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One Way Trip

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"Mother, why are you packing so many clothes just to go to a funeral?" Halil asked from the bedroom doorway. "How long will you be gone?"

Ceylan didn't look up from her suitcase. "I need lots of clothes. You know me, always cold."

"In the pod I'm designing for you there's a central gas fireplace so you'll never be cold."

She didn't answer. She was thinking about how often he answered her in Flemish when she spoke to him in Turkish.

As if reading her thoughts, he switched languages. "Today I jumped 52 hurdles playing Pass the Torch."

Ceylan flinched at the thought of what else preoccupied him at the computer.

He pulled a portable gaming device from his pocket and started to play.

"Time for bed."

He ignored her.

"Halil!"

"Not now," he said, eyes glued to the screen. "Vulcan is passing the torch to Loki. It's an Olympic marathon game."

"I said *now*."

"Let me stay up 'til Papa gets home. I want to say good night to him."

"Papa is not coming home soon. He's working late."

"Why does he work so late?"

"Do you know where the Olympic torch comes from?"

"No."

"I never told you about Yanartaş, the place near Olympos where fire comes out of the ground?"

"Fire comes out of the ground?"

"Most places, you light a fire and eventually it dies. But not Yanartaş. Even when storms rage, the fire may smolder, or even go out, but then it re-ignites, all on its own." Ceylan remembered watching a small fire die out on the mountainside a long time ago, and feeling a part of her had died with it, then hoping but barely daring to believe that it

would come back, and finally feeling her heart swell when the golden flickers reappeared. "I've been there," she added.

Halil looked up at his mother. Struck by his pale amber eyes, she forgot her recent fear of meeting his gaze.

"That's how the Olympic torch began," she continued. "That is, the Olympics started in Greece, but the fire that lit the first Olympic torch came out of a mountainside in Turkey."

"I can't imagine fire coming from the ground."

Ceylan smoothed a crease from a blue skirt. "It is difficult to imagine here. In Belgium things are restrained."

"You hardly ever talk to me about Turkey. What's it like there?"

"People think nothing of sitting on the porch for hours, just talking. The weather is almost always nice. Weeks or months go by without rain, sunshine all day long. Most of the food we ate came from our huge garden. It was a magical place. One year my grandmother and I even made rattles out of the gourds that grew in the garden and made music with them!"

The more she spoke the more she remembered. It was pleasant to share these memories with her son, but strange, as if they'd happened to someone else.

Suddenly she was back in the present, her heart pounding. She winced. To have spent a decade and a half raising a little boy and then find out that even if she were to ever have grandchildren, she would never meet them.

Usually Ceylan's grandmother chatted good-naturedly on their way to town, but today she walked in silence, her worry beads jangling softly. The road was hot and dusty, dotted with fig trees and apricot trees. Ceylan was wearing a new outfit that her grandmother had made.

"An outfit for such a girl must include the niqab so that her head and face can be covered," her father had said, jutting his face out aggressively.

Grandmother had looked at her son with raised eyebrows. Even she knew that it was old-fashioned, unlawful even, to force someone to wear the traditional Turkish headscarf let alone have her face covered.

But Ceylan didn't mind the niqab. As she walked the familiar road to town with her grandmother that morning she pushed it down so that it fell across her eyes. The fabric was extraordinary: a fiercely jubilant semi-translucent chartreuse, like the flourishes of new life in the garden. It gave the world a lime green glow and softened edges. What a miracle that thousands of exquisite, luminous threads, woven together had created something tangible yet not quite there.

It was the day of Ceylan's first blood, and her grandmother had explained that morning what she must do now and every month to come. She hoped she'd inserted the tampon properly so as not to embarrass herself and ruin her favorite outfit. She had

known the blood would come, but no one had told her that when it did, the whole world would seem different. The patterns on the carpets draped over stairways and balconies of carpet shops seemed to come alive: kaleidoscopic geometries hovered before her and then faded into the background, appearing and disappearing, though nothing was changing at all.

There was a sudden chill in the air.

"I must go back," Ceylan's grandmother said resolutely.

Ceylan looked at the frail woman with concern. For years they had taken this weekly walk into town together, and never before had her grandmother turned back before they had finished shopping. "Are you ok?" She motioned to a bench. "Sit down here and I will get the stuff. A kilo of salt and a spool of black thread, right? Was there anything else?"

"No," her grandmother said, shaking her head. There was fear in her eyes but her lips were pressed tight, and the deep grooves extending downward from the corners of her mouth looked even deeper. She thrust a bill into Ceylan's hand, and then threw her arms around the girl, held her briefly, and pulled away.

"I hear you with your father!" she said in a raspy, disapproving whisper.

Ceylan flinched in surprise. The topic had never been openly discussed before. How long had her grandmother known? Couldn't she see that Ceylan was forced to do things she didn't want to do?

Her grandmother took a step back and then turned around and gave her a hard look.

"Go!" she said forcefully.

Ceylan wondered if she'd ever done anything to lead her father on. "What's going on?" she asked, clutching her grandmother's arm.

Her grandmother was shaking. For a second, she looked torn. Then she yanked her arm from Ceylan's grasp and held it to her bosom.

"I'm going back alone," her grandmother said. "You are staying here."

Ceylan felt as if lightning were bolting from her eyes, like in cartoons.

"Killing eyes," her grandmother said, in a hushed screech that was so unnatural and inhuman Ceylan wondered if she'd imagined it.

Although she felt both angry and afraid, Ceylan reacted in pure anger.

She saw her grandmother exchange glances with a pale-skinned, yellow-haired man standing at the edge of the road. Ceylan had never been alone in town. She had often dreamed of venturing far from home, especially after seeing a painting at a neighbor's house of Istanbul at sunset with its gleaming spires reflected in the sea. But she'd only left town once before, to go to Olympus for the wedding of an uncle.

As if in a daze, she watched her grandmother walk away and disappear into the crowd. In the years to come, Ceylan would remember this moment vividly: the voice of the pop singer Tarkan on a distant, raspy boombox, dust gleaming in the air, raised by a passing cart, eggplants for sale, bulging, freshly picked, each uniquely shaped, the pungent aroma of spices and feta from a shop with windows lined with huge bottles of

garlic-stuffed olives. Ceylan half wanted to chase after her grandmother but her feet wouldn't move. She became aware that the yellow-haired man was watching her. He was handsome. A glorious feeling surged through her unexpectedly. Maybe the world was, after all, the magical place she'd thought it was when she was younger, for here was a prince from a faraway land looking at her adoringly.

The momentary distraction of the blonde man made the pain of her abandonment more intense. Eventually, the sun came out. She did something she'd never done in town before: she pushed her headscarf off. She felt terrified, yet raw, as if reborn. An involuntary flutter of black lashes. The midday call to prayer sounded from the ancient minaret loudspeakers, echoing back and forth from one mosque to another. She did not kneel to pray. It was the last prayer call she ever heard.



Two whirlwind weeks later, Ceylan and the blonde-haired man, Jooris, were together in the Grote Markt pita shop in Ghent, Belgium. It was a friendly but disorderly place painted birdshell blue. A man at the next table was ordering a falafel in Turkish. Instantly Ceylan felt welcome. But she wasn't prepared for what she saw next: her own face on the wall! A younger version of herself squeezed in amongst hordes of relatives in a large, framed photograph amongst other photographs of Turkey. The picture, taken at her uncle's wedding, was almost identical to the one in her own living room back in Turkey. Fourteen people of all ages, the harsh lines of their features softened by bright smiles and billowing dark hair. It had been one of the happiest days of her life, a day spent playing and laughing and feasting with relatives, some of whom she had known forever and others whom she had never met but who felt familiar. At sunset they'd gone to Yanartaş where they'd sat on a hillside telling stories and singing songs and watching flames flicker spontaneously from rocky outcrops, as if by magic, until late into the night. Never before or since had she had the feeling of belonging to a clan.

Jooris saw her look of surprise, and tried to explain something. Ceylan could not understand his Flemish, but his soft tone put her at ease, and she smiled politely. Jooris switched from Flemish to French, to English, and finally gestured wildly with his hands and drew something on her scallop-edged paper placemat. Still she didn't comprehend. He went to the kitchen door and called, "Azize!"

A vaguely familiar man with merry eyes emerged carrying trays with steaming pitas and salad with feta and olives, which he placed on their table.

"You're here!" he said warmly to Ceylan in Turkish. "Do you remember me?"

"I think so," she said hesitantly.

"I am your mother's cousin. We met at your uncle's wedding. As soon as I hung that picture there, Jooris fell madly in love with you! He wouldn't stop asking me about you until I told him who you were and where you lived."

"So after seeing me in that photograph he came all the way to Turkey to fetch me?"

“Yes!” Azize beamed. “Romantic, isn’t it? Jooris is a good man. I’ve known him for years.”

Azize returned to the kitchen. Jooris smiled at Ceylan and she smiled back, her life falling into place with more clarity.

On the way home to Jooris’s place they encountered a family with five smiling children. They were all sucking orange popsicles with enormous pleasure, quite unaware of the gentle rain spattering on their plastic hoods. The cheerfulness of a polka-dot-bright orange world reminded Ceylan of the apricot trees in Turkey. She would never have dreamed that the course of her life would be so drastically changed by a photograph on a wall.



Time passed differently in Belgium than it had in Turkey. The days were marked not by the echoing chants of the muezzins atop mosques but by church bells. Each morning Ceylan woke not to the sound of the rooster but to the iphone chimes ringtone. She would lie awash in the remnants of turbulent, bittersweet dreams set in Turkey—full of action and bright colors and expressive faces—and be surprised all over again to find herself in Belgium. The dreams would begin to dissolve as soon as she awoke, but one element lingered, sometimes all morning long: the unmistakable sharp, musky smell of her father. Although it was rare that anyone from Turkey tried to contact her, she felt her father’s presence always; in any eerie way, he seemed almost as present now as when she’d been living with him.

She tried to be a good doctor’s wife. At least once a week she cooked her husband’s favorite dish, a Flemish specialty, witloof met kaas en hesp: ham wrapped in endives, covered with grated cheese.

“As good as any Flemish woman can make,” Jooris would boast.

At least that’s what she thought he said. She had started taking a course in Flemish, though she wondered how she would ever learn the language when everyone seemed too busy to talk. One particularly cold, dreary day she walked home from her class without a single person acknowledging her presence. The few people not in cars were on cell phones or looking down. She’d felt less invisible wearing the niqab back home.



Nine months after Ceylan arrived in Belgium she was lying on a hospital bed as new life, bloody and wailing, shrouded in the veils of her innermost membranes, was pulled out of her. In the residual pain of birthing she felt overcome by a terrible sense of separation. “Childbirth makes the family’s kettle whistle,” her grandmother had once said. But her family’s kettle wasn’t whistling.

She gave the baby a Turkish name, Halil, although the baby powder made him smell more Belgian than Turkish. He did, however, have eyes strikingly reminiscent of Ceylan's father's: large and amber-brown with long, thick lashes. For the drive home from the hospital she wrapped him carefully in layers of soft cloth. When her husband took his place behind the wheel it occurred to her that from now on there would be three of them, not two.

Halil passed the usual milestones, but his first words were not Turkish and his first steps not on Turkish soil. He didn't chase his friends playing *korebe* and *uzun ejek* (Turkish games similar to Blind Man's Bluff and leapfrog) on the streets. Instead, he played on the portable gaming device that Jooris bought for him. Ceylan found the bleeps and gunfire of his games mildly annoying, but what disturbed her most was that he was plagued by murderous nightmares in which ghostly beings tried to suffocate him. Terrified, he would run to his parents' bed in the middle of the night, and fall asleep twitching and trembling so much that Jooris often left to sleep in his son's bed. But Halil had endearing qualities as well, such as an unexpected fondness for the Atomium, a bizarre building consisting of silver spheres connected into the shape of a giant iron crystal. When it came into view on a day trip to Brussels, he stopped and stared, mouth agape.

"One day we will live in something like that," Halil said fervently to his mother. "Except way better. Your sphere will be your favorite color, chartreuse."

Ceylan put her arm around him.

"And a blue sphere for papa," Halil added, switching from Turkish to Flemish.

Ceylan wondered what made him think they should be in different spheres.



Jooris tended to do spontaneous things on his days off, like jaunt off to the Alps to climb a mountain. After work he would go on long walks while Ceylan cooked dinner. Halil was usually in his bedroom at his computer. Once, when he was ten, she managed to talk him into going with on a walk with his father, and at the last minute she came too, though she felt excluded from their conversation, which went into endless detail about architecture, space ship design, the cosmos...

"Look at this house," Jooris said. "With windows and doors like Saint Bavo Cathedral. Did you know that cathedral is a thousand years old?"

"I prefer this one," Halil said.

"*That* one? It's boring. Perfunctory. No ornamentation. Why do you not like the ones that are beautiful?"

"To me that *is* beautiful."

Ceylan walked behind them, wondering how it came about that her son's command of Flemish was better than her own. She had little social life beyond the occasional get-together with relatives at the pita shop and coffee with Demet, a Turkish

woman she had met there. She shared much more with Demet than she did with her husband.

“Halil,” she said one day when he came home from school, “Azize has a brother Adem who is a violinist. We are invited to a concert tomorrow.”

She opened the oven to tend to her endives. Even after living in Belgium for over a decade she still missed the hearty, sinuous vegetables that sprouted flamboyantly from Turkish soil and had to be tamed slowly and devotedly for hours in a big, iron pot. The sight of the endives lying in the pan, tender and translucent, scintillating with melted ham fat, kindled the memory of the lime green veils she had worn long ago.

“I don’t want to go,” Halil murmured, gazing attentively at the game he was playing.

“What do you mean? Everyone loves music. To go to a concert is an opportunity other kids could only dream of. You’re the lucky one!” She slashed the tops off some carrots.

Halil said nothing.

“Halil?”

Halil’s defiant look reminded Ceylan of her father. Suddenly Halil brightened. “Hi Papa!” he called, as Jooris approached the house. They hugged warmly at the doorstep.

Ceylan cut the carrots with unusual vigor.

“Papa, I don’t have to go to a concert, do I?”

“A concert? Of course not.”

“He lives in a bubble,” Ceylan said. “He needs exposure to the world around him.”

Something smelled burnt. Ceylan opened the oven to find her endives ruined. She had forgotten the grated cheese that normally kept the delicate leaves from burning. This had never happened before.

“Why force him to do stuff he’s not interested in?” Jooris asked. “He’s smart. Who knows, maybe he’ll be an architect.”

“How could he ever build a building when he can’t put down his phone?”

“The architect doesn’t *build* the building,” Jooris said condescendingly, as if speaking to a child. “The architect *desi*...” His voice trailed off. He looked startled.

“What?” Ceylan said. She was shaking.

Halil’s phone clattered to the floor.

“Mother, lightning flashed out of your eyes!” Halil said, staring at her.



The next day, Ceylan met her friend Demet at the Grote Markt pita shop.

“Jooris has been coming home very late at night,” Ceylan said.

“He’s not the most level-headed person in the world,” Demet commented.

“What makes you say that? He’s a doctor!”

It occurred to Ceylan that whenever she mentioned that her husband was a doctor she had a nagging suspicion that he didn’t live up to what a doctor should be.

"Well, it takes a certain kind of person to fly across Europe to meet you after just seeing you in a photograph!" Demet said. "You may be beautiful, but still!" She gave Ceylan a friendly kick under the table.

Ceylan twiddled her fingers thoughtfully. It was always helpful to get Demet's perspective, though not always pleasant.

"Ask him if he has a mistress," Demet suggested.

"I can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"He's a man of reputation. A saver of lives. He has no idea I suspect anything."

Demet looked puzzled. "You pretend to be asleep when he gets into bed?"

"He sleeps in Halil's bed."

"Where does Halil sleep?"

"He usually sleeps in my bed."

Demet looked at her strangely but said nothing.

One day Ceylan found Jooris at the computer with eyes red and swollen. She had never seen him like that. She wondered what a doctor's wife was supposed to do in such a circumstance. She put her hand on his head and caressed his hair. Hair the colour of corn never ceased to amaze her. She noticed for the first time a few strands of gray.

On the computer was a photograph of Halil, and a photo of an endless desert landscape under dusty rust-colored skies.

"Halil signed up for a one-way trip to Mars," Jooris said. "And they chose him. Out of thousands of applicants."

Ceylan shrieked and shrunk back, horrified. "Are you sure he's really *going* to Mars? Perhaps he will just design buildings for Mars."

Jooris sneered. "I read it all. He's going. And never coming back."

"Has he spoken to you of this?"

"No," Jooris said.

"Well, we'll tell him he can't go," Ceylan said.

"You think that will stop him? He emailed the organizers saying this was his life-long ambition. His ultimate dream."

"Do you read my emails too?"

Jooris sneered. Ceylan stood next to him in uncomfortable silence trying to recall anything personal in her email, but her state of mind was too chaotic.

"I'm not sad that he will go," Jooris said. "I have nothing against that. I'm sad because of how difficult his life will be. If he even gets there alive."

"This is what comes of not cultivating in a child an appreciation for culture. For nature. Letting him sit at a computer all day."

"You think this is *my* fault?"

Ceylan did think it was his fault, at least partly, but she did not want to argue, so she said nothing.

The clock chimed.

"I will be late to meet Demet," Ceylan said.

When she reached the pita shop, she sat at the little table against the wall, where they sat every Tuesday. Demet wasn't there yet.

Mars. It was unthinkable. Halil had always been brave, an explorer, interested in how things worked, in outer space. She'd sometimes wondered if he might do something amazing with his life. But she never could have imagined this. He certainly hadn't inherited his interplanetary aspirations from her. But she could not chase away the fear that to have a son want to do something so strange was a reflection of his parents' failings. She felt trapped in a life that had nothing to do with the future she'd expected.

She got a refill of coffee and curled her hand around the cup, appreciating its warmth. Three o'clock. Strange. Usually by now she was deep in conversation with Demet. Had their last meeting had given any clues to explain her absence now? They'd talked about their children, how little Turkish they spoke. About how their children's Flemish friends made them feel embarrassed about their Turkish mothers.

Ceylan sipped her coffee and then, somehow, put the cup down with so much force that it spilled. Coffee sometimes gave her the jitters. If Demet were here, she would tell her to think of something other than Mars. Something nice. Ceylan looked at the photograph of her uncle's wedding on the wall of the shop. Buried in the memory of that happy event were searingly painful ones. The memories had nothing to do with her uncle's wedding; they had to do with what was happening to her when she used to look up at the nearly identical copy of that photograph on the living room wall back home in Turkey.

"I can make you feel beautiful," her father whispered beguilingly, sitting next to Ceylan on the couch. He was solidly built, with a wide face, and soft, tousled hair, shiny with sweat, and his amber eyes glowed with anticipation.

Ceylan looked up at him, heart pounding. His gaze lowered and fixed on her breasts. She cringed and a shiver ran down her arm as he caressed it. Involuntarily she pulled away. He thrust her down forcefully with one thick hand, and pushed his loose pants down with the other. The next thing she knew he was willfully forcing himself through fabric and flesh. She felt the sharp pain of penetration; his extraordinarily long eyelashes brushed her cheek softly. Then something shifted. Although she could still feel the pain, it felt somehow remote, as if she were disconnected from her body, observing the world with unusual clarity. She was floating into the photograph of her uncle's wedding on the wall behind them. Delving into this joyful time helped keep at bay what was actually happening. One by one she looked into the faces, plummeting

their depths, until she felt as if she were looking beyond the actual faces in the photographs to distant ancestors she'd never known, feeling a sense of connection and strength coming from them.

Her father let out a startling moan of relief, and the weight of his sweating, trembling body collapsed on her.

Demet entered the shop, looking frumpy and flustered as Ceylan had never seen her before.

"What's the matter?"

Demet sat down and said nothing but looked at Ceylan blankly.

Ceylan asked again softly, "What is it?"

Demet leaned toward Ceylan and whispered, "My boy was seen visiting the black girls in the windows on Winkelhaakstraat!"

"How do you know?"

"His teacher told us. Another teacher saw him there. Ceylan, I can't bear it!"

Ceylan did not know what to say. "It's not so bad," she ventured.

"It *is* bad!"

As soon as Demet's coffee arrived she started tapping her fingers on her coffee cup. Ceylan found it annoying but said nothing.

"Growing up in a land where girls run about in clothes like dental floss, it isn't so extraordinary, you know, that a boy might be tempted," Ceylan said.

"How would you feel if it were Halil?"

Ceylan took a deep breath. "There are things far worse than having your son be interested in girls."

"Like...?"

"Halil applied for a one-way trip to Mars. And he was chosen."

Demet's eyes widened.

"When does he go? The training takes a decade or something, doesn't it?"

"I don't know. I just found out. Demet, I cannot bear it. To have borne and raised a child just to see him..."

Demet silently took Ceylan's hand.

"He hid it from us," Ceylan said. "Jooris found out on the internet. I hate the internet. In Turkey, there isn't internet everywhere."

"There is now."

"Yes, I suppose there is," Ceylan admitted. Of course there was. Many things must have changed in Turkey since she left.

"Did you talk to Halil about it?"

"No. I have barely been able to look him in the eye since we found out."

Demet's face was suddenly stern.

"The two of you drive that boy to distraction."

Ceylan looked at Demet incredulously. It was the first time she had ever been anything but supportive.

“What do you mean?”

“You think you are just two good people raising a good boy. But he’s getting old enough to sense that he is your battleground.”

“How can you say such a thing, Demet? Neither Jorris nor I are the least bit violent. Halil is the only thing that makes life in this wretched country bearable. I love him more than anything.”

“Yes, I know,” Demet said with alarming insincerity. “Everything you both do is with his best interests at heart. But the two of you try to pull him in opposite directions.”

Ceylan looked away. Her heart was pounding.

“A child is a seed that you water,” Demet said, “Not a possession you own.”

Ceylan rolled her eyes.

“How’s *that* going?” Demet asked, nodding in the direction of the book in Ceylan’s bag.

“I’ve spent hours on it and still haven’t made it through Chapter One.”

Demet frowned. “It’s so full of operating-room lingo, even native Flemish speakers don’t know what half the words mean. Try something else.”

Ceylan took a deep breath.

Demet’s words echoed in Ceylan’s thoughts as she walked home. Raindrops quivered and fell from intricate iron balconies. They reminded her of a dream she’d once had shortly before her son turned thirteen, of a strangely beautiful storm. Raindrops on shaking branches had glittered beneath a purple-grey sky, and the wind had moaned. She had awakened from the dream and instinctively put her arm around her son. He shrieked. They’d stared briefly at each other before he bolted from the room. It wasn’t until the wee hours of the morning that she pieced together what had happened: he’d been masturbating, thinking she was asleep.

That was the last time he shared his parents’ bed. If the nightmares continued he never mentioned them.

With Halil now sleeping in his own bed, Jooris had returned to theirs, yet she often lay awake, alone, wondering where her husband was, feeling as if the deepest part of herself were crippled. When he slipped in at four, five, sometimes six in the morning, she would lie very still, eyes closed, so as not to confront the fact that everything seemed wrong.



The week after Ceylan found out about Mars it rained so relentlessly that branches tore off trees and lay strewn in the yard. A few days earlier she had opened all the windows a crack, eager to rejuvenate the stale indoor air with scents of spring, but the drafts were so strong and the pelting rain so incessant that she went from room to room closing them again. Through the kitchen window she watched pedestrians shield their faces

from the onslaught as they gingerly made their way through the maze of puddles. She emailed Demet to cancel their weekly rendezvous. She started another Flemish novel and this time she made it through Chapter One. Triumphantly she moved on to Chapter Two.

One morning Ceylan woke early to the sight of a yellow-pink gleam across the bedroom wall. Finally, sunshine! She bounded from the bed and, to her surprise, danced her way into the bathroom. For breakfast she made boiled eggs, tomato slices, and toast. They ate in the little garden in the backyard, speaking animatedly, laughing, enjoying each other's company. Ceylan had little appetite but felt strangely happy to be the wife and mother in this little family. Halil was telling them his theory about the relationship between gravity, ceiling shape, and acoustics. Over the years his facial features had acquired some of the angularity of her Turkish family; his hair, which usually looked quite dark, was glinting in the sun like the buttered rye toast. It impressed Ceylan how he was becoming his own person. Jooris took Ceylan's hand, and somehow by the end of the meal she was sitting on his lap.

She did not like the sound of the dishwasher so she washed the breakfast dishes by hand. As soon as she sank her hands into the warm soapy water, the phone rang. For the first time in days, she answered it, despite her wet hands. It was her uncle calling from Turkey.

"Ceylan, I am very sorry to be the bearer of bad news," he said. "Your father has died."

Ceylan was stunned. "What? How did it happen?"

"He fell off a ladder and had a heart attack."

She was breathing quickly. "I am sorry for your loss of your brother."

"You will come home for the funeral I hope?"

"Uh, of course," Ceylan said.

She went upstairs to the balcony and gripped the black iron railing, bracing herself against a flood of memories. Her father clapping heartily in the front row when she was part of a tap-dance performance at school, teaching her how to sharpen knives, tucking her carefully into bed. And then sitting at the bed a little longer, telling her how beautiful her mother had been before she died when Ceylan was five, telling her how much she looked like her mother, untucking the bedcovers and slipping into bed with her, saying how he needed to show her how deeply he had loved her mother. One time, when she was ten, and she heard his footsteps approaching her bedroom, she'd felt strangely unafraid. Something strong had been building inside her, and it was focused on one word, which she would say confidently and forcefully: NO. It was as if all the powerful forces of the universe had been summoned to align with her and help her through this important moment. This was her chance. But when he appeared, the word got stuck in her throat. A sound came out, but it was garbled. As her father lowered himself into bed with her she felt as if the universe had betrayed her. Or perhaps she had betrayed it.

She stood on the balcony for over an hour before tears began to trickle down her cheeks. Life below continued on as normal, her neighbors doing chores they had put off during the rain: gardening, shopping, fixing a gutter.

It occurred to Ceylan that she probably wouldn't need a thick wool sweater in Turkey. She took it out of her suitcase.

Her son gulped and his face brightened. "Are... you're not sure you're going?" he asked.

He had the same kind of concerned look on his face as when Jooris was about to go somewhere, Ceylan thought to herself. Whichever parent Halil feared he might see less of was the one he seemed to care about most.

She noticed that he had gone back to his computer game.

"Enough computer games!" she said. She picked up the wool sweater she had taken out of her suitcase and threw it at his portable gaming device.

The device beeped.

"You killed him!" Halil said.

"Who?"

"Vulcan. The leader."

Ceylan looked surprised.

"It doesn't matter," Halil said quietly. He put the device in his pocket and fell silent.

"You play alone?" she asked.

"Sometimes. Well, against the computer. The computer has its team, I have mine."

Ceylan went back to her closet. Any shoes that seemed appropriate for a funeral did not seem appropriate for Turkey in summer.

Halil was watching her.

"What are you thinking?" she asked him.

"About that fire coming out of the ground."

"What about it?"

"People use a torch to pass fire from one person to another. Maybe sometimes someone drops the torch and the fire goes out. But you can always go back to the source and re-light it, because there the fire never goes out for good." He paused. "I was thinking about the light of the soul, and when you love someone..."

Ceylan's pulse quickened. "What do you know about that?" she asked.

She started erratically picking up odds and ends in the room and dropping them into the suitcase. A pair of slippers. A book.

"What I meant," he said, "is that each mother and father lights a torch that forms the soul of their child. And even if one of them goes away, their love still exists."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"I have fire inside me, mother. Waiting to come out."

Ceylan looked at her son quizzically, as if for the first time.

"What do you mean?"

"Ideas. They're not ready. But they're eager to come out."

His confidence surprised her. But it shouldn't, she realized. He was, after all, someone who planned to go off and do incredible things.

"They're more intricate than Turkish carpets. More inspiring than church spires. Beautiful like you, mother."

Ceylan winced, remembering how her father used to ask her if she would like to feel beautiful.

Halil took her hand and looked at her imploringly.

"Mother, in my mind are fantastical dwellings, the culmination of humanity's greatest dreams."

Ceylan had never seen her son speak so passionately. "Perhaps you'll design space colonies that fuse elements of both Belgian and Turkish architecture."

"Hm... Not sure about that. They'll be underground!"

"*Underground?*" Ceylan couldn't imagine that. She noticed that his hands were almost as large as hers now. But hers were still larger.

"Let's go to the computer," she said, in Flemish. "I want to show you images of Istanbul on the internet."

"Okay!"

As they ran from the room he accidentally knocked over the suitcase spilling its contents to the floor, but they barely noticed.

END