

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM PERSEA

Poems of Nazim Hikmet
Translated by Randy Blasing & Mutlu Konuk

HUMAN
LANDSCAPES
FROM MY
COUNTRY

An Epic Novel in Verse

By
NAZIM HIKMET

Translated from the Turkish by
RANDY BLASING & MUTLU KONUK

Foreword by
EDWARD HIRSCH



A Karen and Michael Braziller Book
PERSEA BOOKS / NEW YORK

TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

TWENTY YEARS AGO, when Persea Books published our abridged version of this poem under the abbreviated title of *Human Landscapes*, roughly one-third of the original had to be left out for reasons of economy, and this uncut version restores all the omitted sections. In fact, we have newly translated the entire epic, substantially revising it from beginning to end. We have also restored the many passages that, until recently, had been censored and banned from all Turkish editions of the work, so that we finally have in hand the first English rendering of Hikmet's magnum opus as a whole.

Our thanks to Muzeyyen Dursunoglu and our son, John Konuk Blasing, for their help with this edition, and to our friends and publishers, Karen and Michael Braziller, who for twenty-five years have gone all-out to put Hikmet on the map for English-speakers. This translation is dedicated to the author's stepson, Memet Fuat, whose editorial genius and generosity of spirit have preserved—for more than half a century—the integrity of the original for readers both at home and abroad.

R. B.

M. K.

September 2001

Çeşme, Turkey-Providence, Rhode Island

FOREWORD

Mustafa stopped.

Mahmut was a little taken aback:

"That's a strange epic," he said,

"this guy in prison has written a different kind of epic.

He's stirring up something.

But your voice is sad, son,

and it reads like music:

it touches a man."

Book Two, Section III

NAZIM HIKMET is one of the necessary poets of the twentieth century. His voice is sad and reads like music; it is joyful and sounds like happiness. It is compassionate, lonely, heartbreaking, unashamed. It is vulnerable and impure, at times offhanded, at times didactic. It is strikingly direct, ruthlessly honest. It is sorrowful and filled with struggle. It is plaintive and hits a note of pure feeling. To read Hikmet deeply is to be stirred up and confronted by unabashed emotion, connected to something mortally, even nakedly human. "Who touches this," as Whitman said, "touches a man."

Hikmet is one of the great poets of social consciousness. He is a figure comparable, say, to Federico García Lorca and Miguel Hernández, to César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda, which is to say that he was a Whitmanesque poet of the empathic imagination who felt his way into the lives of other people, who put his wild creative energies at the service of a humane vision. Like the major poets of the Spanish Civil War, Hikmet was politically minded and devoted to the international left, romantically inclined to utopianism, but also temperamentally allergic to socialist realism, to authoritarian constraints on the literary imagination. He essentially valued people over ideology and thus created what Vallejo called *poemas humanos*, human poems. His poetry radiates with human presence. He took suffering personally—it instigated his writings—and compassion flowed through his work like a deep river. It is possible to read Hikmet in English because of the path-breaking collaboration of Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk, who since the mid-1970s have made him available to us as a major poet. They have shown the range of his achievement, both in short and long poems, and consistently captured his idiomatic free verse cadences, his fresh tonalities,

his openheartedness, and his ferocious humanity. It is a noteworthy event in world literature that they have now translated into English for the first time in its entirety the 17,000 lines or so of Hikmet's masterpiece, *Human Landscapes from My Country*, a collage-like work to put beside Ezra Pound's *Cantos* as a heroic achievement, one of the majestic epic sequences of the century just past.

Hikmet called poetry "the bloodiest of the arts," and *Human Landscapes* is, in a crucial sense, a war poem. It is written in flesh and blood, and baptized in dark water. It is empowered by the idea of the poet as a singer of tales telling the tale of his tribe, and it simultaneously employs and plays with the traditional notion of the epic as a long narrative poem, exalted in style, heroic in theme. Hikmet shared Pound's concept of the epic as "a poem including history." He evoked the historical events he considered fundamental both to the development of his country and to an understanding of the modern world, and thus his work has a long memory. It takes place in time. One thinks of it as a written poem (the lineation has a strong rhythmic economy) that bears traces of the oral, that often sounds spoken, as if Wordsworth had confronted real people in an actual prison setting. The people so brilliantly characterized are (ordinary people,) and the exalted epic style becomes in Hikmet's hands something playful and daily, something musical but also social and even novelistic, almost Joycean. Like Joyce, too, Hikmet was inspired by the local, instigated by his native realm to try to create a universal pageant. From a Turkish prison cell, he imagined nothing less than his own human comedy, and hence the title: *Human Landscapes from My Country*.

"How fast the earth passes!" Hikmet writes in one of the key refrains of his poem. How quickly it passes, and how deeply we need to cherish it. Hikmet's epic poem is filled with social information usually reserved for novels, but it is animated by lyric feeling, by human wishes. It remembers what has come before us, it holds fast to what is rapidly passing away, and it is driven forward by a fundamental faith in the future, by something immutable that he is not afraid to define as love:

*Night falls in the mountains.
Distances disappear,
but love stays in the heart.*

Edward Hirsch

INTRODUCTION

NAZIM HIKMET, the first and foremost modern Turkish poet, is known in more than fifty languages around the world as one of the great international poets of the twentieth century. In his native Turkey he is both popularly recognized and critically acclaimed as one of the best poets ever to write in Turkish. What such a consensus means becomes clear in the light of his masterwork, *Human Landscapes from My Country*. Hikmet began this epic poem in *Bursa Prison* in 1941, sending sections of it to friends and relatives for safekeeping as he finished them, and it was largely completed by 1945; he continued revising it until 1950, however, when he was finally released in a general amnesty and subsequently driven into permanent exile. Parts of the epic were published first in translation, in Italy in 1960 and 1965 and in the former USSR in 1962; it did not appear in Turkey until after his death in 1963. In 1966-67, the five books of the poem appeared in separate volumes under the editorship of his stepson, Memet Fuat. Since then, the poem has gone through multiple printings in numerous editions and has been translated into French and German. This is the first English translation of the poem in its entirety.

Hikmet's long imprisonment was crucial to the creation of the epic and the development it represents in his work. When Hikmet was arrested in 1938 on charges of inciting the army to revolt, convicted on the evidence that military cadets were reading his poems, and sentenced to twenty-eight years in prison, he was thirty-six years old and already had established himself as the most important poet of his generation. In the preceding ten years he had published nine books, which had revolutionized Turkish poetry by introducing free verse and flouting the proprieties and conventions of Ottoman verse. During the same period he had been in and out of prison, serving almost five years on a variety of trumped-up political charges. It was the thirteen years he spent in prison between 1938 and 1950, however, that radically changed his poetry in manner and content: a more serious tone, a simpler and more direct style, and a growing interest in the lives of common people mark this change. As a pasha's grandson and an Istanbul intellectual, Hikmet had had no real contact with Anatolian peasants, who made up nearly ninety percent of Turkey's population. The lengthy prison stay gave him a true education in what it meant to be a "poet of the people," and the experience enabled him to write *Human Landscapes*, which is filled with characters based on real-life models from *Bursa Prison*. Hikmet wrote: "At least half the people depicted—sometimes in five lines, sometimes

throughout the first three books—in *Landscapes* are people whose lives I personally witnessed; the other half are heroes of my imagination.”

The evolution of *Human Landscapes from My Country* offers valuable insights into its aims. In September 1940 Hikmet started what he called “The Encyclopedia of Famous Men,” a long poem that represented in its scale and style an early attempt to deal with his new experience. The fact that he could no longer publish his poetry—his books were banned in Turkey after he went to prison—led him to abandon the rhetorical mode of the topical poems on current political figures and events that he was writing immediately before his imprisonment. He came to realize that his time in prison would be best spent producing a poetic history of the present, which might be of use to the future. Hikmet conceived of his “Encyclopedia” as a series of portraits, ranging from two-or-three-line epitaph-like notations to more fleshed-out life stories and arranged alphabetically by the names of the “famous” men and women. As Hikmet described them, his heroes were not “generals, sultans, distinguished scientists or artists, beauty queens, murderers or billionaires; they were workers, peasants, and craftsmen, people whose fame had not spread beyond their factories, workshops, villages, or neighborhoods.” Such a series of portraits done in the manner of biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias would constitute, he felt, an abbreviated social history. The individual portraits were not intended to stand alone but meant to function as parts of a whole, as separate “lines” of the whole “poem.” In Hikmet’s view, just as a poem combines lines of different values—plain as well as brilliant lines, both muted and resounding lines, lines of one syllable and thirty syllables—the variety of “lives” in his “Encyclopedia”—some modest and indistinguishable from their epitaphs, others more complex and sketched in greater detail; some presented through their thoughts only, others seen in their milieus—would, when combined, create a new entity, a document delineating a historical period and reality yet not exceeding the bounds of poetry.

Hikmet’s simile reveals the compositional principle that would become the method of *Human Landscapes*: he emphasizes less the units of separately “finished” lines or portraits and more the variety that constitutes the larger unit of the poem and lends it greater range and flexibility. This conception defines a social and aesthetic position that would yield a new style, even though the “Encyclopedia” itself remained an experiment.

In June 1941 Hikmet embarked on another long poem upon hearing of Hitler’s invasion of Russia, which convinced him of the need for an epic—a history of the twentieth century: “To start with Hitler’s

attack and work back to the Boer War, then to work forward again, and to keep at this history till the end of my life, was my goal. I had no doubt that fascism would be defeated and that I would get out of prison.” This poem, eventually entitled *Human Landscapes from My Country*, superseded the “Encyclopedia”; yet many of the original portraits survive in the opening section of *Landscapes*. The title of the new work indicates a less encyclopedic and more compositional approach, stressing the relationships among people as well as their interplay with their social and natural settings. And Hikmet’s statement of his intentions projects the scope of the poem: the personal life of the imprisoned poet and the history of modern Europe would mark its boundaries. For *Landscapes* ranges beyond Turkey, and the ongoing war in Europe provides Hikmet with a context for epic action—the possibility of heroism not confined to national examples. In fact, war became his central theme. *Human Landscapes* has no single hero; its hero is a composite “fighter,” and the “war” includes the First World War, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the Allied occupation of Turkey; the subsequent Turkish War of Independence and the establishment of the Republic; the Second World War, which Turkey mobilized for but never entered; and the civil “war” Hikmet’s political prisoners are engaged in.

Hikmet initially envisioned a 10,000-line poem. In 1941 he reports in a letter, “I’m writing fifty lines a day. It will be finished in six months and have 10,000 lines.” But the poem kept growing, and he kept revising it in content and conception; in 1944, for example, he writes, “I pass my days in uninterrupted work from 8:30 a.m. to midnight, and I am happy. *Landscapes* is proceeding full speed ahead. It’s getting longer and longer, but what can I do? Life is so various, people and their lives so curious, and I am so greedy, so eager to put it all in one book, that I can never call an end to it.” As the poem expanded, so did Hikmet’s conception of his form, until he became unwilling even to call it a poem. “*Landscapes*,” he explains, “is not a poetry book. It has elements of poetry and sometimes even technical stuff like rhymes, etc. But it also has elements of prose and drama and even movie scenarios. And what determines the character of the whole, the dominant factor, is not the element of poetry. But it’s not any of the others, either. I’m trying to say that I’ve stopped being a poet; I’ve become something else.” He was not afraid to say this, because he valued what he had gained more. In *Landscapes*, he felt, there was no dichotomy between poetry and prose, and he referred to the work both as an “epic” and as a “novel.”

Hikmet regarded his language as a historical synthesis of oral poetry—

which, designed to be sung, relied heavily on such devices as rhyme, meter, and repetition—and its antithesis, the printed prose novel designed to be read silently in private. Such a synthesis, which he argued was necessitated by developments in the non-print media, represented a new language that could both be memorized and read aloud on the radio to large numbers of people and be taken in by the eye by solitary individuals. While he aimed to synthesize poetry and prose, the techniques of poetry offered advantages over prose. For one thing, poetry was more economical: it could say so much more so much faster than prose. Thus Hikmet employs poetic techniques, but not for self-protection or to distance himself from his material. For someone of his literary education in Russian Futurism and European modernism, *Landscape*s represents something of an act of courage. Here poetic language is not allowed to mark the poet's distance from the lives he is portraying, and Hikmet's discovery of such a language opened up for him an immense area—a store of material for fiction. The lives of ordinary people, which in European and other “advanced” literatures had been relegated to prose, was essentially unclaimed in Turkish literature at Hikmet's time. His use of such material places *Landscape*s at the source of modern Turkish fiction as well; the contemporary novelist Yashar Kemal, for example, has repeatedly cited the poem as a major influence on his work. In fact, one of Hikmet's models for the poem was no doubt the epic novel *War and Peace*, which he translated into Turkish while working on *Landscape*s.

A compendium of all Hikmet knew about human life, *Human Landscape*s is also a compendium of various modes of representing it. Indeed, this blurring of the distinctions between genres contributes to the epic stature of *Landscape*s. Ezra Pound defined an epic as “a poem including history.” Hikmet's poem is, and was meant to be, a short history of Turkey since the Constitution of 1908. Yet epics are also histories that include poetry. Suzanne Langer's definition of “epic” conveys its peculiar status. The epic, she writes, “is the great matrix of all poetic genres. There are lyric verses, romantic quests, descriptions of ordinary life, self-contained incidents that read like a ballad.” Moreover, as C. S. Lewis points out, primary epics like the Homeric poems and *Beowulf* always contain descriptions of “poetical performances, at feasts and the like, proceeding in the world which they show us.” The “feast” with its epic recital occurs in Book Two of *Landscape*s, when the waiter serving the upper-class passengers in the dining car recites to his fellow workers Hikmet's “Epic of the Independence War.” As Hikmet admitted, his “Epic of the Independence War” was not an autonomous work created in isolation;

the poem commemorated a social environment and a history that transpired within it. *Landscape*s provides the “social context” or setting for the “epic” of the Independence War, which is distinguished by its stylized diction and form. Thus *Landscape*s encompasses not only social and political history and varieties of literary genres but epic poetry itself.

There is no doubt that Hikmet consciously placed *Human Landscape*s in the epic tradition. The episodic plot, the central motif of a journey (complete with a descent into the “underworld” in Book Two, Section III), and the stylistic devices of repeated epithets and digressions looping away from the main action all constitute conscious “epic” allusions. Hikmet even gives us a transformation of the figure of the “blind bard,” who traditionally signified the imagination and the necessity of preserving the past in memory. The political prisoner Halil, one face of Hikmet's composite epic hero, who is growing blind alludes to this figure of the oral tradition.

Halil has no gift of song—of memory or prophecy—but as a writer and scholar he has knowledge of historical necessity: he is the scholar as poet, the historian as seer of the past and the future. His alter ego is the poet Jelal, whom we never meet. Together they comprise the Marxist poet, the two faces of Nazim Hikmet. The epic hero, however, has still more faces and includes, for example, the farmer Kazim and the worker Fuat. The multifaceted epic hero corresponds to the multiplicity of styles, techniques, genres, and points of view, which renders *Landscape*s something of a cultural product. Indeed, there is a sense in which the poem is literally a cooperative venture, for the prisoners Hikmet knew provided not only the characters for his poem but the audience and criticism that helped shape it. As he wrote his epic, Hikmet would read it to his fellow inmates, and any phrasing, diction, or episode that did not ring true to them was immediately revised. Thus *Landscape*s is the joint fiction of novelist and poet, social historian, folklorist, and dramatist, author, characters, and audience, and it presents life itself as a joint human creation. This is the meaning of the inclusiveness of the epic genre, and this is ultimately the only political “message” of *Landscape*s: human beings have the power to make and change human life.

The plot of *Landscape*s is episodic yet carefully structured by dramatic mirrorings of characters, scenes, and actions. Drawing on his experience not only as a playwright but as a screenwriter, Hikmet composes his story as a montage and alludes—in his radical juxtapositions of different tenses, images, and perspectives—to such cinematic techniques as pans, zooms, and freeze frames, jump cuts and dissolves, flashbacks and even forward flashes. The action fans out from a single point,

Do this

Haydar Pasha Station in Istanbul. We start with one man on the steps of the station; we shift to the other people he sees; they board the Ankara train; and we witness the whole range of lower-class social life on the train, while taking in the passing spring countryside and learning about the people who inhabit it. Book Two mirrors this plan, one man in the station café serving to introduce us to a different cast of characters. We follow the express train, along the same route to Ankara on the same day, and get to meet the middle and upper classes. The device of parallel train journeys enables Hikmet to move freely among people from different social backgrounds and classes, ranging from the dispossessed and the unemployed to senators and industrialists, from soldiers and prisoners to students and merchants, from factory workers and peasants to doctors and professors' wives. Such a variety of lives and experiences the journey brings together provides for a corresponding mix of levels of diction, including different dialects and styles of speech as well as allusions to various sorts of folk material, proverbs, folk tales, and popular beliefs and practices. The form of a journey also allows Hikmet to depict the varied geography of Turkey and the sharp contrast between rural and urban life. Finally, the device gives him historical mobility, since the terrain crossed includes major battle sites of the Independence War, and the places passed en route trigger in the passengers memories of events in national history.

While Book Three is stationary and presents a prison and a hospital in a town on the steppe, Books Four and Five move in radical ways. For example, we change scenes by following first the course of nature in the seasonal migration of birds and, later, radio waves and the mail. These books establish the wider networks of communication characteristic of a shrunken globe, where the Atlantic war touches life in a Turkish town on the Mediterranean. Thus Hikmet can stage private lives, hopes, and griefs in the larger contexts of natural, national, and global history. And the background of the Second World War enables him to cut across his various parallel stories in order to relate them in and as a present, thereby animating them with historical reality and significance.

The scale of *Human Landscapes from My Country* shows that Hikmet indeed took on "life in the twentieth century." Yet his preface to the 1962 Russian translation comes to a rather modest conclusion: "I'm curious about just one thing. As you watch these pictures flash past, will you be bored or not?" For the ultimate purpose of *Landscapes* is to convince us that every human life is interesting; this is its supreme and wonderful fiction.

Muthu Konuk

BOOK ONE

*Hatijé Pirayé.
Where she was born,
how old she is,
I did not ask,
I did not think to think,
I do not know.
The kindest woman in the world
and the most beautiful.
My wife/
Here
facts don't count . . .
This work, begun in 1939 at the Istanbul House of Detention
and completed
is dedicated to her.*

Haydar Pasha Station,
spring 1941,

3 p.m.

On the steps, sun
fatigue
and confusion.

A man
stops on the steps,
thinking about something.

Thin.

Scared.

His nose is long and pointed,
and his cheeks are pockmarked.

The man on the steps,

Master Galip,

is famous for thinking strange thoughts:

"If I could eat sugar wafers every day," he thought
when he was 5.

"If I could go to school," he thought
at 10.

"If I could leave Father's knife shop
before the evening prayers," he thought
at 11.

"If I could buy a pair of yellow shoes
so the girls will look at me," he thought
at 15.

"Why did Father close his knife shop?
And the factory is nothing like his shop,"

he thought
at 16.

"Will my pay go up?" he thought
at 20.

"Father died at fifty—
will I die early, too?" he thought
when he was 21.

"What if I get laid off?" he thought
at 22.

"What if I get laid off?" he thought
at 23.

"What if I get laid off?" he thought
at 24.

And out of work from time to time,
he thought "What if I get laid off?"
till he was 50.

At 51 he thought: "I'm old—
I've lived one year longer than my father."

Now he's 52.

He's out of work.

Stopped on the steps now,
he's lost

in the strangest of thoughts:

"When will I die?

Will I have a bed to die in?"

he thinks.

His nose is long and pointed.

His cheeks are pockmarked.

Spring comes to Haydar Pasha Station
with the smell of fish in the sea
and bedbugs on the floor.

Baskets and saddlebags
go up and down,
stopping to rest
on the steps.

A child
about five
comes down the steps with a policeman.

There is no record of his birth,
but his name is Kemal.

A saddlebag climbs the steps,
a carpetbag.

Kemal coming down the steps
without shoes or a shirt
is all alone
in the universe.

Hunger is all he remembers,
plus the shadowy figure of a woman
in some dark place

The saddlebag going up the steps
is embroidered red, black, and blue.

Carpetbags
used to ride wagons, horses, mules;
now they ride trains.

A woman comes down the steps.

Cloaked,

fat.

Adviyé Hanum.

Originally from the Caucasus.

She got measles in 1895

and married in 1902.

She washed clothes.

She cooked.

She bore children.

And when she dies, she knows

her coffin will be covered with a shawl

from one of the sultan's mosques:

one of her son-in-laws is an imam.

On the steps, sunlight
a stalk of green onion
and a man:
Corporal Ahmet.

He fought in the Balkan War.

He fought in the Great War.

He fought in the Greek War.

"Hang in there, brother, the end's in sight,"

he's famous for saying.

A girl goes up the steps.
She works at the stocking factory
in Galata—Tophané Street.
Atifet is thirteen.
Master Galip
looks at Atifet:

"If I'd married,
I'd have a granddaughter her age,"
he thinks.
"She could work and look after me,"
he thinks.
Then he suddenly remembers Shevkiyé.
Emin's daughter.
With the bluest eyes.
Last year,
before she'd even had her changes,
they ruined her in Shahbaz's field.

Baskets and saddlebags
go up and down,
stopping to rest
on the steps.

Corporal Ahmet,
a soldier once again,
caught up with the carpetbag
and kissed his hand.
The carpetbag
(and blue shirt, overcoat, black shalvars,
and sneakers,
felt hat, beard,
and Lahore
sash)
patted the corporal on the shoulder and said:
"Don't sweat a couple loans.
I won't put the squeeze on you.
We'll just add a little interest."

In Haydar Pasha Bay
sea gulls rise and fall
over the carrion in the sea.
A gull's life
is nothing to envy.

The station clock reads
five past three.

Down by the silos
they're loading wheat
on an Italian freighter.

The carpetbag parted with the corporal
and entered the station.

On the steps, sun
fatigue
and confusion—
plus a gold-headed dead butterfly.
Heedless of the huge human feet,
ants drag the dead butterfly
across the longest, whitest stone.

Adviyé Hanum
walked up to the policeman.
They discussed something.
She patted little Kemal.
And all together they left
for the police station.
And though
he'll never again see
the shadowy woman
he dimly remembers,
the child Kemal
is no longer all alone
in the universe.
He'll wash a few dishes,
carry some water,
and live at Adviyé Hanum's knee.

A group of prisoners goes up the steps,
joking
and laughing:
three men,
one woman,
and four guardsmen.
The men with handcuffs,
the woman without,

the guardsmen with bayonets.

On the steps, an apricot rose
a cigarette package
a newspaper.

The prisoners stopped.

Guardsmen Hasan
shook hands with Corporal Ahmet.

Guardsmen Haydar
picked up the empty package
and stuck it in his pocket.

And the woman prisoner
kissed Atifet, who came running up to her,
on both cheeks.

Handcuffed Halil looked down
at the newspaper next to the apricot rose:

"A single-column soldier.

Unclear what uniform.

Unshaven.

Head in white bandages.

Blood on the bandages.

Then airplanes
like winged sharks—

'dive-bombing,' it says.

And then a harbor
with tiny white circles drawn on it.

Can't read the name—
the ink's dissolved by a kerosene stain."

Three ladies

in pointed hats
and platform shoes

ran up the stairs—
commuters.

Handcuffed Suleyman

saw the ladies.

He pictured a young woman.

Aiming at the apricot rose,

he spat.

Handcuffed Fuat

called out:

"Master Galip,
you're thinking strange things again."

"Just thinking, son.

You take care."

"Thanks.

But thinking doesn't change life."

Fuat

is a fitter in the dockyards.

He went to prison at nineteen

for pulling down the shades

and reading a book with two friends.

He's been inside two years.

Now they're sending him to the interior.

Galip looks

at Fuat's handcuffs

and has a scary thought

this time.

Things that have built up unknown

until this moment

rush

all together

in torrents

like water bursting from a capped spring

—muddy,

clear—

and flood his head:

"So many factories in Istanbul,

so many in Turkey,

so many in the world you can't count them!

The lathe-turner Drunk Kadir was found dead

last night outside the university gates

—one of the women students fainted.

So many belts and pulleys,

so many flywheels,

so many motors

turning and turning and turning, forever turning,
so many people, so many people thinking,
‘What if I get laid off? What if I get laid off?’
The typesetter Shahap went blind
 and goes begging in the print shops.
Textile looms, drill benches, lathe benches,
pile drivers, rollers,
planes,
 planes,
 planes.
[Galip was a planer.]
Who knows how many in the world,
 how many are out of work?
But maybe they’re soldiers.
When an unemployed man joins the army,
 doesn’t he count as unemployed?”

“You’re getting deep again, Master Galip.”

Galip touched Fuat’s handcuffs:
“May God”—
 his own voice scared him—
 “see all ends well,”

he said.

Fuat smiled
 under his fine black mustache:
“Our end is good for sure.”

Galip’s bleary eyes were moist,
 and his long nose quivered.
And without letting on to the others,
 he slipped twenty of his fifty-five kurush
 into Fuat’s pocket.

The station clock reads eight past three.
This train leaves at 3:45.

In the third-class waiting room
 they sit

or pace
or sleep face-down.
They’re not waiting for any train.

The fabric printer Omer
has crouched here since morning,
beard in his palms,
bare feet on the concrete.
And also since morning, Rejep has paced
 back and forth in front of him,
 back and forth.
His long thin arms jerk up and down
 as if juggling invisible knives.
Ali lies face-down on the table,
 his shirt torn in the back,
 his blond head on his wrists.

In the third-class waiting room
 they sit
 or pace
 or sleep face-down.
They aren’t waiting for any train.

Aysel:
age unclear.
Maybe thirteen, maybe twenty.
Dark.
Skinny.
Nejla:
not quite fifteen.
Red nose,
 round face.
And her breasts are surprisingly big
under her green slicker.
Vedat:
eighteen.
Thick neck, white tie with six arrows on it,
 and pimples.
Vedat says:
“The Bursa baths are like nowhere else.”

Especially the 'Open Air.'
A hotel in a garden.
Clean customers.
Three bills a visit.
One's for the owner.
Last year I took an Armenian girl there.
Armenians are sharp,
 not like us Turks.
She made a bundle.
Put together a dowry.
You know heathen customs.
She's engaged now."
Aysel asks:
"How much do we give you?"
"I'll take five bills for you each from the owner
 against your accounts,
 as commission.

It's the season—
if you girls stick,
fifteen times a day,
 maybe more.
 Know what that adds up to?

Let Bursa see some class goods.
The papers said Kadikoy girls
are the most beautiful in Istanbul."

For the first time
 since morning,
the printer Omer straightened up.
He called to Rejep:
"Give me a cigarette."
Rejep raced past,
 spun around,
 and tossed him a cigarette.

The printer Omer's father had been a mufti.
He had coconut-wood rosaries in the house,
 gold-thread prayer rugs,
and gilt volumes hand-lettered by the calligrapher Osman,
but not a single deed to any property,

 a single savings bond,
or a single Hejaz Railway share.
Mufti Effendi was a pale, plump man;
 Omer was a sickly child.
He couldn't learn Arabic;
he couldn't learn Persian.
But he took one look at the Gates of Heaven in the Book of Ahmet
 —they were just like the doors of Dolmabahtché Palace—
 and started to draw designs.
The mufti died before the Constitution.
During the Constitution the women ran off,
 taking the rosaries and prayer rugs.
Back then
 Omer must have been twenty.
He burned the calligrapher Osman's pages at Les Parisiennes.
He enlisted during the Balkan war,
was taken prisoner during the Great War,
came back, and began printing in Kalpakchilar.
The designs on Ahmet's Heavenly Gates
 unfolded on cambric.
Wood blocks
 wood spoons
 wood shop
and, in the evening, a clay jug of wine
and (a holdover from prison camp)
 a little pederasty—
 the mufti's son Omer Effendi lived happily.
Until
 ready-made patterns arrived from Italy.
The paper patterns
 closed the doors of the printing shops
 one by one
 for good.
Racing past again, Rejep
 turned
 and threw Omer the matches.
Ali lies face-down on the table,
 his shirt torn in the back.

Aysel went to piss.

Nejla told Vedat:

"Brother,
let's not take that skinny thing.
She has gonorrhoea.
She got it in Izmit last year.
She's dripping everywhere.
And don't believe her, it's a lie—
 she's not from Kadikoy."

Spring comes to Haydar Pasha Station
with the smell of fish in the sea
 and bedbugs on the floor.

In the third-class waiting room
two red-bearded Bulgarian immigrants
with blue buttons on their shirts
and homespun yellow pants worn at the knees
 squat
 on the concrete
 against the wall,
 instead of sitting on the wood benches.

One says, sad but not angry:

"If bad then,
now worse than bad.
Enough of that.
Money's brass.
Men bastards.
But that's not all—
 there's good, too."

Outside,
the 3:45 train pulls away from the platform.
Despite its sleeping car,
 it's the sorriest of trains,
 something like a six-kurush cigarette...

Galip saw the prisoners off
and went into the third-class waiting room.
He sat next to the printer Omer.

Ali lay face-down on the table.

Rejep suddenly stopped in front of the dead radiator,
turned the knob from cold to hot, from hot to cold,
then gave the pipes a kick,
and yelled at the top of his voice:
"All the Jews in the world should be butchered wholesale.
What's keeping you, Uncle Hitler? Come quick!"

Rejep was a dealer.

He'd been waiting all morning for Moishe
 to show with heroin.

Galip was no friend or foe of Hitler.

But he got mad at Rejep.

He looked at the Bulgarian immigrants.

One of the redbearards said

 with the same sadness without anger:

"... a man goes to the prophet Abraham and says,

'I saw crows
rise from manure
to perch on branches
and read calls to prayer.

I saw a man
sitting at a wellspring;
he won't let the water flow,
he drinks it all.

I saw deer:
they don't run away
but chase the hunter—
go on, shoot us...'

Prophet Abraham tells the man:

'Those crows you saw
are imams and hodjas.
They dwell in manure
and read the calls to prayer...

The man drinking up the stream are nations;
they drink their people's blood,
they drink and drink, and never drink their fill,
they won't let the stream flow
 where it will.

The deer you saw are our sins,

they run to the hunters.
The hunters are money.”

Ali lies face-down on the table,
his shirt torn in the back,
his blond head on his wrists.

Rejep yelled:
“Hey, you! Is this an all-night coffeehouse, a hotel?
Wake up!”

Ali didn't move.
“I'm talking to you!”
Ali didn't move.
Rejep grabbed the young man
and rolled him over on his back.
Ali's head
flopped.
Ali was long dead.

II

Near the Kiziltoprak station,
in the garden of a wood-frame villa,
stands a great big pistachio tree.

It leans a little to one side.
Under this pistachio,
a woman in a yellow dress
hangs out clothes.
The 3:45 train goes screaming past.

Concrete villas.
Lined up all the way to Pendik.
The trees are mere saplings,
the grapevines just greenening.
The 3:45 train goes screaming past.

Concrete villas.
The Secretary Pasha's summer house,

a forty-room marvel,
has been torn down.
Now it's concrete villas,
concrete villas
all the way to Pendik.

Afternoons like this,
the Goztepé station is deserted,
except for a black eunuch of the Harem
sitting by himself
always on the same bench.

He's very tall,
very thin.
One of the last.
The oldest.
Concrete villas.
The 3:45 train goes screaming past.

Schoolgirls in shiny black satin uniforms
walk among the pines, looking awfully serious.
Proud of their breasts.
Books in their hands.
The 3:45 train goes screaming past.
Concrete villas.
Concrete villas.

The sea looks milky.
It's lost its color to the sun.
Along the asphalt road
people walk to the beach.
Their broad straw hats
sway like huge yellow flowers.
Concrete villas.
The 3:45 train goes screaming past.

Islands appear in the distance,
detached from the sea floor.
Like ships,
they float on the surface.
All the way to Pendik.

Concrete villas.

The Kartal cement factory
covered with sad,
thick dust.

And on the shore, camouflaged gasoline tanks.
The 3:45 train goes screaming past.

Pendik.

The train stopped.

Fuat tapped Halil on the knee
with his handcuffs

and pointed out the plainclothesman on the platform:

beady little eyes,
pug nose,

jug ears.

Shoulders hunched.

Navy-blue suit,
tan shoes,

and crumpled black felt hat.

Hands probably sticky-soft.

Something's in his back pocket—
his jacket bulges
just above it.

The 3:45 train left Pendik.

The locomotive.

The engineer Aladdin
undid one more button of his blue overalls.

He stuck his head out
and looked back:

the baggage car,
five passenger cars
(counting the sleeper and the diner)
and six boxcars

came rocking along
one after another.

Whenever Aladdin looks back
—especially on inclines—
he feels as if the cars were roped together

and harnessed to his shoulders.

And on descents
he feels their awful weight
between his shoulder blades.

The cars came rocking along.

Eskishehir-Haydar Pasha; Haydar Pasha-Eskishehir:
since '28,

passengers have come and gone,
engines have changed,
but Aladdin is in his place,
Aladdin hasn't changed.

The cars came rocking along.

To get on the Simplon Express at Sirkeji Station
—not this mail train—

like a passenger with a linen-covered suitcase!

To sleep in the *wagon-lit*.

And, especially,

to sit by the little red lamps at night
and sip raki in the *wagon-restaurant* . . .

The cars came rocking along.

"Hey, boss!"

Aladdin turned to the fireman Ismail:

"What is it, Ismail?"

"Boss, how will this war end?"

"It'll end well."

"How's that?"

"We'll drink raki in the dining car."

"Us?"

"Us."

"Who'll shovel the coal?"

Who'll drive the engine?"

"We'll do that, too."

"Seriously, boss,

who'll win?"

"Us."

Ismail didn't really understand,
but he let it go.

He rubbed his thick black eyebrows
and said: "Boss,

I have another question.

These rails here,

do they go around the whole world?"

"They do."

"So if there's no war,

and not just no war

but if no questions are asked at borders,

and we let the engine loose on the rails,

it'll go from one end of the world to the other?"

"When you say 'sea,' it stops."

"You get on ships."

"Airplanes are better."

Ismail smiled.

One of his front teeth was chipped.

"I can't get on an airplane, boss—
my mother made me promise."

"Not to get on an airplane?"

"No,

not to hurt even an ant."

Aladdin slapped Ismail's long bare neck.

"Well, aren't we pious!

No problem, man,

we'll get on airplanes anyway—

not to kill people

but just for the fun

of breezing through the sky.

Now you go

stoke that fire."

The cars came rocking along.

Third-class car 510.

The prisoners and guardsmen occupy the first section.

The sergeant hasn't smiled once.

Though the Mausers have been laid on the racks,
the handcuffs remain locked.
The two sides are in different worlds.

The prisoner Halil has opened his book.

He has mastered

turning the pages

with cuffed hands.

This is his fifth trip

in thirteen years

with books and handcuffs.

Lines under his eyes

and white at his temples,

Halil may look a little older.

But his books, handcuffs, and heart haven't aged.

And now,

his heart more hopeful than ever,

Halil thinks of his handcuffs

as he reads his book:

"Handcuffs, we'll beat

your steel

into plowshares."

And he finds this idea so well phrased

that he's sorry

he doesn't know the art of writing poetry,

measured or otherwise.

The train entered and left the Gebzé station.

It crossed a high iron bridge.

On the right, the earth dropped off sharply

maybe a hundred,

maybe a hundred and fifty fathoms,

and there,

way down

below,

the "Old Fort" village and fortress,

the two horsemen on the long narrow road,

the olive trees, and even the empty sea

look like toys just taken out of their boxes,

so small

and colorful,
so distant
 deep
and clean in the spring light,
 because so quickly left behind.

The prisoner Fuat
saw and would not forget
 the deep road and its two horsemen
 sinking into the distance toward his big city.
And because Istanbul was lost to him for the first time,
he suddenly started talking about home.
"My grandfather," he said, "my grandfather
 was a strange man.
He was a lieutenant commander in the navy.
We've only got one photograph of him.
You can tell that under his long pointed fez
 his head's been shaved with a razor.
He was incredibly reactionary.

Imagine: when the Constitution came,
he renewed his marriage license
 out of allegiance to Sultan Abdul Hamid.
He retired three years later anyway
and opened a corner store in Kulaksiz.
He died in 1922
during the liberation of Istanbul,
in October.
They found his body in the kitchen,
all alone
beside the food cupboard.
Children were singing marches in the street."

The prisoner Suleyman kidded Fuat:
"Your social origins are pretty mixed—
 reactionary militarism
 and petty bourgeoisie."

Fuat ignored him and went on:
"I can still see my father.
A man with long yellow fingers.

He was a master wood-carver
 in the carpentry shop of the dry docks.
He was very fond of old calligraphy.
Mornings he would read the call to prayer,
 and you could hear him as far as the fairgrounds.
He sulked
 and wouldn't read it
 after Arabic was outlawed.

He died of TB at thirty-five."
Suleyman asked:
"And your mother?"
"Died giving birth to me.
I grew up in the carpentry shop—
 in my father's toolbox.
It was a green box.
He'd take the tools out at the shop
 and put me to sleep inside it."

Third-class car number 510.
The corridor.
A university student paces up and down.

Third-class car number 510.
Second section.
Canned sardines, lemons,
 bread, cheese,
 bottles:
men and women
 drinking.
The National Operetta Company
—eight performers
and the famous composer Mehmet Ali—
is on tour.

Third-class car number 510.
First section.
Handcuffed Fuat laughs, flashing his white teeth,
because handcuffed Suleyman can't stand
 the university student
 peering in the window,

probably at Melahat.
Uncuffed Melahat,
flaunting the freedom of her pale thin wrists
and happy she can use her hands,
eats an apple.

The student kept staring.
Suleyman spoke up.
Guardsmen Haydar agreed
with him and lowered the shade
on the glass door.
And so began
x | the friendship of the prisoners
and the peasant guardsmen.

Handcuffed Halil
(maybe he'd noticed everything,
maybe nothing)
looked up from the book on his knee
and asked Guardsman Haydar:
"How many households in your village?"
"Around fifty."
"How many have more than one pair of oxen?"
"Two."
"How many with just a single ox?"
"With a single ox, about fifteen."
"Without any?"
"Five or six, I guess."
"And the rest?"
"One pair of oxen."
"You?"
"I've got a pair."
Suleyman asked:
"Any families without land?"
"Sure, some."
Fuat broke in.
The talk went on.
And such a moment of friendship occurred
(beyond suspicion and orders)
that the peasant guardsmen exchanged glances

and, joking in their thick voices
as if doing some happy job together,
unlocked the handcuffs.

The corridor.
The student paced up and down.
Someone from the fifth section bolted out of his compartment.
It was a short, potbellied pair of pants.
All in a sweaty rush,
he threw open every single window.
And leaning out the last one,
he took three deep breaths.
Suddenly he spun on his heel.
He had a low narrow forehead
and broad full cheeks.
His head sat on his shoulders
like a huge pear.
His crossed blue eyes lit on the student:
"My good man," he gasped,
"I almost suffocated!"
They're a bunch of pigs in my compartment—
the filth
the sweat
the stink.
They won't open the window."

He approached the student:
"You're a student?"
I could tell.
From the gray wolf on your cap.
Except a lot of funny fellows
wear those caps.
So I've heard.
That's what they say.
I haven't seen it myself.
I've got no cloth in that loom.
Except I'd be lying if I said I hadn't tried it.
When the English came to Istanbul,
those Scotch boys with no pants . . .
And the poor Persians, they just have a bad name.

Except a man should sample every pleasure.
 Pleasure
 is what life's all about.
 Except, brother, you got to have money.
 Love, life, and all that—
 it all comes down to dough.
 Now try telling this to the pigs in there.
 Those jerks won't open the window.
 Look,
 here's some fatherly advice:
 your health is sacred.
 You have to take care of your body.
 A raw egg every morning is a must.
 I've got three little donkeys at home.
 Except each morning they drink three raw eggs.
 And we have this custom:
 when I come home from work,
 I find out from their mother
 if they've been bad
 or good.
 And depending on that,
 a bird brings a little something to the window:
 it could be an apple,
 an orange,
 or a candy bar.
 Of course, it's not a bird—
 I bring it.
 But my youngest
 caught on one night.
 The next day he told his mother:
 'The bird looks just like Daddy.
 His spitting image.'
 Except I'm convinced
 you gotta test your kids' I.Q.
 I test it all the time.
 There's a famous story:
 one of the sultans wanted to teach his son how to tell fortunes."

The student smiled:
 "I know that story," he said.

And then, just to say something, he asked:
 "Are you in the civil service?"
 "Well,
 you could say so.
 I'm an accountant at the Istanbul Nursing Home.
 The name is Nuri Ozturk.
 We're on the government pay scale.
 But I once sold tickets at Salajak.
 I was in business, too—
 a salesman, a merchant.
 I've done just about everything
 but run a coffeehouse.
 That's the one thing I didn't get to do.
 I even drove a cab.
Had my own car.
 The golden age of taxis.
 I'll never forget one summer day,
 late afternoon,
 I'd dropped a fare at Chiftehavuzlar
 and headed back.
 I saw a woman walking up ahead.
 In a black coat.
 Her legs caught my eye—
 well-turned.
 When I got up next to her, I stopped the car.
 I looked at her face:
 classy, somebody's wife for sure.
 And she had these big black eyes.
 The Devil got into me:
 I opened the door
 and said, 'Please.'
 She got in.
 I drove off.
 Where to?
 She doesn't say and I don't ask.
 I can see her eyes in the rear-view mirror:
 they're so black,
 so big,
 just so.
 We turned up at Jaddebostan.

Erenkoy, Upper Erenkoy, fields.
I stopped the car.
Under a nice plane tree.
Not a soul around.
I took her out of the car.
She doesn't say a word.
I lay her on the ground.
Still not a word.
Except I'm kissing her.
She's just like a statue.
Anyway, to make a long story short,
we finished our business and got up.
Into the car again.
We started back.
Back to where?
Like before, she doesn't say and I don't ask.
Like before, I can see her eyes in the mirror:
 her eyes are still, like I said, so black,
 so big,
 just so.
We came to Kiziltoprak.
The lights were on downtown.
I stopped in front of a fruit stand.
I opened the door.
The woman got out,
 walked away, turned, and disappeared.
Now, what do you think of that, my man?
Except how can I say—
 or, as the Albanians say,
 how can I make it said?
I mean, it's been thirteen or fourteen years—
I can't get that pasha's wife out of my mind.
Because she was a pasha's wife for sure.
Well, I didn't have this belly then,
and my mustache was like silk,
 yellow as an egg yolk.
I cut a wide swath through the Parisian quarter of Kadikoy.
I've lived, my man,
 I've lived my life.
Now try telling all this

to the pigs in there.
Those jerks won't open the window."

Those who wouldn't open the window
 were in the fifth section.
The owner of the carpetbag
sat at the head of the section,
 in the corner seat
 on the left,
like an enormous,
 cunning
 bird of prey.
Felt hat on his head, overcoat on his back,
his black shalvars spread out in easy folds,
and with his sneakers off,
his feet in white wool socks
 were as animated as his hands
 beside them on the wooden bench.
And he didn't listen to the conversation with his hairy ears
 but with his feet.
The subject was demons.
Across from him, Blond Seyfettin
 (the mayor of a Circassian village in Adapazari)
talked away,
 his Adam's apple bobbing up and down:
"Don't ever undress without asking God's blessing.
All things need God's blessing.
Or the demons steal your clothes
 and raise Cain all night."
The carriage driver Selim—from Eskishehir, fiftyish, bald—
 agreed with Seyfettin:
"It's the same with horses.
If you tie up a horse in the stable at night
 without asking God's blessing,
the demons get on it
and ride till dawn.
Plus, they weave the horse's hair into tiny little braids.
It's happened to me lots of times:
I go into the stable in the morning,

the animal's tied up in there all right,
 but it's frothing at the mouth
 soaking wet,
and its hair's braided like a bride's.
Most of the braids won't comb out—
 nothing to do but cut them.
Where do the demons go at night,
 riding these horses under the moon?
People have enough trouble as it is.
Because we forget to ask God's blessing,
He sets these demons on us.
Wonder what they're like?
 Are they like people?
They act like people:
 thieving,
 seeking their pleasure,
 making trouble . . . ”

The Tartar-faced man sitting by the door
 (from a Bursa village, a watchman at the Merino factory)
 answered Selim:

“I was visited by them.
They appeared to me.
Six weeks, day and night.
It happened because of a lute.
The sultan of strings is the nine-string *jura*.
Whenever I heard of a *jura* master somewhere
 —even at seven days' distance,
 in raging winter—
 I'd sit him on my donkey
 and take him to the village.

But I can't learn the *jura*, no way.
There's this famous *jura* player.
A Gypsy.
Known as Master Alish.
He told me:

 ‘A curse must descend on your wrist
 before you can master this instrument.’
‘Okay,’ I said,
‘but how will a curse descend on my wrist?’

‘On the Night of Revelation,’ Alish said, ‘on the 27th of Ramazan,
 you'll take the *jura* and go to the bathroom.
And you'll sit backwards in there
 and start playing.’
I followed Alish to the word.
Revelation Night was close anyway.
I went to the bathroom.
Sat backwards.
Touched the strings.
But no sound.
I adjusted the frets.
No use.
But no sound,
as if the thing called ‘sound’ had disappeared from the earth.
I threw away the cherry pick
 and plucked the strings with my fingers.
The strings don't break
 and they don't make a sound.
They stretch like rubber and snap back.
Alish, help,
 what is this?
 I'm losing my mind—
then they appeared.
Some smaller than a lentil seed,
 some tall as a minaret.
Their clothes look like ours,
but they have cone hats—
 red, green, long, and pointed.
All on horseback.
They draw their swords
 and attack me.
I must have thrown myself out of there.
Night and day for six weeks, they never left.
My grandfather broke and burned my instrument.
They say they chained me in the basement.
They called in hodjas to exorcise them.
No use.
Finally, they called Master Alish.
Gypsy Alish
put his own *jura* in my hands.

And I started to play.
The more I played, they say, the more I came round,
the more I could play.
Then I passed out.
When I came to, no swords or horsemen—
they're gone.
But from that day on,
no one in all of Bursa
can play the *jura* like me."

He fell quiet.
The driver Selim glared at him.
The owner of the carpetbag
stroked his wool socks
as if petting two white lambs.
Across from him came a weak voice
like the squeal of a beaten animal:
"The water in my belly
is probably their work, too."
The speaker
was a tiny man
(or else he'd shrunk);
his face was thin and yellow,
the skin drawn at the temples.
And his eyes glittered
in his bony face.
Death often begins in the face
with protruding temples.
And death
had begun in the face of the Sakarya peasant Shakir.
"This water in my belly
is probably their work, too."
Shakir has cirrhosis.
"I know what I know.
The doctor took ten buckets of water out of my belly,
and it swelled up again in three days.
No way I'll get well.
The demons got in my belly.
I know
I'll die.

I said: 'Doctor, don't discharge me—
I got wounded for my country on so many fronts,
what would it hurt if I died in a bed with springs?'
The doctor wouldn't listen.
I guess they wanted to save the bed with springs
for someone they still had hope for.
I have the wounds, I have the pain,
but I have no hope.
The city gave me money for the train,
and I'm going back.
What luck,
what fucking bad luck—
of all the people in the world, it had to find me."

The train stopped at Hereké Station.
The engineer Aladdin stepped down from the locomotive
and checked something near the rear wheels.
The engine looked alive,
as if it had nerves and a heart—
young, impatient, and sleek as a racehorse.
Hereké Station is a quaint little place.
Hereké itself
is an hour away
and out of sight.
At the station they sold cherries, dangling
from long sticks like red earrings.
(From here on, cherry and olive trees line the tracks.)
Across from the station stood the textile factory,
facing the sea.
You think you can almost see inside it from the train.
The prisoner Suleyman leaned out the window and bought cherries.
By the time the student finished drinking from the spigot,
the train had started moving.
Suleyman saw him:
"He'll miss the train, the dirty womanizer," he thought happily.
But the student jumped on.

The train headed for Yarimja,
now and then losing the sea
—for just a moment—

and coming full upon it once again.
In the fifth section of car 510
they discussed the war.
The owner of the carpetbag listened,
from time to time
pulling at the tip of his nose
—a nose curved like a knife handle—
above his black beard.

The carriage driver Selim from Eskishehir said:
“The Germans are doomed to defeat—
whatever happens, they’ll be brought down for good.
Thugs, those who wreak havoc,
always die like dogs or end up pimps
or night watchmen.”

Blond Seyfettin (the mayor of the Circassian village)
disagreed.

“I don’t know about the Germans,
but thugs don’t end up pimps.”
The driver Selim almost screamed:
“They end worse!

Huseyin Agha of Zindankapi
was a pretty big man.
He held all of Eskishehir at knifepoint.
Had gold to burn, too.
And what happened to him?
When a two-bit punk,
the drunk Sherif,

flattened his nose at a whorehouse,
he was finished.
He couldn’t show his face anywhere.
Then we heard they found his body in a ditch.
He’d been living off what fish he could catch.
He was trying to catch his supper
when he got nailed in a ditch.”

The owner of the carpetbag spoke,
his voice soft and puffy
like fluffed cotton.

“The Germans will win.
I heard from high up.
They said this heathen called Hitler

is really a Muslim:

he has a secret religion.

No wonder all those countries together still can’t beat him.”
Stunned, the driver Selim
wanted to say something.

Blond Seyfettin,
as if seizing a chance to get even
for a personal insult, glared at Selim,
triumphant:

“Thugs can’t be pimps!” he said.

The owner of the carpetbag continued:

“There’s this pasha,
one of the old pashas.

In the Great War, he alone could beat the heathen English.
Now he’s retired.

He’s in business and writes for the papers, too.
We should either join with the Germans, he says,
or let them pass through the Straits.

This is a big pasha,

and he writes for the papers, too.

In the Great War, he alone could beat the heathen English.

My grocer, Haji Nuri Bey, knows him.

Haji Nuri Bey told me

the Germans drove into the Balkans

and made short work of the English and Greeks.

But, thank God, we’re Muslims:

the man respects us.

If we join the Germans

and jump the English,

we can get Damascus

back in one day.”

Kazim from Kartal

or Kazim Agha from the village of Yayalar

or Kazim Effendi of Istanbul

(about 45, he looked like a wolf)

said to Shakir: “Have a smoke.”

Shakir from Sakarya

(the one they took ten buckets of water from)

sucked on the cigarette

as if rubbing salt and tobacco on an open wound.

How awful the desire

to die in a bed with springs!

Shakir from Sakarya knew it.

Kazim from Kartal

leaned his head back against the wood.

His yellow wolf-eyes narrowed.

He watched Shakir,

his head swaying from side to side,
rocking with the car:

"Mehmets," he thinks,

"Mehmets, poor Mehmets."

And one after another

the wheels clack away on the tracks, repeating

(faster and faster, louder and louder):

"Mehmets, poor Mehmets.

Mehmets, poor Mehmets."

And the years of the Great War and the Mehmets' faces,

wrenched out of the darkness

and torn to shreds on the black brambles, pass

before Kazim in one endless troop movement.

Why does the comfort of today come so easy?

Why is remembering past disaster so hard?

Kazim was a brakeman in Pozanti,

the year 1917...

Day and night troops on the move to the front.

Where does it start, where does it end?

Trains with wood-burning engines.

The smell of burnt pine the length of the tracks.

The army has the deed to the length of the tracks.

Mehmets, poor Mehmets,

Mehmets, poor Mehmets.

Doomsday on four fronts...

The cars are made for forty people each,

but each holds eighty, a hundred Mehmets.

The doors of the cars are all locked.

The trains roll on, packed with Mehmets.

Mehmets, poor Mehmets,

Mehmets, poor Mehmets.

The locked cars pitiless...

Back then, Pozanti was the last stop.

Brakeman Kazim undresses,

squats down facing the sun, and picks his lice.

Mehmets everywhere, everywhere troops on the move.

They leave hungry and thirsty, they come back crippled.

Death is God's will, but hunger...

If hunger doesn't drive men to attack like wolves,

it's sure to make them less than dogs.

Mehmets, poor Mehmets,

Mehmets, poor Mehmets.

The paymaster pitiless...

Pozanti is a stream burning up the sun.

Brakeman Kazim looks:

the Mehmets are skin and bones,

their mustaches droop.

The shoes on their feet are tattered and torn.

The Mehmets get down on their bellies, delirious.

The Mehmets pick horse dung for barley.

They wash the barley in the stream.

They'll dry it in the sun and eat it.

Mehmets everywhere, everywhere troops on the move.

Death is God's will, but hunger...

Mehmets, poor Mehmets,

Mehmets, poor Mehmets.

At most a handful of barley it gives,

the horse dung pitiless...

A siding branches off to the left of the switch.

A car is pulled off on the siding.

Six Germans sit in the car.

Faces red, asses fat.

Sitting at a table, they eat spaghetti.

Maybe they aren't so fat,

but Kazim sees them like that.

Mehmets, poor Mehmets,

Mehmets, poor Mehmets.

What is the magic of being a German?

The Germans' dog is tied to the car:

roan coat, clipped ears, fat rump.

The Germans are full and feed the dog their spaghetti.

Even the Germans' dog eats spaghetti.

Maybe it doesn't always eat spaghetti,
but that's how Kazim sees it.

Mehmets, poor Mehmeets,
Mehmets, poor Mehmeets.

A Mehmet walks along the siding.
He walks toward the dog.
Down on all fours, crawling,
he stops from time to time,
lowering his head as if scared he'll be stoned.

Mehmets, poor Mehmeets,
Mehmets, poor Mehmeets.

The Mehmet snatches the spaghetti from the dog and takes off.
He runs and doesn't look back.
If hunger doesn't drive men to attack like wolves,
it's sure to make them less than dogs.
The six Germans applaud the Mehmet.
The Germans have enjoyed the show.

Mehmets, poor Mehmeets,
Mehmets, poor Mehmeets.

A partridge flits from hilltop to hilltop,
but when he takes a hit,
he drops on the spot.

He's had it—
he'll never fly again, even if he has the strength . . .

The hub of the troop movement was the Selimiye Barracks,
the blasted barracks full of Mehmeets back from leave.
The wounds in their flesh have healed, their leaves are over,
but the Mehmeets have had it:

a wound has opened in their hearts.

It's almost the end of the war,
the year 1918.

Hey, the blasted
Selimiye Barracks . . .
In the barracks yard
the earth swarms
with lice.

They crackle and squish underfoot as you walk:
you tread on the Mehmeets' sucked blood.

This blood has glutted lice.
This blood is dead and black.
In the Selimiye Barracks,
the Mehmeets' flesh isn't covered with skin or hair:
it's crawling with lice.

In the yard they call roll
for shipment to the front.
The Mehmeets scratch, stare at their feet,
and do not answer.

The Mehmeets have given up hope,
and they are stubborn.
Each day a hundred Mehmeets turn up dead,
their flesh fed to hunger and lice.
Master sergeant, call your roll through the night,
yell all you like—
the Mehmeets won't go through that door alive.
But the government is stronger than the Mehmeets.
One morning
Mehmeets filled the yard again like grains of sand.
Maybe ten thousand,
maybe more.

A solid stream of Mehmeets
scratching and silent.
Man upon man.
Climbed up on a table, a fresh sergeant
(tall,
with a black mustache
and spotless headgear)
calls roll with no response.

One hour, two hours.
If the Mehmeets are stubborn, so is the sergeant.
Two hours, three hours.
No one answers.
The sergeant can't stand it:
he swears at them, starting with their mothers.
If he's hopeful,
even if he's alone

on a mountaintop, it's dangerous to swear at a Mehmet
It's worse to curse ten thousand hopeless Mehmeets in a barracks.
The Mehmeets' hands reach for the legs of the table,

and the sergeant falls from the sky on his face.
The Mehmetts bend down, and when they stand up,
nothing is left of the sergeant—
no flesh, no bones, no clean headgear.
A battalion of MP's is called in.
The MP Mehmetts arrive.
They have bayonets, no lice, and they're well-fed.
It's as if wolves got into the flock.
The roar is like Doomsday.
Mehmetts chasing Mehmetts.
A couple thousand sheep are torn from the flock.
Straight to Haydar Pasha Station, the cars locked.
The cars are made for forty people each,
but each holds eighty, a hundred Mehmetts.
The cars roll on, packed with Mehmetts.

Mehmetts, poor Mehmetts,
Mehmetts, poor Mehmetts.

I think I killed a Mehmet
one afternoon
on the stone steps
of the Selimiye Barracks.
The Mehmet had bread in his hand.
Who knows
 where he got it . . .
The Mehmet's mustache was blond,
 the bread black.
I untied my red sash
 (four fathoms long,
 pure light,
 silk woven into wool)
and said: "You cut me a slice,
 I'll cut you a fathom."
He shook his head.
"Two fathoms?"
He shook his head.
"Three fathoms?"
The Mehmet wanted all of my silk sash.
His mustache was blond.
I looked at the bread.
My sash lit up his eyes.

I kicked him in the groin.
The Mehmet rolled backward.
Like a knot popping out of a pine board,
 a bone shot out of his head.
The bread was in my hand,
but the blood shed on the stones
 —live, red—
 ran on and on
like my silk sash.

Mehmetts, poor Mehmetts,
Mehmetts, poor Mehmetts.
When hunger rears its head,
Mehmet to Mehmet pitiless . . .

Rocking with the car,
Kazim's head sways from side to side.
His yellow wolf-eyes widen and narrow.
Across him, Shakir from Sakarya
 looms closer,
 recedes,
 then comes close again.

And Kazim from Kartal,
now here, now back behind the years,
hears the voices in the car
through the manifest shapes of days past.
The voice belongs to the carpetbag owner:
"We can't fight the Germans anyway.
What should we fight them with?
The couple bum weapons the English dole out?
We'll wake one morning
 and see the man has lined up his planes overhead.
They're not birds you can shoot with a shotgun;
they aren't martens you can catch in a trap."

Kazim from Kartal
sees a Mehmet life-sized before him:
barefoot,
shotgun on his shoulder,
 Martini bullets in his cartridge,
 in his hand an axe . . .

The year is 1919.
Mehmet is a guerrilla in the Liberation Army.
The sky behind him,
he stands guard in the Izmit mountains.
Neither hopeful nor hopeless,
 he's in a state apart.
And in his hazel eyes, fight to the death.

Kazim woke with a start
 and stepped into the corridor.
The Tartar-faced man followed him:
"Got a light?"
"Here."

Through the open door
 came the voice of the carpetbag:
"The Germans are strong beyond description . . ."

The Tartar-face swore:
"That pig must be a paratrooper—
should we call the train police?"
Kazim laughed
 (half his teeth were missing,
 but he laughed so much like a child
 his mouth wasn't ugly).

"Worse," he said,
 "worse than a paratrooper.
Looks like some small-town merchant
or maybe a rich shopkeeper . . ."

"The war will end this year.
This year the Germans will beat the English."

Nuri Ozturk
 (the nursing-home accountant)
 nudged the student:

"Hear that?
The pigs are talking politics.
Except I'm for the English, of course,
but I wonder sometimes.

"What do you think?"
"Those who'll win the war
 aren't in it yet."

"I don't get it.
Oh, but I see now.
Sure!
You mean us.
But you're right.
Except we'll want the Caucuses."

The student wasn't listening.
He kept his eyes on the first section, where the prisoners sat.
Voices came from inside:
the prisoner Suleyman burst out laughing.
Kazim's eyes
 lit up, happy.
From the corridor you could hear
 Suleyman's every word:
"Right on, Halil!
Our economists must be poets, too.
You know what Engels said—
 something like 'Poets see the future.'
So it came to you as a couplet?
It even sounds good.
Seriously.
Maybe a bit poetic, but not bad:
 'This is the final battle death will fight;
 victory belongs to love and life . . .'"

The train stopped at the Yarimja station.
Yarimja is famous for its cherries.
The fruit orchards go on forever,
the branches bent with cherries sweet and sour.
The reds and greens
 —the colors of the sun, birth, and fertility—
sang a joyful song of revolution
 in the orchards of Yarimja.

The prisoner Halil
closed his book.

He breathed on his glasses, wiped them clean,
gazed out at the orchards,
and said:
"I don't know if you're like me,
Suleyman.
But coming down the Bosphorus on the ferry, say,
making the turn at Kandilli,
and suddenly seeing Istanbul there,
or one of those sparkling nights
of Kalamish Bay,
the stars and the rustle of water,
or the boundless daylight
in the fields outside Topkapi
or a woman's sweet face glimpsed on a streetcar
or even the yellow geranium I grew in a tin can
in the Sivas prison—
I mean, whenever I meet
with natural beauty,
I know once again
human life today
must and will be
changed..."

The train left Yarıncı.
Third-class car number 510.
Third section.
Basri Shener.
Big, dark-lined, glass-green eyes
and wrinkled olive skin.
Small mouth, long nose.
He was born in Florina, Macedonia, in 1897.
His grandfather was well-born,
his father was a forester.
And knew the Koran by heart.
Basri studied up to high school.
From school, only a march stayed with him:
"You rose, like the sun, wearing the crown of freedom."
Greeting the Sultan at the Florina Station,
the children sang this march in their thin voices,
and Sultan Reshat still shines

like a bright toy in Basri's memory.
He sees him in the decorated station:
a likeable old man,
frock coat and pants drooping on short bow-legs,
red fez,
cotton-white beard . . .
During the Balkan War, Basri's family emigrated.
They settled in Edremit.
His father died.
His mother cashed in the gold around her neck
and bought long-lashed camels for Basri.
In "The Tale of the Severed Head," it says
camels are angels,
they wait at heaven's gate.
And their wool cures all pain,
for this wool is sacred:
who sleeps on it
is cleansed of sin.
Basri carted olives on the camels till he was 19.
He met with bandits in the mountains
and gave them bread.
He gambled at the inns,
then sold the long-lashed camels
and shut himself up for three months
in the Kemeralti brothels of Izmir.
In 1916 Basri was drafted.
Chanakkalé, Onion Creek.
One midnight, Basri entered the trenches.
Bombardments.
More bullets than stars burned in the night.
He buried his face in the dirt
and shut his eyes tight.
When he opened them, it was dawn,
and he was the only man alive in the trench.
Basri wasn't used to bodies blown to pieces.
And cunning like fear,
undaunted like fear,
he ran from the front, driven by fear.
His Mauser hanging from his neck, Basri walked
a road as long

and safe as fear.
 Tekirdagh, Silivri,
 sleeping in forges under the bellows,
 then rented vehicles,
 and then one nightfall, at prayer time, Istanbul.
 Burnt-out buildings in Fatih.
 He ditched his Mauser and cartridge belt in a cellar.
 And the next day,
 a sunny Wednesday,
 he paid eleven silver coins
 in Yenijami and bought civilian clothes.
 Fear is stupid.
 Basri moved around constantly.
 If he stopped to sit somewhere in broad day,
 he thought they'd grab him by the neck and take him away.
 Night fell.
 Back to the ruins in Fatih.
 In the cellar of a burnt-out building
 he spied a candle burning,
 papers and stamps,
 and five men.
 Fear is stronger than suspicion.
 They agreed.
 And for six months, in the doorman's cubicle of a well-known office
 building,
 Basri sold medical reports and leave papers
 and, for 25 kurush,
 red war medals.
 Fear is smart,
 smart enough to make Basri forge
 his own discharge papers.
 Goodbye, Istanbul.
 And hello, Willows Village in Akhisar.
 There's sure to be a Hasan in the village,
 and Hasan will have a mother for sure.
 And when the disabled veteran Basri
 brings word from Hasan
 at the front,
 Hasan's widowed mother, black-browed but blind in one eye,
 will surely ask Basri to be her guest

(especially at tobacco-hoeing time).
 And no matter how tired widows are,
 they still want their bellies tired
 by nights with men.
 And being blind in one eye
 doesn't make the wanting less.
 Basri got used to his black-browed, one-eyed, widowed love
 —but not to the tobacco fields
 or fear—
 and lived in Willows till the Armistice.
 The day he got the good news,
 without thinking of the tears
 in a widowed woman's eyes
 —one good, one blind—
 he sold his fear at the bazaar
 along with her oxen and ox cart.
 O my black-browed, widowed love
 and the damn tobacco fields
 and Willows Village—goodbye . . .
 Izmir.
 Old memories of Izmir.
 The Greeks had entered Izmir,
 and the guerrillas were fighting in the hills,
 when Basri's money ran out in Kemeralti's brothels.
 Farewell, heathen Izmir, goodbye.
 Basri joined Ethem the Circassian's gang at Bloody Gulch.
 Night raids on villages.
 Men hanged from plane trees.
 Basri favored big five-in-one gold coins
 and filled his belt only with those.
 Then one dark rainy night
 goodbye, Ethem the Circassian, goodbye.
 Uludagh,
 Bursa.
 Even if Bursa is in enemy hands,
 a coffeehouse for hashish and gambling
 is not unprofitable.
 Some people smoke more hash
 and gamble more desperately
 the more they're beaten down.

Basri opened a coffeeshouse.
Married.
Had a son.
Divorced.
And the day Bursa was liberated,
Basri passed out free hash for twenty-four hours.
To celebrate.
And hugging his son,
 he cried for joy.
Now his son is 19.
He studies in Izmir
 at the Vocational School.
Basri has two houses in Bursa
and olive groves in Edremit.
The coffeeshouse is still in business
 but it's due to close.
For Basri is down to three hours of sleep again,
and once more a strange fear is his companion—
 fear of his son.

Basri Shener sniffled.
He looked out the window.
The pine poles speedily falling away
 suddenly bored him.
He was tired of things speeding by
 one after another.

Across from Basri in the car
 sat a little hunchback.
But this tiny man
 bore his hunch bravely.
His thin wrists ended
 in big, bony hands.
His pointed knees stuck out
 under his navy-blue pants.
For some reason
 he looked like an old maid:
sad
 lovable
 fragile.

Like the one in "The Loyal Child,"
 who didn't marry but took care
 of her sick old father.

And under his big heavy lids
 he had the eyes of a well-behaved child.
Those eyes
 could think no evil.
But his full-lipped mouth
 hid an awful curse.
A curse that wasn't voiced
 and couldn't be.

Hunchback Kerim came from Adapazari.
His father, a carpenter, died in the Great War.
The words "Great War" bring back to Kerim
a black-bearded dead face on a snow-white pillow,
 herding geese and digging potatoes on Fahri Bey's farm,
 schoolbooks,
 and, with her golden hair
 and lined forehead,
 his mother.

In 1919 Kerim went to Eskishehir,
 to his aunts and uncle, for school.
His uncle was a train engineer.
The enemy held Eskishehir.
Kerim was 14.
He didn't have a hunchback;
 straight as a sapling,
 he was a boy curious about the world.
On the days his uncle drove the train,
his aunts didn't feed Kerim
(they were two long-haired old women),
 so he made friends with the Indian soldiers.
These men who
 —amazingly—
 didn't speak Turkish,
who had black beards, shiny black eyes,
and dark hands with light palms,
threw Kerim boxfuls of cookies
over the barbed-wire fence.
They had a huge warehouse

Kerim would play inside.
It stored sacks of chickpeas, fava beans, and raisins
—amazingly,
for their mules to eat—
plus crates of ammunition and guns.

One day his engineer uncle told Kerim:
“Steal me some guns from the warehouse.
I’ll send them to the guerrillas fighting the enemy.”
And Kerim stole guns from the warehouse:

one
one more
five
ten.

He betrayed his Indian friends
because he loved the guerrillas more.

The men with shiny black beards soon left anyway.
Kerim saw them off at the train station.
The next day, when the guerrillas
threw up the Lefké bridge

and entered Eskishehir,
Kerim’s uncle took him by the hand
and delivered him to them.

And from that day
to this,

Kerim’s life has been a heroic song.
They took him from Eskishehir
to the pasha of the “Kojaeli Group.”
He was a stern, unsmiling pasha.
Kerim quickly learned how to ride a horse,
herd animals

(he already knew something about it),
scamper down rocks like a young goat,
and hide out in the woods.
And with all his accomplishments,
coming within a bullet’s range of death
and surprised by the words “close call,”
Kerim delivered messages

across enemy lines.
The guerrillas respected him like a famed “Captain”;
he loved them like playmates.

And the boy, as straight
brave
and promising as a sapling,
played this terrible game with joy
till 1921 . . .

The Kojaeli forest is hornbeam and oak,
tall
and dense.
You can’t see the sky.
The night was calm.
A light rain had fallen.
But the leaves on the ground were dry
and crackled under Kerim’s horse in the dark.
Ahead

on the left,
a fire burned in the foothills—
probably the heathen gang known as “The Sailors.”
Raindrops from the branches hit Kerim’s face.
The horse’s head plunged deeper into the dark.
Kerim is on his way back from Loose Rejep.
He’s given him papers
and taken papers in return.
Suddenly the horse froze
like a statue
—it must have seen the Sailors’ fire—
then suddenly reared.
Kerim was stunned.
He dropped the reins
and hugged the horse’s neck.
The animal ran like mad.
The trees lashed the child one after another.
The forest with its hornbeams and oaks
blew past on both sides like a dark wind.
Who knows how many hours they rode that way?
Then suddenly they emerged from the forest
—the moon must have risen, because it was light—
and when Kerim rode at the same speed
to Mill Center below Armasha,
the horse suddenly fell on its face,

and Kerim was thrown off, head over heels.
 He straightened up.
 The first thing he thought was to check his watch.
 The glass was smashed.
 He got back on the horse.
 The animal limped.
 They rode slowly.
 Kerim's left ear bled.
 They came to Kirezjé
 (between Sapanja and Arifiyé);
 Kerim stopped.
 He couldn't breathe.
 The following night he entered Geyvé.
 His back hurt so much
 he couldn't get off the horse—
 they had to help him down.
 They put him on a carriage.
 Adapazari.
 Then maybe ten days, maybe fifteen,
 on ox carts and horse carriages,
 his chest tighter and tighter.
 Yahshihan
 Konya
 Silé township
 (where they made artificial limbs
 for crippled veterans)
 and finally
 the bonesetter Master Hasan from Hatchehan Village.
 Kerim still dreams
 of this man's pockmarked face
 riding down the thin path on a donkey
 and leaning over him.
 The master rubbed Kerim's back till he passed out,
 then packed in tar this child's body snapped like a branch.
 Twenty days passed.
 And late one afternoon they took Kerim out of the tar
 a hunchback . . .

 Kerim might have had an Independence Medal;
 he doesn't.

He might not have had a hunchback;
 he does.
 And now in 1941,
 as spring comes through the car window,
 Kerim thinks:
 "Before this month is out
 I'll probably have a prison record."
 For years
 Kerim worked at the telegraph office.
 Six months ago
 he embezzled 180 liras.
 Even if it's given
 to a sick and dying friend
 one hopeless night,
 those who embezzle government money
 must do time in prison.

 The train approaches Derinjé.

 Basri Shener
 looks at Kerim
 and smiles, his mustache short and trim
 under his long nose.
 "Fate," he thinks,
 "cruel, hunchbacked Fate—
 who knows what mischief caused
 God to make him this way?"
 Hunchback Kerim looks at Basri Shener.
 "What a nice smile," he thinks,
 "what a nice man!
 If I came up before a judge like him,
 maybe I wouldn't get too bad a sentence."

 The door opened.
 Nuri Ozturk stepped in
 (the nursing-home accountant)
 and stopped.
 He called out to the corridor:
 "There's room here.
 And the window's not closed.

Please, come in.
Except they're all clean people here."
The student answered from the corridor:
"You go ahead.
I'll come later."
Nuri Ozturk
 looked at hunchback Kerim.
Hunchback Kerim understood:
 he got up from his seat,
 the window seat on the left.
For years, Kerim had dealt
with others in a strange exchange—
to want nothing from them
 and give them everything they wanted.
And since he embezzled the money,
 the curse
 on his lips
 grows
 more terrible
 by the day.
A curse that hasn't been
 and can't be voiced.

The corridor.
The prisoner Suleyman
 entered the corridor
 with the prisoner Melahat.
Melahat was olive-skinned.
Her long neck was as delicate
 as a bird's.
Her lips were red without lipstick.
But her feet were big,
and her hands looked like a man's.
The student stepped aside, smiling—
 probably at Melahat.
Melahat passed by.
Suleyman spoke to the young man
 dark and hard:
"You mistake the lady for someone?"
"No.

But I . . .
I wanted to ask you something.
One of your friends is Halil Bey
 the writer, isn't he?"
"Yeah, it's him—
 so what?
 You know Halil?"
"Just from his books
 and photographs.
If I could talk with him . . ."
Suleyman thought:
 "He's either a cop
 or a damn slick womanizer."
Then he made his diagnosis
 (with a man's intuition
 and the instincts of an underground fighter):
"Neither a cop
nor a womanizer.
Merely curious about the famous.
May even be a sympathizer."
"We'll talk," he said.
"Drop by later.
Except when you come in
—now don't forget, it's all-important—
after you say hello,
sit right down by the sergeant
and, starting with him,
 offer everyone cigarettes.
Peasant guardsmen only hassle peasants.
They're suspicious of city people,
but they think only peasants are sneaky."

Melahat returned.
Suleyman parted with the student
and exchanged looks with Kazim from Kartal.

The train stopped.
Derinjé.
A young officer in the second section got off.
A pregnant woman got on in the third.

Bells.
Whistles.
Departure.

Third-class car number 510.
The corridor.

A man
looks down at the ground from the first window:
 earth rushing up
 and disappearing nonstop.

Thoughts race through his mind
 at the same speed
 as the earth:

"How fast the earth passes!
The poplar at the village spring,
 would it make a telegraph pole?
The trolley poles in Istanbul were iron.
If a man went around the world,
 would he find a city to match Istanbul?"

She asked 25, but I gave 30—
 would she have dreamed of that?

She wore silk slips.
I could eat her.
Should have gone once more.

Hey, look at that rider—
 nice horse, too.
Could it do a day's trip in five hours?
A horse can't keep up with a train.

If a train raced a car,
 would the car fall behind?

The doctor can still drive his car;
 they let him,
 because he's a doctor.

If the doctor came to our village,
 could he change Tahsin Hodja's mind?

How fast the earth passes!
The poplar at the village spring,
 would it make a telegraph pole?

About now the doctor's mother, Grand Hanum,
 will be walking the villa gardens.

Will frost kill the pumpkins I planted?
The doctor said: 'I'm pleased with you.
 Stop by when you get back,
 and I'll give you more work.'

I wonder if he will?
Tomorrow's another day—
who knows what it'll bring?
That's a lot of sheep there.
Lots of goats, too.
Look at that dog—like a wolf!
He's attacking us!
Now there's two of 'em.
Get away, boy, git . . . "

He spun around, looking for a stone.
Then he caught himself and smiled.
His smooth temples crinkled when he smiled,
and his sparse white teeth gleamed
 as if a light flashed in his dark mouth.

This man has syphilis.
A sore no bigger than a quarter-kurush
 opened and closed—
 painless,
 bloodless, and insidious.

This man has syphilis.
But he doesn't know it.
Smiling, he watches a bird glide
 lazy and content across the deep-blue sky.

Working a doctor's garden
can't teach Chankiri Durmush
he got syphilis in Istanbul for thirty kurush . . .

The dogs drop way behind, still giving chase.
The train rounds a bend.
The rest of the cars appear
 one by one,
 all tied to one another
 far into the distance.

It comes as a surprise
to be tied to things so far back.

Third-class car 510.
 The corridor.
 Behind Chankiri Durmush off in the deep-blue sky,
 a man sits on the steps of the platform.
 Squatting,
 he leans back against the door
 as if against the village mosque.
 He's resting,
 lost in thought.
 His mustache droops in an entreating smile.
 White lines crease his dark thin neck.
 He may have to kill a man.
 He isn't sure.
 They didn't say in the letter.
 But his land "with such-and-such boundaries
 and of such-and-such dimensions"
 —as the public records will show—
 has been encroached upon by Ahmet's son Bekir from the same
 village.
 There's a chance he'll kill Bekir with an axe.
 But, for now, there's no chance
 he'll understand why
 he'll kill Bekir...

The conductor came by.
 Chankiri Durmush paid no attention,
 but the man on the steps scrambled to his feet, flustered.
 His smile grew more entreating.
 Shy and unsure of himself,
 he handed the uniformed conductor his ticket
 as if handing an official his birth certificate.
 The conductor—deliberate,
 dignified,
 confident—
 punched the ticket
 and, as he left, said very distinctly:
 "You can't sit there, brother.
 It's not allowed."
 Go see.
 There must be

empty seats
 inside."

In the corridor, the Tartar-faced man
 (the *jura* player
 and watchman at the Merino factory)
 told Kazim from Kartal
 a story

 about Gallipoli:
 "I was wounded the sixth night of May
 in eight places.
 Two of the wounds haven't healed yet
 and still act up from time to time.

We're facing the English
 at close range—
 our hand grenades land in their trenches,
 theirs in ours.

We charged.
 I got hit before I'd taken three steps.
 The English Tommy gun
 raked my groin.

Time passed.
 I raised my head:
 stars in the sky.
 Our men had retreated.
 The English trench fires nonstop.
 Bullets whiz
 overhead.

I started to crawl backward.
 I claw the dirt with my hands,
 facing the enemy.
 As I crawl back toward our trench,
 I keep praying, 'Oh, God,
 don't let me get shot in the back!'

At a time like that,
 not much else comes to mind.
 The dead keep rubbing against me—
 I mean, I keep bumping into them.
 Some lie on their backs,
 open mouths filled with blood,

and some on their faces;
some kneel,

frozen,

Mausers in hand.

'Oh, God,' I say to myself,

'if you're going to kill me,

you should have killed me like that—

gun in hand,

down on my knees,

facing the heathens . . .'

Anyway, morning came.

It got pretty light,

and I got to the trench.

They held out a Mauser.

I grabbed the end.

They pulled me in.

I figured out afterwards

I'd crossed 25 meters

in three hours.

I stayed in the trench for a while,
doubled over.

My wounds started to hurt.

They loaded me on a guy's back,

and we got to division headquarters.

Tents.

Stakes in the ground inside the tents,

straw covering the ground.

On the straw, all kinds of wounded.

Some crying,

some cursing God.

They cut my clothes off with scissors.

I was naked as the day I was born.

They threw a coat over me.

There's no cloth for bandages.

My wounds are open.

Luckily,

there's no blood—

dirt stanching the wounds.

Time passed.

I drifted off

and woke when they grabbed me under the arms.

They took me outside.

It was evening,

the sun about to go any minute.

I'm cool on the outside, warm inside.

Horse carts stand lined up.

The medics load the wounded on the carts

one on top of another,

like empty grain sacks.

Whoever ends up on the bottom, let him die.

Ten, fifteen wounded on a single cart.

Some screaming,

some maybe dying then and there.

Anyway, we started moving.

The Bee Point road is rocky.

The carts shake.

Dark comes down.

I'm lying on my back.

A human body moves under me,

a pair of legs is on my chest,

one intact.

We ride downhill.

The sky is all stars.

There's a soft breeze.

The carts roll on, one after another.

We got to Sandy Quay at dawn.

A tent.

Someone calls from the tent

(without coming out):

"Where you from?"

"Such-and-such a place."

"Father's name?"

"So-and-so."

"Your name?"

"So-and-so."

"Throw him down, driver."

The driver picks up and throws him down.

My turn.

The pain is unbearable.

I swear at the driver, from his mother on down.

'Swear, brother,' he says
 —he's used to it—
 'do your worst.'
 They laid us on the sand.
 The sea rustles in and out.
 It got totally light.
 Maybe a thousand wounded, maybe more,
 are laid out on the sand.
 We waited till late afternoon.
 A ship came:
 two smokestacks
 the color of the sea.
 They loaded us on the ship,
 screaming and swearing,
 again like empty wheat sacks.
 On the boat it's like Judgment Day.
 Sticky with blood
 steam
 grease
 sweat.
 They took me down to steerage.
 We started.
 Seven days and seven nights.
 My wounds got maggots.
 I open my cape:
 little white worms
 with black heads.
 I bend over to look,
 but the critters are smart:
 when they see me,
 they scurry back inside the wounds.
 Seven days and seven nights.
 If God doesn't want to kill you, He doesn't.
 Turks are tough,
 we can take a lot.
 On the eighth day we arrived at Sirkeji.
 The captain dropped anchor.
 But
 they didn't want us: 'No room!' they said.
 The captain raised anchor at evening prayers.

We crossed over to Haydar Pasha.
 The Medical School was a hospital then.
 They said, 'Okay.'
 A crewman carried me up on deck.
 He limped a little,
 but he was a Laz boy strong as steel.
 I thanked God and looked around—
 the lights of Istanbul sparkled.
 Ah, my Istanbul!
 Anyway, we got inside the hospital.
 The walls pure white.
 The electric lights like a vision.
 The stone floors
 squeaky clean.
 A bed with wheels is waiting.
 They laid me on it.
 Pure comfort.
 God save the government!
 At that hour I prayed for the government in gratitude . . . "

The Tartar-faced man fell quiet.
 His forehead was deeply furrowed.
 The sparse white beard
 on his pointed little chin needed shaving.
 Kazim's wolf-eyes smiled strangely.
 The student
 (who'd listened to the story from a distance)
 was stunned and sad at first,
 then angry with pity.
 Then he thought:
 "It's too bad
 how soon they forget."
 And he followed his thought:
 "Like a species of fish
 or tree
 or a type of metal,
 a kind of man lives in this country
 whose one memory worth telling
 —the only thing he can't forget—
 is war."

And he kept thinking:
 "Am I brave enough to face death
 in a trench?
 Most of those who did and died,
 were they brave?
 And today, those who face death and die,
 are they all brave?
 Most of the time, does this business
 have anything to do with bravery?
 Or do those in the trenches
 follow the herdsmen
 to the slaughterhouse?
 Not just their bodies
 but their minds captive . . .
 Or am I wrong?
 There could be such trenches
 (for me, for example)
 where I would gladly die.
 I mean this now,
 but if that day ever came,
 and I lived wounded a few hours
 before I died,
 wouldn't I regret it?"
 The university student could think no further.
 The conductor argued with the Tartar-faced man.
 The student couldn't figure out why.
 The Tartar-faced man seemed sorry already.
 And the uniformed conductor
 was dignified even in his rage.
 Nuri Ozturk
 (the nursing-home accountant)
 had hurried to the scene
 and shouted above the others:
 "Gentlemen, stop!
 The conductor here counts as a government employee.
 Except the government has been insulted.
 We'll put it all in writing right away."
 Kazim from Kartal said something to the conductor.
 "Okay, I'll let it go," said the conductor.
 The student grabbed Nuri Ozturk by the arm

 and led him back to the third section.
 The fight was quickly broken up,
 but no one could ever explain
 to the Tartar-faced man
 how he had insulted the government.
 Third-class car 510.
 The women's section.
 Six passengers.
 The oldest sat
 next to the window,
 nothing but thick bones
 under her black cloak.
 She was very tall
 and pale,
 with no eyebrows
 and hollow cheeks.
 Her wide mouth was wrinkled
 and shut tight,
 as if it had never opened.
 The late Sherif Agha's wife sat thinking,
 thinking about Ratip and Yakup.
 Her thoughts moved slow and dark,
 rustling wet rushes
 on a hot, starless night . . .
 Ratip was her real son,
 Yakup her stepson.
 One was in the ground,
 the other in prison.
Yakup killed Ratip.
 The late Sherif Agha's wife was thinking,
 Shahendé Hanum was thinking.
 She didn't grieve for her dead son.
 She'd never grieved for anything in her life,
 except once
 for the death of a long-spurred rooster.
 And she'd never loved anyone in the world.
 Her pale, bloodless flesh
 hadn't opened to love's easy warmth even a single night.
 Like an abandoned ship sinking

under the weight of its terrible loneliness,
she sank a little deeper each day.

She hated Ratip.
She hated Yakup.
She hated Ratip

because his narrow shoulders stooped
and his hands looked like a woman's,
because he couldn't whip the drovers ^{herd of animals}
and loved people,
and because he'd accepted without complaint
to share with Yakup Sherif Agha's estate.

She hated Yakup

because he looked like his father
with his Mauser, whip, boots, and mustache,
because the other one gave birth to him
and the mill went to him . . .

Ratip was cowardly.
Yakup was brave.
Yakup killed Ratip

in the coffeehouse
under the plane tree,
with a single bullet
between the eyes . . .

It was late afternoon when they brought Ratip's body.
They laid him out on the divan.
His left arm flopped down

and swung back and forth,
the sun glancing off his father's gold ring.
Thick-boned, erect,
her browless face all white,

she stood at her son's head
and asked: "Will they hang Yakup?"

With her own hands she had pushed Ratip
on Yakup's red-haired wife:

either Yakup would be disgraced and leave,
or he would kill Ratip,
and they'd hang him for killing Ratip . . .
Either way, Sherif Agha's legacy
—the land, the mill, the dairy—
would remain intact.

But they didn't hang Yakup.

He served seven years.

He gets out in November.

For seven years the late Sherif Agha's wife,

for seven years Shahendé Hanum worked,
as if embroidering an intricate design in colored silks,
to have Yakup killed in prison.

Yakup was shot three times and poisoned once.

Seven years of patience, cunning, hope, and determination
to plot a single death.

And in the end

she forgot why she had started the fight.

So much so that once, when they said,

"Yakup is dead,"

her embroidery needle slipped from her fingers,
and for the first time in her life

she fell to her knees and wept out loud.

For joy, they said.

But no, it was because Yakup's death
was her one tie to life.

Yakup will get out in November.

The battle goes on.

Thank God, only the dead can't be killed again.

The late Sherif Agha's wife sat thinking,

thinking of death as if tracing a new embroidery pattern.

Under her broad chin

the knot of her white scarf was tight and forbidding.

Shahendé Hanum must have been about sixty.

Her hands were hennaed.

A basket of cherries jiggled

on the rack

near the window.

The pregnant woman who'd gotten on at Derinjé
sat with her round eyes glued to the basket.

The basket belonged to Shahendé Hanum.

Bayan Eminé, sitting on the pregnant woman's left,
whispered boldly,

almost demanding:

"Give her a bunch of cherries, grandma,

the girl's at the craving stage . . ."
The pregnant woman blushed to her tiny ear lobes
under her old hat.
But Shahendé Hanum didn't budge.
Bayan Eminé thought, "The old lady must be deaf,"
and repeated her request—
louder, bolder,
and more demanding . . .
But Shahendé Hanum paid no attention.
The pregnant woman trembled with embarrassment.
Bayan Eminé,
now certain the old woman was deaf,
poked Shahendé Hanum and shouted:
"Hey, grandma . . ."
Shahendé Hanum,
as if peeling her cloak from her thick bones,
slowly stood up,
removed the basket from the rack with her hennaed hands,
and threw the cherries
out the open window.
Then she put the empty basket back
and sat down, retracting her thick bones into her black cloak.
The pregnant woman sobbed, her old hat shaking.
Bayan Eminé pushed back her silk scarf
(it made her feel too close to Shahendé)
and told her daughter: "Perihan,
run and find those guardsmen up front
with the prisoners.
They just bought cherries.
Ask them for some.
If they don't have any, tell them to look around.
Say your mother sent you."
Perihan was fourteen.
Cropped hair.
Short socks.
Long, thin, dark legs.
And patent-leather shoes.
Perihan leapt up
and was gone.
Bayan Eminé praised her daughter to the pregnant woman:

"My girl is smart.
She'll finish middle school next year.
She's so good at French
the colonel's wife couldn't believe it.
God willing, we'll make her a women's doctor.
Her father doesn't approve,
but I'm determined.
She can do housework, too—
cooking,
embroidery.
She's washed my dishes since she was eight.
And she minds what I tell her.
I gave her a good licking the other day—
her father barely got her out of my hands.
As I told the colonel's wife:
with girls, you should send them to school
but keep an eye on them . . ."

Bayan Eminé came from a village near Aydin.
Her father was the son of a famous gang leader.
When the Greeks reached Aydin,
the gangs banded together against the enemy
but never missed a chance to kill one another
over power, fame, or the spoils.
And so they shot Eminé's father
before her eyes
early one morning
in the front yard . . .
Bayan Eminé was orphaned at eight.
Now she's thirty—
a woman with thick legs, big sagging breasts, and a potbelly.
But topping her heavy, ruined body
she has the delicate, silk-fine face
that tenth-century Persian paintings trace
and the Sheik's flute turns to melody—
the face praised in Ottoman poetry . . .

Perihan returned.
Her long thin hands overflowed with cherries.
Bayan Eminé gave them to the pregnant woman.

As the pregnant woman ate the cherries
with the sacred hunger of a young animal,
Bayan Eminé talked with Perihan:
“Did you tell the guardsmen who your father is?”
“I didn’t, but they asked.”
“The guardsmen?”
“No, a man with glasses
reading a book—
must be a prisoner.”
“A prisoner?
What did he say when he heard who your father is?”
“Nothing. Oh, he asked where we were from.”
“Did you say Aydin?”
“I did.
He asked if we came from the villages or the city.”
“Did you say the villages?”
“I didn’t.”
“And why not? Are you ashamed of being a country girl?
You silly goose . . .”

Bayan Eminé laughed.
Then her beautiful face suddenly grew serious,
and as if to spite Perihan
she told the pregnant woman
for the whole section to hear:

“We’re from Aydin.
From the country.
Perihan’s father
is a master sergeant in the National Guard.
He’s also my cousin.
Sergeant Husnu.
We got married to keep the property in the family.
He had eyes for someone else,
but his mother forced him.
Well, in fifteen years with Sergeant Husnu,
I’ve been everywhere.
From among the Lazzes on the Black Sea
to the Kurds in the east.
They say Kurds have tails—
it’s a lie.

They don’t have tails.
But they’re real hotheads, and very poor.
Some are rich,
but not many—
just the chiefs.
For fifteen years I’ve gone around the world
and I’ve seen it all:
movies, the theater, even a ball
—I went just like this in my scarf—
in Diyarbakir.
And I played poker with the captains’ wives
one whole winter in Giresun—
and won, thank goodness.
I even hit the lottery once:
three of us
got a thousand liras each.
I can’t complain about my life.
Sergeant Husnu is nearing retirement.
Perihan will go off to boarding school,
the sergeant and I will go back to the village.
The sergeant says he can’t work the land now.
He wants to open a store.

He can.
I’ll work the land.”

Next to the door sat a tiny woman.
She wasn’t a dwarf
(you can tell a dwarf),
which is why her size
was so surprising.
Her big azure eyes looked sad,
and she had wrinkled, freckled little hands.
Suddenly she asked Bayan Eminé:
“So your husband is in the army?”
“Sure is—
a master sergeant in the National Guard.”
“My two sons are in the army, too—
privates,
artillerymen
in Gallipoli . . .

Well,
 I wanted to ask if we'll enter the war.
 My sons say we will.
 They're foolish young boys,
 they don't really understand . . .
 Anyway, they probably want to fight.
 Your husband must know what's going on.
 He must have told you something . . ."
 "From what Sergeant Husnu says,
 we'll enter the war . . ."
 The woman's tiny freckled hands shook:
 "So the boys weren't wrong—
 oh, my God . . ."
 Bayan Eminé interrupted her:
 "No,
 Sergeant Husnu says we'll go to war,
 but I say we won't.
 The colonel also says we'll go,
 but his wife says no.
 Why go to war?
 Anyone can see we're doing just fine without fighting . . ."
 Uncertain at first,
 then sure of herself, Perihan disagreed:
 "But, Mother,
 our country?
 If the enemy treads on our soil?
 My teacher said:
 'Every hand's-span of our country
 we'll water with our blood.
 Turks would sooner die than surrender.'
 And remember
 what the radio said on Independence Day?
 Was that wrong?"
 The tiny woman looked at Perihan sadly:
 "Girl," she said, "you're young—
 grow up,
 marry,
 bear sons,
 then I'll ask you
 what war is."

Perihan started to answer
 when a voice like sky-blue satin
 broke in:
 "Now women are soldiers, too.
 War's not just for men.
 And what about all the kids killed by airplanes?"
 The speaker was Shadiyé.
 She sat opposite Shahendé Hanum.
 There's a heartsick lover
 in an old Istanbul song,
 his fez a little long,
 his fez a little black.
 And his soul is melancholy, ah . . .
 Gold are his glasses, and gold his mustache.
 He's crossed the parched desert, restless with longing,
 and now impatiently he waits,
 on the shores of the Islands, for Shadiyé there to haste.
 And he says: "Where have the sweet-smelling lilacs gone?"
 And he says: "The autumn leaves turn and wither."
 And he says: "When the earth becomes my home,
 Shadiyé, rejoice for me, for your sake . . ."
 How strange that
 the Shadiyé in the pointed hat
 in third-class car 510,
 discussing planes
 that kill children,
 should sadly bring to mind
 the Shadiyé awaited on the shores of the Islands.
 She was all delicacy and grace.
 It was as if a frilly parasol cast shadows on her face.
 And the parasol is tilted slightly to the left,
 casually pointing
 in the direction of the heart.

The train approached Izmit.
 On the right, waterwheels:
 blindfolded horses going in circles
 as if they weren't alive,
 as if they had springs
 and were wound up.

And then the sea beyond.
Out on the sea
—between Goljuk and Millstream—
the warship *Yavuz*:
shapely,
maybe freshly painted,
sparkling,
but from a distance
surprisingly unimposing.
It looked like it had been picked up by its masts
and placed on the water.
Nothing about it, not even its smokestacks,
resembled its color lithographs
in coffeehouses.
On the left, a paper factory.
High up, a plane.
A child running barefoot down the street.
A sailor.
A woman in a black cloak.
A man with a green flag.
Semaphores,
a water tank,
switches,
boxcars waiting to take something somewhere,
and official signs announcing the Izmit station.
The train slowed down.
Kazim from Kartal went into the corridor with the Tartar-faced man.
The train stopped,
and they stepped off.

Just beyond the station,
straight ahead, was a bridge.
Men stood on it,
leaning over
to look at the stopped train.
They waited for the train to leave,
to pass below them
almost between their legs.

Kazim showed the Tartar-faced man

a tree near the bridge:
“See that tree at the foot of the bridge?
Like an animal
up on its hind legs?
That big one
to the left there.
Look.
With its branches arching over the bridge.
They hung Ali Kemal’s body from one of those branches.
They snuck him out of Istanbul
in broad daylight—
he was getting a shave
in a barbershop in Beyoghlu—
in 1922 . . .”

“Who was Ali Kemal?”
“A journalist.
In the pay of the English.
He was the Caliph’s man.
Fat,
wore glasses.
His pen dripped blood,
but dirty,
stinking blood.
Sometimes
enemy pens open
bigger, deeper wounds
than Mausers.”
“Did we have Izmit then?”
“We’d just taken it.
The English still held Istanbul.
Ali Kemal was snatched right under the blue eyes of the English.
The rumor ‘He’s coming!’ started here
six or seven hours before he arrived.
People thronged the quay.
Maybe three-fourths of Izmit,
even the women.
I was up near the Grand Mosque,
watching through binoculars.
The boat finally appeared,
tossing on the waves.

I ran down.
They'd taken Ali Kemal out of the boat
by the time I got to the quay.
Up there
on that hill
is the government building in Palace Square,
the army office:
they took him there.

Outside the building,
the square
and the streets
were mobbed,
teeming with people like ants.
But seething,
pitiless:
Many were laughing, too—
Izmit was like a fairgrounds.
And it was hot,
not a cloud in the sky.
Ali Kemal was inside barely 20 minutes
when they led him out.
He stepped forward.
Officers and police surrounded him.
His face like chalk.
Blond.
Suddenly the crowd began shouting:
'Damn you, Artin Kemal! . . .'
He stopped,
turned around,
and looked back
toward the door of the building,
as if to turn around and go back in.
But they slowly closed the door in his face.
He staggered forward about ten steps.
The crowd kept shouting.
A stone from behind
hit him in the head.
Another stone,
this time in the face.
His glasses broke—

I saw the blood run down into his mustache.
Someone yelled: 'Get him!'
It rained sticks,
stones,
and rotten vegetables.
The guards stepped back.
The crowd fell on him like a black cloud
and knocked him down.
There they did what they did.
Then the crowd opened up a bit.
I saw him lying face-down
in just his underwear—
short pants.
His bare flesh was like gelatin, plump and white.
He seemed to be still breathing.
They tied a rope around his left foot.
I'll never forget it:
his left foot didn't have a shoe or sock or anything,
but the garter was still on his right leg.
They started to drag the dead man by the leg—
downhill, his head hitting the rocks,
and everyone following.
Once, the rope broke.
They tied a new one.
It was quite a lesson:
don't get the people mad.
They'll put up with it once, maybe a couple of times . . .
Anyway,
Ali Kemal went all over Izmit like that.
Then,
like I said,
they hung his body from a branch over that bridge.
Later they took him down,
but his undershirt or pants,
some piece of his underwear,
dangled from another branch a couple months.
Later they auctioned off his watch and other things,
but much later . . .
I know someone
who bought his sock for five liras as a souvenir."

The Tartar-faced man asked:

"Was his watch gold?"

"Gold."

"They didn't do right—

whoever bought the watch

or the sock, they didn't do right.

It's supposed to bring good luck,

but don't believe it.

A hanged man's stuff is unlucky.

They didn't do right.

And the Izmit people did wrong, too.

If the man is guilty,

the government hands him his sentence
and hangs him.

To lynch the man

means to defy the government.

When I got wounded in Chanakkalé

and lay in Haydar Pasha Hospital . . ."

Kazim from Kartal laughed.

"Yes," he said,

"but you just insulted the government yourself."

"Me?"

"You."

"That's a lie.

I would never defy the government."

"You defied its employee."

"I argued with the conductor."

"The railway belongs to the government, and the conductor works for it."

This time the Tartar-faced man laughed:

"Then am I a government man, too,

since I'm a watchman at the Merino factory?"

"For sure

you are . . ."

"God forbid.

I'm not.

Not me or the conductor.

How can conductors and watchmen be government men?

I don't even count cops as the government.

Now the chief of police is different.

He's a government man . . ."

The conversation would have continued,

but the bell rang for departure.

Kazim and the Tartar-faced man ran for their car.

The train pulled out . . .

The train passed

through downtown Izmit.

It grew less serious

and more like a streetcar.

The people, shops, and houses

didn't even turn to look at it.

And for all its racket,

it couldn't wake the carriage horses
from their dreams.

But once it left Izmit behind

this May afternoon

and entered the isolate countryside,

the train regained its gravity

and became once more a "bridge of longings."

In third-class car 510,

forehead against the glass,

a man sat with a lost world flitting

through his heart.

Kiryos Trastellis was an "Old Greek."

He was from the port of Missolonghi

across from Patras

on the Corinth Canal.

He didn't care for Phidias, Homer, or Aristotle.

He liked the sea, sun, and people.

And, for Mikhail Trastellis, the true wonders of this world

were lobsters and eight-footed octopuses.

Steerage bunks on fishing boats,

a one-story house in Missolonghi, and his friends
were Greece in his heart.

What's happened to Greece?

Kiryos Dimitryos Mikhail Trastellis,

here in the month of May

in the year 1941,

where are you headed now,

packing the sea, your home, and Greece
 into a cardboard suitcase?
 How did you end up all alone in the world,
 how did things fall apart?
 Your friends were killed.
 The fishing boats lie at the bottom of the Corinth Canal,
 like corpses in glass coffins.
 This year Hitler's officers will dine on the lobsters.
 Your father's in Athens,
 your mother's on Chios,
 your sister's in Alexandria,
 and you're in third-class car 510.

The train crossed the Izmit plain.
 When it's spring in the country
 on afternoons like this,
 as the light softens like a love song,
 as the shadows of trees
 stretch out on the ground,
 cool and at ease,
 as the grass with its birds, horned animals, and insects
 looks younger,
 more sensual,
 and greener,
 as the ponds sway
 like lazy, contented goldfish,
 the happy heart grieves
 with the sorrow of being in the world today.

As Mikhail Trastellis looks out the window,
 this earth says nothing to him.
 But not because it doesn't know his language.
 On spring afternoons like this,
 the earth doesn't speak Turkish or Greek
 but its own tongue.
 But Mikhail's sorrow was so deep
 he couldn't hear the earth
 or think of other people and the world.
 Yet in this car on this afternoon, his grief
 was shared by others and the world today.

The train crossed the Izmit plain.
 Third-class car 510.
 First section.
 The prisoners chatted with the guardsmen.
 The prisoner Melahat asked Guardsman Haydar:
 "Do you like kids?"
 "Who doesn't?"
 When they asked the man, 'Is anything greater than God?,'
 he said, 'A child.'
 It's true.
 Can a child know fear of God?
 No.
 The one who doesn't fear the other is greater.
 Do you have any kids, sister?"
 "Yes.
 I left her with my mother.
 She just turned three.
 I'll bring her out next year."
 "To prison?"
 "Yes."
 "Why not?"
 It's all the same to kids.
 To kids and cats,
 prison or paradise—it's all the same . . .
 Where's her father?"
 "He's in prison, too."
 "What was his work?"
 "Tobacco.
 I work in tobacco, too."
 "In the warehouses?"
 "Yes."
 "I know about the warehouses.
 We had an Ibrahim in our village.
 Went to Samsun and worked in tobacco.
 Three years later he died of consumption.
 Is your husband where you're going?"
 "No.
 He's in another prison."
 "God pity you, sister.
 What can I say?"

Don't worry—it'll all work out."

The prisoner Halil talked with Guardsman Hasan.

Guardsman Hasan asked:

"Think the government will start rationing bread?"

"Probably."

Guardsman Hasan thought a minute,
sniffled, and said:

"And it should."

"Why?"

"Bread must be respected.

People have lost all respect for bread.

City people eat one slice and throw one to their dogs.

Bread is the staff of life.

But I wish the village taxes would come down a bit,
along with the price of black cattle.

I've got all the land I could want,
but I don't even have a cat to pet."

Guardsman Haydar told Melahat about Hoyukler:

"An hour from our village

is an Alevi village.

They're hard-working people, but they worship roosters.

This Hoyukler is in their village.

You dig,

and up come giant stone statues,
earthenware pots, gold stags.

Now the government's getting into it.

They take what's found to Ankara,
to the museum.

Ever been to a museum, sister?"

Melahat laughed:

"No."

"I have. In Istanbul once."

"The military museum?"

"No,

the other one.

It's worth seeing.

Lots of heathen sultans carved in stone.

I guess iron didn't exist back then;

if it did, they'd be cast iron like Ataturk's.

And most of them are naked.

There are some women, too.

I even saw their tombs.

They were alive once, too;

now they stand in stone in the museum."

The sergeant discussed the war with the prisoner Fuat.

The prisoner Suleyman stared out the window,

reciting one of Fikret's poems to himself:

"Dine, effendis, dine; this lavish table is all yours . . ."

The train crossed the Izmit plain.

In the fifth section of third-class car 510,

the owner of the carpetbag, Halim Agha,

dozed off.

He'd withdrawn into his black beard

and white wool socks

like an animal asleep in its warm, dank lair.

The train suddenly stopped.

Halim Agha peered out the window.

The lights in the car hadn't been turned on,

but it was night outside.

They'd come to a station,

a station bigger than any

Halim Agha had ever seen.

The station building was dark:

its lights weren't turned on, either.

A dense crowd spread as far as he could see.

Drums beat,

and men carried torches blazing in the night.

Everybody clamoring and shouting.

In the spotty red light of the torches

everything loomed larger—

the drums, the station, the dark.

Suddenly it started snowing:

big heavy flakes.

The drums beat louder.

Flags unfurled—

not red

but green.
A man had climbed up on the roof of the station,
a fur hat on his head,
a saber on his gold-thread belt.
It was the columnist pasha who beat the English in the Great War.
Halim Agha recognized him,
although he'd never seen him before tonight.
He took a closer look
and almost cried out loud.
The grocer Haji Nuri Bey stood next to the pasha,
motioning to Halim Agha from the roof:
"Come here, come on up!"
Halim Agha went up
and kissed the pasha's skirts.
Then they rode together in a car
bigger than the Chankiri governor's.
It was raining.
The car flew like a bird down the slick highway.
Halim Agha sat facing the pasha,
his carpetbag up next to the driver.
The pasha leaned toward Halim Agha's beard:
"Thank God, it's done," he said, "nice and quick.
We've joined the Germans and entered the war.
Act fast.
Don't say anything to anyone, not even Haji Nuri Bey.
Bread will be rationed.
Do you have flour?"
"I do, pasha."
"Did you stock up on sugar?"
"I did, pasha."
"Kerosene?"
"Got it.
Plus olives, bulgur, rice, chickpeas, beans—
everything's set."
"Very good.
You'll be richer than Haji Nuri Bey."
"All thanks to you, pasha."
"Tomorrow everyone will know—keep it quiet today.
We'll say the first Friday prayers together in Damascus."
"God willing, pasha."

"You'll be richer than Haji Nuri Bey,
richer than Haji Nuri Bey,
than Haji Nuri Bey."
He sat with the pasha under a trellis
on a snow-white, silk-fine Egyptian mat.
He asked the pasha:
"Is this heathen Hitler really a Muslim?"
"He is.
I saw him in the baths with my own eyes
—heathens don't cover their private parts there—
he's circumcised."
A cat shot between Halim Agha's legs,
long hair flaring
bright orange.
Halim Agha started after the cat.
The cat ran,
he chased;
the cat ran faster,
he chased harder.
They reached the downtown baths.
The cat went in.
The weighmaster's daughter Sherifé walked out
and sashayed down the street,
her bath things bundled under her arm.
Her full cheeks flushed scarlet,
her black hair wet under her scarf.
She was about fifteen.
Halim Agha wrapped Sherifé's hair around his fist.
He laid her on the sugar sacks
and opened her blouse.
He bit her left cheek.
Blood from his teeth marks trickled down her white throat.
The pasha tapped Halim on the shoulder.
Sitting at the governor's table,
the pasha ate falafel.
Halim Agha said:
"Pasha,
God has willed up to four wives.
Give leave

so religious law rules.”
The pasha smiled.
“That will come, too, Halim Agha,
but all in due time.
Have the imam marry you to the girl.”
“Her father won’t stand for it.”
“Then divorce your wife.”
“I’ll lose the land and the two stores.”
“Then you know what to do . . .”
Halim Agha’s wife was washing clothes in the kitchen.
She didn’t hear her husband come in.
She’d squatted down,
back to the door.
As her arms moved in the wooden tub,
her shoulder blades rose and fell under her black dress.
Halim Agha looked at his wife in the kitchen.
The kitchen ceiling had vanished—
stars showed above.
Halim Agha walked on tiptoes.
His sneakers didn’t make a sound anyway.
He got up real close to his wife.
With his right hand he grasped the axe he’d hidden in his coat.
The axe lip was chipped in three places.
He raised it and brought it down on the woman’s neck.
No blood came out.
The head didn’t drop.
It stayed tied to the neck by a piece of skin.
And hanging there,
it stared at Halim Agha:
“Agha, what have you done?” it said.
“You struck once—strike again!”
Halim Agha knew
—he remembered reading it in a fairy tale—
you should only strike once.
If you strike twice, it’ll come back to life.
So he didn’t strike again.
The head frowned,
knitted its blond eyebrows,
then snapped from its dark thin neck,
and fell to the ground.

As the head snapped and fell,
the neck skin ripped away,
peeling like a willow branch.
Some school kids took the head for a ball
and started playing in the army office yard.
As the agha passed with his axe,
the captain’s son kicked
the head
into the agha’s arms.
The agha looked at what had landed in his hands:
it wasn’t his wife’s head
but the severed head of the prophet Ali.
Halim Agha started to cry.
And he was terrified.
The pasha asked why.
“Pasha,” he said, “I killed my wife.”
“No problem—
she’s dead, you’re alive.
We’ll say she died in an air raid,” the pasha said.
“You go off to Istanbul and have yourself some fun.
Now you’re a bigger man than Haji Nuri Bey.
And come see me at the paper—
we’ll have coffee.”
Halim Agha rented a third-class rail car,
one without section divisions.
All for his very own . . .
He covered the car with kilims.
Then he took off his socks
and stretched out in his underpants at the very center.
He lit the brazier
and put on the coffee.
The coffee foamed in the pot.
He saw the weighmaster’s daughter Sherifé sitting across from him.
Her thick white calves and orange nipples
were so close to his beard
that when he leaned across to embrace her waist
the train suddenly stopped.
The owner of the carpetbag
flew into the air
without wings or tail

all the way up to the clouds.
Then suddenly hitting his head on a star,
he fell into the sea
and sank to the bottom like lead—
and shook himself awake.

The train had really stopped.
The people in the section had flocked to the window.
They were all excited.
There were shouts
and whistles.
Halim Agha held his throbbing head
and asked:

"What is it—what happened?
Make room for me, too."
They didn't make room at the window.
But the Tartar-faced man explained:
"You were sleeping—the train screeched to a halt.
We fell all over one another.
There's no station or anything.
It's the middle of nowhere.
The conductors got down,
they're shouting and running around."
Halim Agha didn't listen further.
He shot into the corridor in his wool socks, crying:
"I knew it, I knew it—
I saw it in my dream!"

Down on the ground
the engineer Aladdin stood next to the locomotive.
He looked like he'd suddenly stopped his horse
in the middle of a race and dismounted,
still holding the reins.
The engine was sweating.
It gasped and wheezed,
panting white clouds of steam.
The fireman Ismail called down:
"Boss, which car pulled the emergency brake?"
"I don't know—
we'll check."

Alongside the cars, the conductor shouted:
"Gentlemen, don't panic.
Ladies, please remain on the train."
Aladdin went up to the head conductor;
they talked;
he walked back.
On the road they'd just crossed,
some people appeared, carrying things.
The fireman Ismail asked:
"Is the man dead, boss?"
"Can't tell."
"Why did he jump?"
"I don't know."
"What do you say, boss—
was it for love?"
He asked for the girl,
but they wouldn't give her.
Or his wife cheated on him."
"I don't think so."
"If it wasn't love, it had to be money.
He couldn't see any way out."
"Maybe."
"Or one of his friends had shafted him something awful."
"Who knows . . ."
"Or the real truth, boss,
is that the poor man didn't have a ticket."
"It's possible."
"Look, I just thought of something else:
he had a son or brother or someone abroad;
the airplanes bombed,
and he got killed."
"God, Ismail, I don't know!"
"Yeah, but what do you think?"
"What I think is,
the door to the steps was open,
the man didn't notice,
he leaned back
and fell . . ."
"Boss, that won't do."
"Why not?"

"Because it can't be."

"Why can't it be?"

"I don't know why not,
but it can't."

The engineer Aladdin thought a minute
and then said with a strange, sad smile:

"You're right, Ismail,
that's true—
it can't be.

There are so many reasons in the world today
to go crazy enough to want to die,
and people are beaten down so easily,
that you can't accept it was just an accident—
that the door to the steps had been left open."
Ismail understood only part of this long sentence
and agreed with just that:
"I can't accept it, boss . . ."

They put the body in the baggage car.

It was a man about fifty.

The engineer Aladdin climbed back on the locomotive.

The head conductor signaled,
and as the train started,

in the fifth section of car 510
the owner of the carpetbag,

peevish that his dream hadn't come true,
puffed away on his cigarette

like a black-bearded water pipe.

The time

was 6:38 p.m.

BOOK TWO