

Migration, morality and the Mediterranean

Henk van Woerden

Ultramarine

ENTIRELY UNEXPECTEDLY, *Ultramarijn*, the novel that seemed to indicate a new direction in Henk van Woerden's writing, became his swan song. A month after its publication the author died of a heart attack. With Henk van Woerden's passing, the Netherlands lost a cosmopolitan writer of international stature.

With his first novel *Moenie kyk nie* (1993), van Woerden found his own unique voice: poetic, associative, refined, and strongly evocative. The writer made no secret of the fact that this novel, set in South Africa, about an emigrant family in the process of breaking up, treated his own history. The theme of exile and disintegration was made for him. In an interview, Van Woerden explained that he had three linguistic behavior maps in mind: the prosaic Dutch of his family, the poetic Afrikaans of his surroundings, and the formal English of his classmates at the international high school.

The theme of the eternal outsider recurred in his next two novels, again set in South Africa. In *Tikoes* (1996), the narrator, after years of absence, travels back to South Africa in the company of his new girlfriend Tikoes. She too appears to be weighed down by her past, and the question is to what extent either of these wandering souls can really feel at home anywhere. In *Een mond vol glas* (1998), Van Woerden reconstructs the life of Demetrios Tsafendas, the man who, in 1966, stabbed to death the South African prime minister Verwoerd, founder of the apartheid policy. Via Tsafendas, Van Woerden sketches the shadowy emigrant's existence of a 'colored' and in addition gives his personal impressions of the South Africa of then and now.

Van Woerden felt an affinity with the Turks and Moroccans living in the Netherlands. He recognized their 'feeling of nostalgia'. 'If there is anything that I wanted to treat in my four books, it's the feeling of loss,' he said at the time his big novel about loss was still to be published. In *Ultramarijn* he took inspiration from Mediterranean musicians, writers, painters and poets. The land where most of this book takes place is a cross between Turkey and Greece. Joakim, Aysel, and their daughter Özlem are migrants, uprooted drifters. In this *Özlem* compares herself to a seagull: 'That bird doesn't know anything about where he came from either.'

In addition to the political history of their country of origin, the fate of these characters is also determined by what is an impossible love between a brother and his half-sister, and by the fruit of that love. When their father suspects that daughter Aysel is pregnant, he takes her with him to Germany where she builds a new life. Joakim remains behind, and for the rest of his days he will search for Aysel's ghost. In the end he will find it in *Özlem*, without knowing that she is not only Aysel's daughter but his own as well.

Ultramarijn tells an exceptionally beautiful, bold and fatal story in which people experience their lives as 'cut in half.' His evocative description of the inner lives of migrants indicates that Van Woerden was finally able to level the dividing walls between the compartments in his mind.



photo Hugo Keizer

Henk van Woerden (1947 – 2005) was awarded several prizes for his literary work; his work is available in translation in fourteen countries. In addition to being a writer, Van Woerden was also a successful graphic artist.

With *Ultramarijn* Van Woerden has written a European novel as envisioned by Kundera: grand, melancholy yet vital, many-voiced and socially involved.

DE STANDAARD

There are few writers who describe the uprootedness, alienation, and inner disruption of those who leave their own country as convincingly.

DE VOLKSKRANT

An excellent book, accurate and pulling no punches ... A novel that demands to be reread and will offer food for thought and divulge secrets for years to come. Absolutely masterful.

FINANCIEEL DAGBLAD

Searching for the roots of morals and passions. This writer touches upon the unknowable.

TROUW



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An interview with Henk van Woerden

Writer Henk van Woerden on migration, morals and the Mediterranean

'The lost loyalty of a migrant'

by Elsbeth Etty

(NRC Handelsblad, 11 November 2005)

translated by Susan Ridder

Ultramarijn (Ultramarine) is Henk van Woerden's first novel set not in South Africa but in a Mediterranean country resembling Turkey, with a bit of Greece mixed in. 'There is no clear cultural divide between Turkey and the rest of Europe.'

'South Africa. Excess. White inbreeding. Pent-up lust. Yuk!' Painter, photographer and writer Henk van Woerden (b. 1947) spits out the words in disgust. We have been talking about a white South African academic who raped his young son, a sideline to our conversation about his intoxicating, yet mysterious new novel *Ultramarijn*.

It is his first novel not about South Africa, the country where he moved to from the Netherlands aged nine but which he left, embittered because of Apartheid, twelve years later. How different is his description of sexuality in his beloved Mediterranean – there is no embitterment or disgust here. Rape, bisexuality, incest – all are there without seeming to permanently damage the characters. Apparently, such lust can be vented here.

What is mysterious about the novel is that the story's setting isn't clear. Everything seems to point to Turkey, a land with a city which is reminiscent of Istanbul, with a history of rebellion and coups and a mixed population, the result of migration. In other words, a land which cosmopolitan Henk van Woerden loves. So why not name it?

'I wanted to keep the place abstract,' says Van Woerden during a short visit to the Netherlands for the launch of his book at the Amsterdam gallery Espace, which is also exhibiting his drawings and photographs. Then he's to fly back to Michigan, where he teaches as writer-in-residence at Ann Arbor University until Christmas. He reluctantly admits that the capital he describes is indeed situated on the Bosphorus.

'It had to be about the Mediterranean. I wanted to write about a failed musician, Joakim, whose parents were born in Thessaloniki. The musician's family are followers of Sabbatai Zevi, the false messiah who was forced to

convert to Islam in 1666, followed by all his disciples. The group was based in historic Thessaloniki, a Turkish city which, for a long time, was dominated by Sephardic Jews. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, whole communities exchanged places. The city became Greek and the Muslims, including the original Sephardic Jews who had converted to Islam, had to leave. This proved their salvation because in 1944 Jewish Thessaloniki was virtually wiped out by the Nazis. It is not for nothing that Thessaloniki is the only city in that area I mention by name. It experienced the same identity crisis or identity shift that my characters go through, and is therefore characteristic of the Mediterranean.’

Nor did he avoid naming the country for fear of angry reactions from Muslims, or fearing the kind of retaliation which his Turkish colleague Orhan Pamuk – who has to stand trial for his alleged remarks about the Turkish genocide of Armenians – is threatened with. ‘I love Turkey and don’t dislike Islam. Islam is not a problem, all problems related to immigrants have to do with culture. Turkey’s problem is the way it deals with its minorities, with the diversity of its population. Pamuk is right in saying that it’s all about nationalism.’

Still, it is odd that the novel is set in a country strongly resembling Turkey, while Van Woerden is more at home in Greece. He moved there in 1969 after nine months in the Netherlands, where he was ‘driven mad’ by Protestant stiffness and – despite its provos and hippies – the dominant 1950s’ atmosphere. He went on an art trip to Italy and ended up on Crete, where he stayed for more than two years.

I realised only later why he couldn’t set the novel in Greece. Joakim is clearly modelled on Greek bouzouki player Jordánis Tsomídis, about whom Van Woerden wrote an admiring portrait in *NRC Handelsblad* in 1998. Joakim is bisexual, and as a boy he had an incestuous relationship with his half sister Aysel who, unknown to him, gave birth to a daughter, Özlem. When he is old, he has a relationship with this girl, now a prostitute, whose identity he is unaware of. She returned to her parents’ homeland via Germany and the Netherlands. It is impossible, of course, to link such a history to an existing, internationally famous person.

Reverse Route

Probably in order to avoid any resemblance between Jordánis and Joakim, Van Woerden made his protagonist take the reverse road that Tsomídis took. Joakim’s family moved from a city turned Greek to Turkey, while Jordánis was born in Piraeus in 1933, and his parents were from Samsun, on the coast of the Black Sea. They, along with more than a million destitute compatriots, had fled Turkey in 1922, after the loss of Greek Asia Minor. In 1930s memories of the East were kept alive in Piraeus, most refugees in that overcrowded city, particularly those from Constantinople and Smyrna, remembering their homeland with nostalgia. This nostalgia and the migrant’s useless loyalty, his faithfulness and all-

consuming homesickness play a central role in all of Van Woerden's paintings, photographs and stories.

Van Woerden also refuses to name any specific Mediterranean country for political, anti-nationalist reasons. 'There is a sharp cultural-geographic dividing line between Europe and Turkey. Few people know that many Greek myths, for instance about the Cyclops, are also Turkish.' It makes no sense, he believes, that Turkey cannot become a member of the EU because it allegedly doesn't belong to Western culture. 'What is Western? Judeo-Christian? As if the Greeks are Judeo-Christian! They skipped the Renaissance and the Enlightenment too. But the Greeks have the advantage that they look white and aren't Muslim. If there really is a cultural divide between Turkey and Greece, show it to me.'

Jordánis, the bouzouki player Van Woerden admires, supported the ideal of no borders, of not having a home country, although he felt bound to his language, background and land of origin by fate. Van Woerden once wrote that Jordánis followed 'the pulse of the landscape'. 'His music testifies to something called *glénti ápo píkra*, literally: feast of the bitter, of fate.'

Something similar happens in *Ultramarijn* when Joakim's daughter and lover Özlem reacts to the music of his lute. In the novel fate is represented by the incestuous brother-sister and later the father-daughter relationship, making it impossible for anyone to escape their roots. This moving double incest story is based on the Greek myth – also a Turkish folk story – about Myrrha or Smyrna, mother of Adonis. Adonis was born of the union between King Teias from Asia Minor and his daughter Myrrha. Teias had bragged that his daughter was more beautiful than Aphrodite. The goddess took revenge by making Myrrha passionately desire her father. Without his knowing, she spent twelve nights in a row with him under the cover of darkness. When the father discovered this, he wanted to kill her. She asked the gods for help, and they turned her into a myrrh tree.

'The difference between this story and mine,' says Van Woerden, 'is that in *Ultramarijn* the father ostensibly doesn't discover the incest, and that as soon as Özlem knows who her lover is, she refuses to make love to him. Apart from the taboo, there seems to be a natural dislike of incest that I cannot ignore.'

His description of the relationships between Joakim and his lover Avram, as well as his half-sister and daughter contains a great deal of criticism of what Van Woerden sees as a mentality change in the West. 'Joakim is a character from classical times. There are no differences between the sexes in his world, no men or women, just love objects. This divide between the sexes is traditionally not made in the Mediterranean. Almost anything goes sexually, so long as it doesn't come out in the open.'

Beatnik Generation

‘The West imposes its concept of sex differences on people from other cultures these days. You ought to free women our way and if you’re a homosexual, you’re supposed to come out – without taking into account what you destroy in the process. Homosexuals of the 1950s’ Beatnik generation went to the Mediterranean because of the freedom of male relationships. It is part of the Mediterranean culture – a culture which doesn’t officially exist, which is officially denied and sometimes punished, but one to which a blind eye had and has been turned in large parts of the Mediterranean. The greater the emphasis on the Western perspective, from which everything needs to be out in the open, the more repression there will be. Repression of homosexuals in that area is a result of Western neocolonialism.’

Criticism of Western sexual mores is voiced by Özlem and her black colleague, transvestite Babette. And yet, Özlem feels happy in ‘tainted’ Amsterdam where the Dutch dare to do everything. Everything the Prophet forbade, is available here. The milkman smokes joints, in summer the Dutch sit with bare breasts in the park and no-one bats an eyelid. The Dutch pay twenty-five guilders (ten euros) to see her arsehole. They may live in boxes, but they’re having fun.’

Does this Turkish-German girl mean this, or should we see her observation as Muslim criticism of godless Dutch decadence? According to Van Woerden, she is entirely serious. ‘Özlem is from Germany, from a very cramped environment. So Amsterdam is liberating to her. How many other Germans don’t share her view? She knows the city is tainted, but tainted is fun too.’

This immigrant’s view of the Netherlands is much sunnier than Van Woerden’s when he arrived here in 1968 and fled in horror. ‘With hindsight I can see that it was quite a good time after all, but I couldn’t connect with this country. It reminded me too much of my parents’ circles: gentleman farmers from Groningen and sweet manufacturers from Delft. When I lived in South Africa, I disliked Dutch immigrants and when I arrived in the Netherlands, I found a country full of that kind of people. In 1968 you saw very little of the immigrants that we seem to have so many problems with now. I thought the Netherlands was horrible. And then the climate! I was shaped by South Africa, by the light, the space, the mountains. I felt stifled here, if only because you couldn’t see beyond the end of the street.’

Van Woerden feels that the Netherlands has improved hugely since then. ‘Because of immigration things happened here that I feel very comfortable with, even with the negative aspects. I once warned of a new type of apartheid – perhaps I was exaggerating a little – but now that Amsterdam is almost fifty percent non-white, I feel more at home here than thirty years ago. Many Dutch people claim they no longer feel at home here, but the opposite’s true for me. I rather revel in that. This mass immigration is much more influential, much

greater, more important, interesting and meaningful than people think. The entire culture has changed as a result. We have imported the melancholy and passion of the South which characterise *Ultramarijn*, and which is very valuable. I'm talking not just about the culinary aspects of immigration but the different lifestyles and the way in which the Amsterdam dialect has changed. It's fascinating to listen to Moroccan Amsterdam dialect.

'Amsterdam culture and the culture of part of the rest of the Netherlands is undergoing a wonderful transformation. That's what I feel comfortable with. Nostalgia for the South is of all times. In the past we had to travel to get there, now it has come to us. The Netherlands has changed and become so much better than the passionless mess of the fifties. I find it appalling, therefore, that the immigrants' contribution is neglected and disparaged.'

Compulsory Turkish

The biggest mistake the Dutch make with regard to immigrants, claims 'experience expert' Van Woerden, is that we don't understand them. 'An immigrant has been uprooted and needs to translate his entire personality. That's impossible, just as it's impossible to translate a landscape, as I have Özlem say in my book. 'The call for total, unsparing assimilation, the demand for immigrants to detach themselves from their background takes no account of how much is being asked of the immigrant. Those who demand such things are unable to put themselves into another's shoes. They don't know what it means to lose everything.'

As a writer who has written four novels about displacement and its traumatic psychological results he is livid about the absolute incapacity of the Dutch to put themselves in another's place. 'This must change. Mediterranean history should become a compulsory subject at school. I once announced provocatively that Turkish should be a compulsory subject for the native Dutch. I still think there's something in that. You have to be able to see things from their culture's perspective. We in the Netherlands are no longer what we thought we were. I've noticed that white Dutchmen have a shocking lack of empathy; they refuse to recognise the situation that immigrants find themselves in.

'It's the same in the United States. When I ask my students there what they know about Afro-American history, they say zero. The majority of schools don't teach the history of slavery. The most obvious mistake is that we don't look at the background of people who stay here permanently, just as white Americans don't study the history of slavery. It's deplorable. Immigrants are required to study Dutch culture but what is that Dutch culture? We're creating it together. That just doesn't sink in with people who talk about Dutch identity and reestablishing a Dutch literary and historical canon.'

From a review of *Ultramarijn*:

'(...) As in his novels about South Africa Van Woerden has chosen a 'wanderer' as the main character in *Ultramarijn*. Turkish Joakim is a silent, restless man with unconventional thoughts and ideas. He is a roamer, a dreamy drifter who seems only half-there. He doesn't understand people very well and is astounded by their perpetual muddling. As a musician, he tries with his unique lute music to provoke his audience. He is particularly proud of what he calls '*hidjaz makám*', a kind of Gypsy music in a slightly different key and timbre. Van Woerden enchants us with melancholy sounds in a minor key that his hero draws from his lute, with which he manages to bridge 'the indescribable distance between people' (...).

Janet Luis, *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 October 2005

Sample translation from

Ultramarine by Henk van Woerden
(Amsterdam: Podium, 2005)

Translated by S.J. Leinbach

pp. 11-23

1

On Thursday, 11 August 1955 Joakim boards the bus with his duffle bag, and, with a sense of relief takes his place among the others. It's a boxy vehicle with dusty windows, an army cast-off, and it will take them to the mountains. Even once the bus starts moving, he refuses to look back. He knows that his parents will still be standing there at the kiosk on the corner of Karagöz Street. Father – cap and dark glasses – will already have turned away. Mother will certainly take one last look and arrange her shawl. Aysel, his half-sister, stayed at home. She didn't want to say goodbye.

On the road together: forty uniformed scouts divided among four patrols, each with its own leader. The bus reeks of gasoline and sun-bleached imitation leather, a smell he will later be able to recall precisely. When they reach the city outskirts, riding through streets he no longer recognises, he sees Djavid making his way down the aisle. Djavid is a sergeant, not yet promoted to be patrol leader. He sprinkles eau de cologne on every outstretched hand he passes. That must be what you do on long trips, Joakim thinks; he doesn't dare ask. He accepts the liquid, rubs it on his neck and temples and through his hair – lank black hair, not Aysel's curls.

Outside Kusaliman they cross the peninsula. He is leaving the city for the first time, all on his own. They pass the oil depots along the coast and the white-powdered skeleton of a cement plant. They rumble over a bridge and head slowly uphill, towards the edge of the plateau, agonizingly slowly. He hears the boasts of the boys around him. The trip will take at least a day, say the ones who go every year. Sometimes two, if a bridge is washed away or a road is blocked by boulders and tree trunks. And then there is the treacherous pass that leads to the highlands.

This time there are no washed-out bridges or blocked roads; their ride south is unimpeded. Like a chameleon, the surrounding plains gradually take on the

colour of the bus: ochre and grey ochre. Ochre can go on for hours. By mid-afternoon, the road is running parallel to the river that marks the border with the southern province. They come to a halt at a roadside tavern north of the river.

‘You can get out and stretch your legs, or relieve yourselves,’ says one of the patrol leaders.

Joakim stays in the bus; he doesn’t need to go. He leans out the window and observes the travellers. Passengers from another bus are queuing for the outhouse. Several men simply open their flies at the side of the road. How long have they been travelling? Where have they come from? Some pee standing up, others – a minority – do it squatting. Moaning can be heard coming from the wooden outhouse. He has never before heard a man wail like that, like a desperate animal.

Later in the afternoon they pass a harbour town. He takes out a notebook and jots down: ‘constipation: howling like a dog in pain’. In a short time they climb to the top of a plateau and descend towards a village overlooking a bay. The driver slows down and honks the horn as if this is his home. From doorways women shout back something unintelligible. Outside the village, a villa flashes by, two white lions in front of the entrance. After that the pass begins, it won’t be much longer now. The vehicle sputters its way up the hill, its rattling echoing off the mountainside. He counts the bends in the road. When he stops counting, they are riding through a saddle between two peaks. They follow a hairpin bend northwards again, and suddenly the camp comes into view below. That is to say, the place where they’ll be pitching their tents, a meadow bordering on a small lake. The bus rattles, shudders one last time and then the motor shuts off.

The racket is finally over. Djavid is the first to get up. He jumps off the running board and starts barking orders. The scouts begin setting up their encampment, lugging gear down the hill in double time: thick canvas army tents, tarpaulins, boxes of tent pegs and bales of rope. Forty boys carting around tent poles, jerry cans of kerosene, pulleys, mess kits, kettles and other gear in the fading light below the massif. One of them goes off to cut firewood: they’ll have

to eat that night. A short distance away, another drives a spade into the ground, turning up red earth. Joakim stumbles to what will become the field kitchen with provisions: sacks of flour, potatoes in burlap sacks that are hung on a hook next to the meat safe. In his wake, Jemil Tekfur picks up a pile of groundsheets. Barely fifteen, the helplessly fat Jemil is another newcomer and apart from Djavid, the only boy from his neighbourhood. For the next month, he will have to share a tent and chores with this fatty.

Joakim climbs the hill once more. At the top, he sits down against a tree and looks out over the valley. There are cedars and plane trees in the meadow, and the slope is covered by a pine forest. He is familiar with plane trees, and pine trees dot the hillside at home at the back. But the cedar is new to him: black and silent. He watches the valley fill with shadows.

The tent, at night. The boys have each dug themselves a grave, a shallow hole filled with pine needles. Joakim, sucking a sweet, is lying on a pinewood mattress covered with a groundsheet. Aysel slipped him the candy before he left, and he's keeping it hidden from the others, especially from Jemil, who is tossing and turning under a blanket next to him.

The kerosene lamp is out; what thoughts fill your head in the dark, in a grave smelling of pine needles? What seemed like a great adventure in the morning now makes him uneasy. He isn't homesick, like Jemil. It was a relief to be sent out of the house on Karagöz Street. But he does miss his half-sister. He has reached 'that age'. 'It's time that boy learned his lesson,' his father thundered. Aysel doesn't have to learn any lesson, even though she is nearly fourteen, a year and a half younger than he. Not so long ago they slept in the same room. Now he is suddenly separated from her, cruelly sent away to the high country. Father flew into a rage, as he often did after coming home from one of his trips abroad. His attacks – a kind of sickness, or so Aysel's mother thinks – are getting worse all the time. He blames everything and everyone, invoking the name of his own

father, and his father's fathers. Even Aysel is unable to calm him, no matter how much she pleads with him and covers his hands with kisses.

He can hear strings being strummed in a tent nearby, Djavid playing songs on an instrument he brought along. He doesn't so much strum the strings as caress them. A melody curls over the valley, like the smoke from the campfire, and Joakim's thoughts float away with the music. In the past it was sometimes like this, when father brought out his lute. As if the mountains themselves could sing. Aysel's mother loves to tell stories about her mountains, about the region she came from. His own mother was from the city; he doesn't know much more about her than that. The others never talk about her. There was a time that father gave the local children dancing lessons. With Djavid coaxing beautiful music from his instrument in the next tent, a memory drifts to the surface: days spent on the beach near the harbour. They had their picture taken by a beach photographer, like any normal family. Nowadays father's lute stands idle in the parlour, an ornamental object next to the portable gramophone.

No one can fall asleep right away on this first night, apart from Jemil, who is quietly snoring. He hears Djavid's comrades humming along to his songs. Every now and again someone lets out a fart or a belch, which sends the boys into gales of laughter. They had lentils and meat from big American tins for dinner, served on metal plates, and potatoes that had first been packed in a layer of river mud and buried in the fire until they were done. They were charred on the outside and crumbly white on the inside, and tasted of iron. The flavour of ashes and rust dispelled now by the sweetness on his tongue. The names in the camp are also unfamiliar, short and cryptic. The toilet – a hastily dug trench – is called a 'latrine'. The food is 'chow' or 'grub'. Their clothes, 'togs'. Right, so he had been to the latrine, had had his chow and a drink of spring water from a canteen, and on command he had removed his togs, extinguished his lamp and nestled into his grave. Now, under a felt blanket, he listens to the lute and the landscape, in a way you never would in the city, his ears pinned back, a wary field mouse. When

the others fall silent, he stays alert. He misses Aysel. Her warmth and her skin that smells of peeled lychees.

The next morning they have ‘day manoeuvres’. There are night manoeuvres and day manoeuvres. The goal of the first exercise is to work together to pull a farm cart up to the top of a plateau. The four patrols take turns in dragging the heavy cart up a dirt track for seven or eight kilometres. Below the mountain ridge, they take the thing apart. Each boy is given part of it: one of the planks that formed the bed, a wheel or one of the supports. Then they trudge uphill again. Here and there they see remnants of walls, imposing ruins. As they climb higher and higher, it becomes clear that an ancient city once stood on these slopes. They pass through a gate. From there they have another half kilometre of climbing through the ruins before they reach an amphitheatre, at which point they bear west. Once they reach a narrow plateau, they reassemble the cart.

Joakim can’t see the point of it: plopping this vehicle down among ancient tomb pillars, high on a mountain, and leaving it there for three or four weeks, on a spot with no roads in sight, decorated with flags and banners from the city. No one explains who might benefit from its presence or what purpose it could serve, not even Djavid.

The patrol leaders hand out the bread, olives and sardines they brought for lunch. The harbour is in the distance. The tinkling of a herd of goats echoes off the hillside.

‘Is this the summer pasture?’ someone asks.

‘That’s higher up,’ Djavid replies, ‘at a place they call the Navel. That’s where the goatherds set up their camp.’

Djavid knows everything. For a brief moment Joakim feels he is being watched. He isn’t prepared for that, for Djavid’s amused expression, a look of understanding almost. There is no bond between them, even though they see each other every week at Kusaliman market. He knows Djavid’s family only from a

distance. They own a factory, a warehouse; they're in the import-export business. There is a rumour that David is the nephew of Udi Ozan, the famous lute player.

On the way back, Joakim walks alongside a powerfully built boy: high cheekbones, crewcut. The others call him the Falcon. Everybody seems to have a nickname at the camp. Mosquito, Spider, Sleepy, the Trumpet; he doesn't know their real names. The Falcon's father is fighting in Korea. 'Doesn't your father work for the newspaper?' the boy asks.

'He's a travelling salesman,' says Joakim.

'Oh, I see. Selling junk.'

'That's not true. He sells magazines. He used to be town clerk, actually. We moved a few years ago.'

He doesn't tell him that his father used to be a professor, before he was banished. They've been living on Kargöz Street for ten years already. A narrow house, much smaller than the one they had in the capital, and not far from the alley where Jemil's family sells fish.

'Oh yeah, Jemil. He was just telling me you have a sister that the whole neighbourhood is after. Or maybe it's the other way around. I'd keep an eye on her if I were you. What's her name anyway?'

Joakim hesitates, the words sting him. 'Her name is Aysel. And Jemil's full of shit. Jemil's father claims Adolf Hitler converted to Islam and is now living in the Emirates. That man's as stupid as his son is fat...' He has gone too far.

'So that's the sort of stuff you write in your notebook is it, Snotface?' asks the Falcon. The boy swats an insect on his forehead and jogs on ahead.

On the other side of a pine forest, they descend straight into the ravine, pass clefts in the rock face, and reach a stream shortly afterwards, the headwaters of the river that feeds the lake and eventually flows to the coast. Further on is a pool with, on one side, the phenomenon known as the 'bum slide': a flat slab of rock, sloping downward at a sharp angle, eight to ten metres high and as smooth as any

playground slide. Joakim had heard hushed conversations in the bus about the bum slide.

It's warm in the gorge. The older scouts strip off, and nonchalantly toss their clothes onto the rocks. The other boys hesitate. Did someone give a signal? Joakim isn't sure whether to follow their example. Is this part of comradeship? There's a sort of swagger in the air which he has trouble placing: a friendship confirmed by casting off everything, by being stark naked in front of everybody else. They act as if it's perfectly natural. He's embarrassed but determined not to show it. He whips off his socks and purposefully unbuttons his trousers. He can see out of the corner of his eye that Djavid has very little body hair.

One scout dives into the water. Once he reaches the other side he clammers up towards the weathered rock on hands and knees. When he gets to the top, someone tosses him a canteen. The boy oils himself from the canteen, then slides down the rock at full speed and plunges into the depths of the pool. A cry goes up from the onlookers, at the same time as five boys reach the far bank and start climbing.

Joakim waits his turn with his knees drawn up to his chest. He lets almost everybody go ahead of him. Then he wades through the shallow part of the stream and drags himself up the slope, tearing his fingernails in the process. Near the start of the slide someone hands him the canteen. He oils his bottom, his back. He feels two hands – familiar, almost intimate – push him in the right direction, slightly to the right, to avoid a crack in the rock. Then he slithers down the slide, somersaulting once and whizzing down the steepest part, like a eel across the kitchen counter.

Silence surrounds him as he is enveloped by the water. The pond is a funnel. The water is cool and cools further as he sinks. At the bottom of the funnel he sees translucent, amber-coloured walls. After a minute – at least, that's how long it seems – pressure forces him back up. Lungs screaming, he breaks the surface. He scrambles onto dry land and retires under a tree. There is a row of parallel scratches on his thigh, as if drawn there with a comb.

In the meantime Djavid has had one of the scouts tie a rope by the crag, so the boys can pull themselves up more easily.

Everybody goes down the slide once, even pale Jemil Tekfur, who would have been less conspicuous if he had only taken his trousers off earlier. Now all eyes are on him. He emerges from the bushes, low to the ground. His flabby buttocks scrape along the rocks as he slides into the river, reappearing on the other side to grab the rope, child-like and white against the rocks. Nobody says anything. Even the Falcon keeps his thoughts to himself. Djavid nods as he hands him the canteen of oil. Jemil does what he is told and makes a big splash, but it hasn't escaped anybody's attention that the boy has no sex, just a tiny snail.

The afternoon heat builds up between the walls of the massif as the boys laze on the river banks. He inspects the others, spread out over the rocks. Young men in the midst of a growth spurt, boys with rashes and blotchy patches on their backs, dark seams in their armpits and on their buttocks. He doesn't look like them; he isn't as hairy. He doesn't have a rash or blotchy skin either, and there's nothing about his body that will impress or command respect from this crowd. Djavid casually peels an orange, throwing the rind in the stream. The Falcon has an appendage that lolls listlessly back and forth in the sun as he shifts his weight from one hip to the other. The stubble on his skull glistens with sweat, and he tenses his jaw.

The troop has decided that fat Jemil will get his nickname today. A girl's name. 'Aysel, Aysel, Aysel,' the Falcon taunts him in a sing-song voice. The others take up the chant, not shouting, but saying it with a mix of derision and affection.

It takes on the quality of a leitmotiv as the afternoon wears on. The refrain of the monotonous tune made by crickets: slightly hysterical, almost a mating call. The target of the call is clear to everyone. Jemil shrinks into a ball, trousers or no trousers. The Falcon has to know how much it gets to Joakim: the timid, fleshy Jemil Tekfur will now be addressed as if he was his sister. He is fuming on the way back to the camp. He doesn't know how it happened, but Aysel – *his* Aysel –

has in some strange way migrated into Jemil's body. It's as if she was the one being humiliated, being sullied by the mob.

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This is what the founder of the Republic envisioned: scouting as an activity befitting a modern nation. Maybe the camp is a lesson after all, rather than a punishment, Joakim muses in the days that follow. Never before has he been so painfully aware of what goes into his body, and what comes out. The body has entrances and exits. Ingestion alternates with excretion; they pulsate, they possess a kind of rhythm, a drive. But sometimes things get turned around. That can also happen: an opening through which something leaves the body becomes an orifice into which something enters, a receptor. He has heard the nightly noises from the other tents and imagines what must be going on inside. Eager lips, a hungry mouth, but not on the face. The thought of it makes his bones twinge with pain. Then the Falcon comes to fetch him: it's his turn to peel potatoes.

Potatoes weren't the only things they packed in river clay and buried under the fire. They did the same with birds, often turtledoves, which they shot out of the trees with homemade catapults. An hour later, they're dug out from the ashes, scorched, egg-shaped packages. When you break open the hard casing, the feathers peel off. Pigeon meat is a disappointment. Perhaps they should have gutted them first. Earlier they'd fished freshwater turtles out of the small lake. They live under the algae, stink like fetid sewers and fight back viciously. The turtles suffer the same fate as the pigeons, but taste better: strips of fresh white meat, which smells of the broken stems of lily pads.

They don't pick much from the field, apart from aubergines. It is too late in the season for artichokes. Every now and then a farmer rides from the coast in a three-wheeled cart filled with peaches and cucumbers. Apart from that, the troop lives mainly on beans, canned sardines and sour yoghurt. The diet makes his

stomach rumble. It took him a few days to learn how to shit in front of the others, with two or three of them balancing precariously over the hole, and the sun jabbing him in the back. The latrine is hidden from view by a screen of sacking fastened to poles, but that doesn't keep out the bluebottles and dung beetles. Sounds manage to get through as well: sighs, groans, the dull plop or splatter of the daily bowel movement. Those who are constipated are given a laxative by the patrol leader; a mug of olive oil usually does the trick. Those with diarrhoea are given some revolting substance that looks like a bar of chocolate, but isn't.

Joakim tries to counteract the bitter taste of the medicine with his sweets. The lozenges are hidden at the bottom of his knapsack, in a tin which he took the precaution of wrapping in a sock. Almond-shaped lozenges coated in white powder, that became glassy green if you dusted them off. Tourmaline, like her eyes.

Where had Aysel got the tin? There are palm trees swaying on it, a gleaming white beach of an island in what must be the Pacific. She certainly won't have got it from their father. He sometimes handed out comic books in a foreign language after his trips – and recently the notebook with unlined paper that he filled with scribbles – but never sweets. And if the sweets *were* from overseas, who had given them to her? The morning he left, she had crawled through the hole in the fence. She told him to wait. She went into the house alone – the vacant house behind the mulberry field – and reappeared a short time later with the exotic gift in her hand. She had sworn him to secrecy. Just as he had entrusted a secret to the Greek: a birdcage for Aysel, make sure she gets it – with a bird inside, doesn't matter what kind.

But now that her name was being tossed around indiscriminately in the camp and the contents of the small tin were dwindling, Aysel began to fade away.

pp. 93 – 106

4

There is probably no more sensual ode to the aubergine than that by Ibn al Mustakfi in his cookbook *cum* morality guide *Kitab al Wusla il al Habib* (Baghdad, 1226). ‘Take two, preferably small, tender-skinned aubergines – fruits which are not yet completely ripe but have nevertheless attained a substantial size and contain considerable potency – fruits of unequal size perhaps, but fresh from the sun-bleached fields and purplish black in colour, gleaming like the testicles of a chamois and redolent of the lips of a beast of burden in heat for the very first time: do not use the odourless ones, whose milk always tastes of iron, for they lack the sultriness of summer....’

Ibn al Mustakfi start his book with the customary pious formulas. But the most remarkable thing about the work is the famous preamble to his recipe for what would become known as *Buran al Mustakfiya* (pureed aubergine with sheep’s brains), in which he rigorously divides the human pleasure principle into six main categories: eating, drinking, love-making, dressing, smelling and what he calls ‘tasting sound’, bringing forth the sounds of the lute. There is no greater pleasure than eating, and his cosmos makes no allowance for the pleasures of the eye: painting. He prefers to paint with foods, with coriander and roasted cumin; to work his magic with eggs cooked in myrrh, lamb stewed in pomegranate juice, or bouillabaisse with just a pinch of cinnamon. ‘Even a worm on a rock eats herbs and spices,’ Mustakifi remarks at one point. Sixteen-year-old Özlem is utterly and blissfully unaware of all this when, on 22 June 1971 in a new neighbourhood on the outskirts of Frankfurt, she gingerly dips her left foot into the bathwater and then, no less carefully, lets her right foot follow. She slides slowly down on her buttocks, feels the water tickle her belly and armpits, and finally disappears under the bubbles, while the suds slop over the edge of the bath.

Silence, humming in her ears.

She surfaces spluttering. The sun is shining through the ribbed glass of the window. On the street a dog is barking, and then another, for no other reason than because it is a summer morning. Every few minutes the shadow of a cloud passes over the neighbourhood and a chill comes over the room. As if the sky is shivering, she thinks, lying here inside, safe in the warm water. She locked the door, just to be sure. She plans on lying here for hours, maybe even setting a record, a personal one, at least. How long can one person soak anyway? Has anyone ever made a study of that? It's the holidays, and there's not exactly anything else to do in this crummy neighbourhood. She doesn't feel like washing dishes or scrubbing the floor or rinsing liver clean at her mother's restaurant. Aysel's Corner is almost too small to be a restaurant – plus business is slack on weekdays – but at the weekend they come all the way from the city centre for mum's liver. The marinated and grilled livers are truly unsurpassed; a healthy squirt of lemon juice, a pinch of cayenne pepper: her mouth waters at the thought.

She stretches a leg out of the foam and examines it closely. Lets it splash back into the water and lifts the other one. Some girls are already shaving. Excess body hair has never been a problem for her, nor for her mother, even though her father was apparently extremely hairy. 'A mat on his back, a mat on his belly and two moustaches over his eyes,' says her mother mischievously on the rare occasions that she reminisces about the past. There are no photographs of him. Mum doesn't care for photographs. Once she even claimed that none had ever been taken. She doesn't say much more about the past, since tide and time fly for no man. She often mixes up proverbs, even though her German is good. It's as if she doesn't care, which may be the worst thing about Mum: she doesn't care how she appears to others. No matter what people say, she isn't bothered: 'Like snow on a duck's back.'

There are two stories about her father. In one he's known simply as 'your father'. This is the more romantic of the two. Her father was handsome and strong, but not rich. That wasn't a problem though. He was kind, and Aysel would have done anything for him. She was even willing to sleep with him,

although no one was allowed to know. She shared everything with that father, in secret, a whole summer long. Whenever she thinks about him, she starts blubbing.

Once the two of them were slicing onions in Aysel's Corner. Her mother was quietly singing an old song, 'One day at sunrise, his hand will break my life.' When the song was over, she said, 'I woke up that morning with a smile. I was so happy to see him again.' She dried her eyes with the corner of a dishcloth. 'Your father liked to go diving. Once he fished a birdcage out of the sea for me. He cut his leg open in the process. A nasty gash near the knee. But that's what you get. He could have drowned.'

She was upset for the rest of the day: 'I feel like something is crushing me.' Özlem didn't quite understand, because the other story was a lot grislier. And sometimes her mother could laugh about it, when it didn't make her cry.

In the other story, his name was Charis. 'Charis was a magnet for bad luck,' Aysel scoffed, 'but he wasn't the only one in those days.' Plus he was a foreigner. She met Charis at the market. And one fine day she decided that she was ready.

'Ready for what?'

'For the taking.'

What is the point of this story? Mum is never precise, and when she is precise, she is dreaming. She believes in the power of food, and in the power of the moment: seize your chance. But she had let it slip through her fingers. It's not clear what actually happened. 'What's done is done. There's no turning back time, sweetheart.' Aysel had allowed herself to be seduced by a hairy Greek; that much is clear. It led to misery. Misery usually passes. But not this time, said her mother bitterly. 'I left my happiness with him.'

Another time Özlem was suddenly told the whole story. She had to promise not to tell anyone what had happened. Not a soul; don't wash your dirty laundry in public. On the night she spent with Charis, riots had broken out in town. Not just brawls, like the kind you saw at football matches: this was a massacre. People are as stupid as they are poor, or vice versa. Once the blood starts flowing,

there's no stopping it. But Özlem would learn that later, when it's her turn, may the Prophet forbid. That night Aysel and her boyfriend hid in an empty house, their meeting place. Towards morning, the mob forced its way in. The two of them were beaten. By her own people: by the teacher, the barber, by fishermen and people from the market. The house was set on fire. And then the clouds opened up. In the pouring rain Charis was led away to the wharf and beaten with iron bars. And she could expect the same treatment, for the disgrace she had brought on herself. They called her a Jewish slut. An infidel and a Christian pig. It's always the names that make the difference. Without those words, they wouldn't have the courage, the inspiration: they tore off her clothes. They dragged her up the hill and were about to toss her off the fortress onto the rocks below. If her father – Özlem's grandfather – hadn't come between them... Aysel's lip began to tremble, and she cut the story short.

Her grandfather had a way with words, like no one else, Özlem was told. He could have been a writer. 'That's why he wanted so much for you to pass your final exams.'

Exams? Always a moral.

She's fallen behind in her studies, but she can't let anyone know. Three more years of school would be torture. Her one notable talent is foreign languages. She likes reading, even in English. Her mother warns her about this too: 'Don't read too much, those books are like a virus. Trashy novels rot your brain. They're not real, they'll infect your mind.' As if Aysel's history were the only real one.

Özlem stretches out her toes towards the tap. Two taps, left and right, hot and cold. Two histories and two fathers, she can choose. A hairy one, who was beaten to death, a jet black fairy tale. And one who is still alive, but a shadow, since there are no photographs. She can't make sense of it. The past must stay behind a curtain, like the thick net curtains that prevent passers-by from seeing into the front room. The only thing common to the two stories is their ending. Grandfather had claimed Aysel from the men. There were rules and customs for these kinds of things. He had the right to avenge the affront to his good name. They gave her up

reluctantly, half-naked and as wet as a kitten. That same day grandfather fled to Europe with her. Seven months later, Özlem was born, the end result of all this. The one souvenir of the world behind the curtain.

There *was* a snapshot of grandfather, which showed the three of them in front of the station with pigeons flapping round. Özlem has fond memories of her grandfather, a man who could tell the most wonderful stories, mostly about his travels. He went back home when she was eight. By train – she can still picture the farewell. A stooped man with a moustache and a small leather suitcase with yellowed stickers from all over the Mediterranean: Marseille, Tangier, Oran, Aleppo, Alexandria. He left to bury her grandmother, she was told, but it was always clear that he would not be coming back to Frankfurt. She's sorry he is gone. Sometimes she suddenly thinks she sees him on the street corner. Or in the playground by the railway line, with the other men who hold their meetings there, in the absence of a mosque.

Outside the wind is picking up. Mighty gusts beat against the window, as if the wind god and the sunlight want to force their way inside. Özlem pictures the African marigolds that were recently planted in neat little rows in the public gardens on Pegasus Street. Ugly orange flowers, crumpled by the breeze. On a sunny, windy day like this, you belonged in a bath, getting nice and pruney in the warm water. She inspected her hands and the soles of her feet. Her skin was already becoming a bit like the scum that appears on milk when it come to a boil. If you kept at it long enough, she wondered, would you become completely transparent and froth up like warm milk?

Under her pillow she has an old-fashioned book that she sometimes leafs through at night. A gift from Kurt, a new sweetheart from her class. It's called *The Story of Ling Sin, in Six Short Tales Translated from the Mandarin*. Often Ling is just as bored as she is. Sometimes she plays with herself to while away the hours: 'As the sun hit the paper windows, I brought my milk to a boil for the third time. Yesterday I managed to do it four times. No matter how often I do it, I

am never certain if this is in keeping with the laws of propriety, but it remains the only way to be released from this longing on a windy day.’ After finding her release, Ling reads the paper, perusing the news and the financial pages. Or paints her toenails.

Özlem thinks her own feet are ugly, wide and stumpy. A man’s feet, not slender and elegant like her mother’s. But she has nimble toes which she can spread out and use to grab hold of things as if they were fingers. The right foot is slightly handier than the left. This means the left needs practice turning the tap on and off. If she works at it, she’ll soon be able to open bottles without using her hands. The bottle of HimaLaya bubble bath, for example: *HimaLaya wirkt erfrischend und belebend*. ‘Him-aa-La-ya!’ She felt like yodelling, even though yodelling indoors is not appreciated, least of all by Murat, the man with whom her mother shares her life. She never calls him ‘Dad’, even though for all practical purposes that’s what he is. Murat doesn’t mind. Murat doesn’t know anything about her biological father. ‘That’s Aysel’s business,’ he says. He doesn’t know anything about homesickness either. On the other hand, he knows everything there is to know about typewriters and setting up exhibition stands. He is unbelievably meticulous, practically a German.

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Aysel thought that she could read the country – any country – like a newspaper. But this country, this city, was impossible to read. What had happened to her back home was a closed chapter. But the shock of Fragfurti would probably never leave her. That first winter she spent hours along the railway tracks behind Pegasus Street. Just to be outside, no matter how cold she was. To have the feeling that there was sandy ground here too, a grassy patch on the side of the road, a ditch that might acquire significance. So many things had become insubstantial, empty. The neighbourhood was crisscrossed by humming power

lines strung between tall poles. Time and again, with her back up against one of them, she crouched down in the sand. During her pregnancy, she became accustomed to that position: crouching with her hands around her belly. The railway embankment hid the brown-coal power station and the brickworks from view. The railway signal was powered by a gas canister, which had to be replaced every so often by a man in an orange uniform. But whenever she half-closed her eyes and squinted at the low-hanging sun, she felt as if she were somewhere else: the corner of a southern wharf, the shadow of the public garden and the land behind Kargöz Street.

When she opened her eyes, illegible Fragfurti returned. How much effort did it take to find a little piece of yourself here? Sometimes she managed it, in miniature, in a little corner. At the bottom of the railway embankment, for example, was a trench in which water sometimes accumulated. One day some of the water froze. A sheet of ice with reeds poking out of it. She examined the ice. The rest of the water had seeped into the ground, leaving behind a hollow space. The ice had become the roof of a sort of cave. What could that mean? She remembered a mirage she had seen many times with Joakim, from high above the Fortezza: clouds stretching out to the horizon like a sheet, as transparent as this winter grotto. If she had a choice, she would have spent the rest of her days crawling among the reeds. Couldn't be any chillier than the local apartments. It was a dump, this place where she had ended up. Miles outside the city centre, cut off from an industrial estate by the railway tracks, and behind that a canal and dreary farmland. A lot of low-rise buildings with damp walls, more like a village than a suburb. On Gemini Street there's a brick church with two bells in the tower. Hercules Street has three or four snack bars and a Spar supermarket. No one chooses to live in a place like this. It's a place you pass through, that's what it is.

During the last months of her pregnancy, Murat moved in with her and her father. Something inside her snapped then, and the storm clouds burst open: rain and wind and hail for the next few years. She had never seen so much hail, so

many grey skies. The aeroplanes screeched past directly overhead, in search of a runway somewhere beyond all the wetness. Inky black wetness, like the crown of a newborn baby. The winter refused to yield, even in the delivery ward where chunks of plaster, loosened by the warmth of the radiator, fell from the ceiling and dropped onto the beds and the floor with a chilling, flat sound. It sounded like applause. She did not deserve applause. Her thoughts narrowed; thinking became a kind of ritual that mimicked genuine thought. Murat held her hand, cheerful as always. But incidents disintegrated in the strangest way. As if her life was a collection of shards. Smashed pottery, scattered among so many other inconsequential shards. Whenever he held her hand, the feeling stretched. Then it became elongated and screeched past directly overhead in search of a runway somewhere beyond all the wetness, something in pure, snow-covered regions.

She said, ‘Don’t hold it against me.’

He replied, ‘I’m still here, darling, aren’t I?’

The tempest in her head raged on for a long time. Afterwards she stayed indoors for a year or two, going outside only to do the shopping. When her thoughts became clear again, she considered ending it all. You could tie a plastic bag around your head, the kind they called a Turkish suitcase. It doesn’t take long to suffocate in a Turkish suitcase and it’s almost painless, she had heard someone saying at the cash register. Or had she misunderstood the German words? She had raced out of the supermarket with all her groceries to the vacant lot behind the power lines. The sun broke through the clouds above the embankment, yellow like the yolk of an egg. In the distance, frozen fields. In the end something kept her from doing it: the child, the thought of Murat. Without Murat she would never have made it. Maybe she could have said the same of Özlem.

The day that the prime minister of the Motherland was hanged by the army – an item that Murat read aloud from the paper – the thought suddenly popped into her head, for no particular reason and to her own astonishment: ‘No wonder these Germans look so grumpy all the time: look at the slop they eat. Red cabbage, tripe stuffed with mince, and hash: what sort of food do you call that?’

A week later Murat went out and rented a ground-level property at the corner of Gemini Street, and Aysel's Corner was a fact. Together they painted things on the walls that reminded them of the South: beehives, a lute, squid, minarets and stars. And she put together a menu. Of course she would have to modify her culinary skills. Beets smelled of clay soil, but endive was not without possibilities. At first, garlic was virtually unobtainable; the same went for chick peas and most spices, until Murat discovered Conimex's mail order service. They could get dried figs, and dates too. Even cooking with yoghurt is strange here, not lentils though, fortunately. Obviously tastes differ, and she could not expect her dishes to catch on immediately. Not immediately. It would take years.

At work Murat went by the name Martin: 'It's funny looking stuff, Martin,' the first guinea pig had said. One of his mates. 'Is this rice? Looks more like maggots.' His wife was less suspicious, but even she thought the lamb was too spicy and the herbs bitter. The couple was served marinated chicken smothered in walnut sauce. Home cooking, in the best tradition of Mustakfi. Would you believe it? The guests picked at their food, washing away the taste with beer.

Aysel noticed that Northern Europeans tended to race through their meals. The idea of leaning back and enjoying every bite, of taking quiet pleasure in good food and good company is a foreign notion here. Here people eat as if it's a duty. She wonders if they make love that way too. She has a hard time picturing it: receiving your partner's organ in an businesslike fashion, the act itself as quick and purposeful as the evening meal. Murat takes his time, he spoils her. Though in the last year he has rarely shared the bed with her, the double bed he'd brought with him. When he lies down next to her now, it is to massage her back and legs. He still does this with dedication: he knows her body like no one else. He knows where the memories live, the hunger between her shoulder blades and inside her chest. He has lived in Germany for more than twenty years. Her father met him at the local gaming tables near the station, but he has since sworn off gambling. Murat is there to protect Aysel, and she protects him by being a woman. This had

been her father's decision, and in the end she was content with it. Murat taught her the language, though she still made mistakes. He taught her how to furnish the house German style, complete with a winged armchair and jute-covered walls:

Es began mit einem Bett.
Einer brachte es mit in die Ehe.
Das war vor fünfzehn Jahren,
Heute ist die Wohnung komplett.

[It began with a bed.
Someone brought it into the marriage.
That was fifteen years ago;
Today the apartment is complete.]

Then he taught her to furnish her mind German style, which was harder than it seemed. She had to make an effort to get to know people, he kept saying. But she couldn't. The German woman next door had a bird table in her garden where she left out pieces of meat for the buzzards from the surrounding hills. Aysel liked her doing that, but the woman couldn't understand her. Ginger, coriander, cumin? The woman leaned over the hedge and complained about permits. Aysel in turn was dumbstruck: you needed permits for a garden chair? 'Those who don't work, should at least eat well,' she had snapped at her the other day. Don't let it get to you, Murat kept telling her. It was a question of *heranführen*: the neighbours had to get used to her, and she had to get used to the neighbours. They were all just people, right? She had taken heart: just as she being urged to get to know her surroundings, Aysel would gradually introduce her customers to a more refined cuisine.

In the meanwhile any leftovers from the kitchen went to Özlem. How that child could eat! Raisins, nuts and anything left on the table: her daughter stuffed

herself. And yet she stayed thin, not an ounce of fat on her. A good child, quick to learn. Very popular at school too, thinks Aysel, so talented. Özlem sings along to her old songs without a single mistake. She's quite a looker too, with those light-coloured eyes. The only thing that annoys Aysel is the way her daughter is always flirting with Murat. When she was young she climbed onto his lap far too often. Until Aysel put her foot down, that is. It was no longer appropriate, not once she reached that age.