody talked about any more was how Istanbul was changing. He couldn't stand it, and he refused to think it was true. He paced back and forth from the kitchen to the living room, and began flinging open all the boxes, looking inside each one. Melis's belongings thrown together carelessly.

In a flurry he began to unpack everything. He stacked the blue bowls back in the cupboard, with the chipped bowl he had always used at the bottom. All the silverware he

slung back into the drawers, and when he was finished in the kitchen, he rolled her rugs out across the living room floor. He put all her drawings to the wall again. None of them were in frames, because she couldn't afford them. It surprised him that he actually remembered where each one had hung before, but still he put them up in a different order—the three she'd done of birds he put in the corner, closest to the window, where he'd always thought they belonged. He ran his fingers over the clouds she'd drawn—deep, dark clouds, sharp sunlight poking through them in places. The chalk dust dirtied his fingers. And he spoke to the pictures as though they were her.

“You can't move,” he said. “I won't let you. This cannot change.”

Sweat dripped from his wrists, and ran down his back. The last thing he did was pull the drawing she'd done of him out from under her bed where she'd kept it—so unexpected relatives couldn't ask, “who's that?”—and he hung it in the bottom corner, below all the others. It was the only picture she had framed. Somehow in the picture she'd made his round, pockmarked face look as smooth as an angel's. In high school, he'd had the worst acne of anybody, and the old faded scars across his cheeks and forehead offered the proof. When Melis wasn't home sometimes he'd pull the picture out from under her bed and look at it for a second or two and wonder why on earth she had made him that way and if it were actually true or possible that he ever looked like that. But he knew he didn't. It was just a picture.

He thought about writing Melis another note, but what good would it do? He even chose to not take his suitcase or any of his things. Nothing but the rest of his money. Sixty million lira—only 24 dollars. He changed into his white shirt for the funeral. The little girl's blood had grown stiff and hard on the shirt's sleeve, so he found

Melis's scissors, and cut the sleeve off just below his elbow. Then he slipped on his black jacket.

He took her brother's cigarettes and left.

Simon ran out of Melis's building and down the street. Nora had been waiting for ages. He'd have to come back and find Melis that night. Shop windows glared, full of bright midday sun. Trucks idled in the street, their huge engines making the ground shake. Simon felt sick when he reached the corner of the street, and he stopped and waited for the light to change. The tea garden had filled up with people, but Nora's hair stood out like a flame. She was the only one sitting alone. He felt glad, knowing she was waiting for him. Why would he not just let her go? Because Istiklâl Street was empty without Nora. It wasn't Melis's street. And he couldn't make it Nora's street any more either.

The light changed and Simon stepped off the curb. And that's when he saw her: Melis riding home on the bus. His heart flipped into his throat, and an old woman bumped into him as he stood stiff in the street and stared after her. The bus made a turn and the crowd inside stumbled and Melis put her hand out, but it did no good, and she was pressed hard into the glass, and her hair streamed down into her bruised face. Simon stumbled back to the curb, and the old woman cursed at him, calling him a fool. He ran toward the bus stop, chasing after Melis.

Passenger after passenger piled off, and Simon stood and watched. His clothes clung to his skin, and he was panting and tired. Finally she stepped off, with her head down, and a man behind her, squeezing her arm in his meaty palm. It was Kemal, her

brother. Simon's anger boiled up inside him. Why would Istanbul not stay the same? He ran toward them, his jacket flapping open in the wind.

Melis turned quickly toward him, and her long hair whipped over her shoulder, and he saw her cheek—yellow and puffing up into her eyelid, making her eye half closed. His face hurt looking at her, and he wanted to touch her, but when he got close enough to do so she slunk away.

"Is he making you move?" His fingers shook as he pointed at Kemal. He was out of breath and gasping to speak.

She looked away, as though he were a stranger.

"Go," she whispered tersely. "Don't do this."

Kemal's dark eyes burned into Simon's.

"Are you making her move, asshole?"

Kemal's chest puffed up like a bull's. Simon knew Kemal didn't speak English, but he didn't care. He'd never perfected the art of cussing in Turkish, so he needed English at this moment.

"What the fuck's wrong with you? Are you her brother? Or are you an animal or something? *Hayvan mısın?*"

Kemal charged at Simon, holding up his hairy fists. Melis screamed and leapt between them, and Kemal knocked her off her feet. Simon caught her for a moment, but Kemal swung hard, bashing his fist into the side of Simon's head. Simon's breath oozed out of him. He stumbled to keep on his feet, and leaned back against the entrance door of her building.

Jelal and his son raced over, and it took both of them to hold Kemal back. He cursed and spat at Simon, hitting him in the face. A ball of white spit rolled down his jacket.

“You dirty fucker!” Simon shouted at him.

“Please,” Melis whispered urgently, as though English embarrassed her. “Go away.”

Simon wiped his face.

“Tell me why you’re moving.” The side of his face ached from Kemal’s awkward punch. “You don’t want me to be able to find you any more?”

Melis almost looked at him. She shook her head instead. “*Haydi git,*” she said. And took two steps closer to her brother.

“You hear, *yanki?*” Kemal squealed. “*Haydi git!*”

Simon pointed at him, and said:

“Go fuck yourself.”

Kemal thrashed his arms, but Jelal and his son kept him fenced back. A crowd was gathering, muttering and asking questions. Men pulled at their moustaches and stared at Simon.

“Don’t leave, Melis,” he said.

Simon reached out, without stepping toward her, and touched her elbow.

Her face wrinkled up and she began to cry. Harder than Simon had ever seen her cry before.

“*Ablamı vurdu,*” Kemal shouted. “*Yüzüne bak!*”

The eyes of everyone in the crowd went quickly to Melis's cheek. Her lips trembled and she leaned forward, letting her hair fall like a curtain over her face. Even Jelal and his son looked at Simon with fresh eyes then, rejudging him, and their hold on Kemal loosened.

Simon stepped closer to Melis. "I didn't," he said. "Tell them."

Melis wouldn't look at him. The two men from the other day, who'd grabbed Simon as he tried to keep Melis from getting into the taxi, began murmuring to the others in the crowd, saying they'd seen this foreigner chasing after this Turkish woman, and that he'd been grabbing after her, and making a scene.

Melis's eyes darted around the men in the crowd, then she mouthed at Simon the words: *Go away. Please!*

"No," he said. "*Burada'dan gitmiyorum, Melis.*"

Simon glared at Kemal, and squeezed his hands into fists. Then, from behind him, he heard Nora's voice.

"Simon, what's happening?" she said. Her voice trembled. Simon turned around. Sunlight filled Nora's hair, hurting his eyes. He couldn't look at her.

"*Kim o?*" Melis asked.

"*Hiç kimse,*" Simon answered, and shrugged. Thank God Nora seemed to not remember any of the Turkish he'd taught her..

But she spoke up quickly from behind him.

"Nobody?" she said. "Nobody?"

Simon jerked around to look at her. How had she understood?

"I never taught you that," he said.

She shook her head, her face was white, and she said:

“This is your mess. I’ll leave you with it. I’ve got to help Asena today.” She stormed away, pushing out from the crowd.

Simon turned again to face Melis and her brother. He held out his arms. Couldn’t Melis see that she was all he had left? But she only stood up straighter. Her hair stuck to her wet cheeks, and her eyes bulged wet with anger.

“It’s over,” Melis said, in perfect English. “I could never be with you.”

Her cheeks pulsed with tears, and she ran at Simon, with her fingers raised like knives, but the men in the crowd quickly caught her, and she only reached him for a single sharp slap. His face stung, and he turned and looked again for Nora. She was gone, her red foreign hair, so easy to spot, was nowhere to be seen. She must have slipped into a taxi, gone. Simon’s legs felt hollow, he could barely walk. Kemal shouted and screamed.

“I’ll get you, *yanki!* You hear? I’ll see you again!”

Simon walked down the street, trying not to listen. He couldn’t win like this. He’d have to find a way to see Melis alone. How could she have such an insane brother? He had to find Nora now. At least he knew where she’d be—Bozkurt’s funeral.