

LAURA CWIERTNIA

WE HAVE A DIFFERENT NAME ON THE STREET

Sample Translation by Alexandra Roesch

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KARLA

The crocuses are out on the lawn in front of the apartment block. A purple-green carpet of flowers and grass. Colours so luminous that I have to stop and look. On the afternoon after her funeral, of all days, I notice the flowers in front of my grandmother's house for the first time now that I will never see them again.

The last time I was in Bremen Nord was at Christmas. I arrived at the small station in Vegesack on the regional train and immediately took the next bus home, without any detours and without looking out of the window. Who was I going to meet? Here at the tip of the city, which reminded me of an upside-down shark when I was a child, with its squiffy fin and wide-open mouth. My cousin Nisa is one of the few people from my old school to whom I still talk to regularly on the phone. But I haven't even called her for months now. It is a strange feeling returning for a funeral to a place you didn't much like living in. Especially when that place suddenly seems so beautiful.

'Grandma has died, come home quickly.' Usually my father shouts into the phone when he's on speakerphone in the car, but on this call a few days ago I could barely hear what he was saying. When we hung up, I told my thesis supervisor that I would not be coming to the institute for the next few days, packed my rucksack and set off for Bremen Nord. But when I got off the train three hours later, I didn't turn off towards the bus stop, but headed to the large forecourt, as if I could escape my grandmother's death for a moment. The tower blocks rose up steeply behind the station building. I wondered whether the corridors still smelled of urine even when the cleaning lady had been in? When I used to visit my friend Janine up there, I always met a group of children on the way. The corridors and lifts were their territory, which they conquered anew each day. There they fought battles that drove them apart in the short run and bonded them even closer together in the long run. It was a world of their own, which they seldom left in their everyday lives, and which was hard to reach from the outside. I slowly walked past the tower blocks. The white slabs of their walls had been made even dirtier by the rain. Directly opposite was the shopping arcade, a huge glass box that had shone like a crystal at the opening ceremony. I had been fifteen and had drunk fizzy wine among the disco lights and smoke machines. I had been so happy that I no longer had to drive the thirty-five kilometres to the city centre to buy clothes. Because something had actually been built here in Bremen Nord that felt like the city centre, not the suburbs.

Today all you could see through the glass were the empty shop windows. The few shops that still remained in the arcade looked like the last survivors of a natural disaster. I continued to walk across the cobblestones to the harbour, and my gaze lingered on the Weser as it flowed along, always the same green, indifferent to what had been built around it in recent years.

Not much had changed. Not far from the station was the pub where my father sometimes used to take me. He had taught me backgammon in the cushioned corner seat. I could see the navy-blue upholstery through the window. The same decorations hung on the wall as they did back then - an anchor, a small sailing ship in a bottle. A man in a polo shirt sat on a stool at the bar, alongside another man in builder's overalls. A few seats further on, two young women with a beer in their hands. 'Of course, we'll all go there,' my father had said one day and shrugged his shoulders. Because there was no choice, and that ties you to the place. I finally stopped in the pedestrian zone, in front of the Italian ice cream parlour. The server was piling the scoops into the cone with the same precision as back then. I had forgotten his name, but when he saw me he waved to me like an old acquaintance. Why do things from childhood taste best even decades later? The taste buds, a storehouse of good memories.

I walked towards the small circular stone wall that surrounds a maple tree on the main road. The older boys from my school used to skateboard over the edges after the half-pipe at the harbour was taken down. Today a mother and child were sitting on the wall. I sat down with them for a moment. The circus suddenly seemed so small, like almost everything in Bremen Nord. A district that had shrunk, was almost cosy; no longer threatening, anyway. And when I got on the bus a little later, I had the feeling I was looking at my home town in a completely different way. As if the deprived area were not the centre of life here, but merely a silhouette on the horizon.

'Have you forgotten where your grandmother lives?' Aunt Yeva pulls me by my arm away from the flowering lawn. Her voice carries a reproachful undertone that is not meant entirely seriously but has become more noticeable since I rarely come to the area any more. I used to come here every weekend as a child. My grandmother would already be waiting for us behind the curtains, only to call out a questioning 'Yes?' into the intercom a moment later. Although she would know exactly who was standing in front of the door.

There is a crackling sound; it comes from Aunt Yeva's handbag. She pulls out a bunch of keys from beneath the packet of walnuts; a pink guardian angel dangles from the silver keyring. For as long as I can remember this angel has hung in my grandmother's hallway on the small board with the golden hooks. Over the past few years, thick dust has gathered on the plastic angel. Nevertheless my grandmother asked us every time: 'Is it still there?' It was only when one of us went to check that she nodded, reassured. Soon the landlord would get the key back. How do you hand over an object that holds half a lifetime? Forty square metres, the control centre of an entire family.

In the flat, I almost collide with my father. He stands bent over in the narrow hallway and pulls his shoes off his feet. His leather boots with the two-centimetre-thick soles with deep notches in them. 'What can I do? German women are just too tall,' he had said to me years ago and grinned. Heels clatter in the stairwell behind us. Aunt Yeva and Nisa have now also made it to the fourth floor. My great-aunt Karine had already said goodbye to us at the cemetery gate and got into her taxi. We might have been able to carry her wheelchair up the stairs, but it would not have fitted through the narrow hallway with the wide wardrobe. I feel a hand on my shoulder. Aunt Yeva pushes past me and

my father into the living room, balancing a Tupperware box in her arms. Moist grains of semolina stick to the sides and lid. İrmik helvası was the only item on my grandmother's list, the semolina pudding with cinnamon that we usually only eat at Christmas. Aunt Yeva nodded as she read it out to us: 'True, you do eat halva at every funeral.' She moved her finger to the next item on the list. 'And what about borek?' I asked. Just the thought of the puff pastry filled with sheep's cheese and spinach meant I could almost smell it. It had never failed to appear on my grandmother's table all these years. Aunt Yeva raised her head. 'We don't eat borek at funerals.' But when she saw my expression, she shrugged her shoulders. 'If you bring it along, I am sure she won't mind.' I nodded hesitantly.

As I child, I often helped my grandmother with the baking. I would crumble the salty cheese in the kitchen and squeeze the water out of the spinach. Together we would place both items on the dough and form little rolls, with her hands on my fingers. Later I even put some in the oven in my own kitchen. But I was never completely alone. My grandmother was always there, on the phone, in my ear. And yet my borek never tasted as it did in her living room. When I kneaded the dough, it was either too crumbly or too wet. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that my grandmother didn't mention some of the things from the recipe, for example, that the dough should be brushed with egg yolk and yoghurt before baking. 'That goes without saying,' she said when I asked her later. It was the same with all things in her household. It's obvious that the black tea needs to be diluted with hot water, it's obvious that the dishes need to be rinsed before they go into the dishwasher, it's obvious that you eat rolls, olives, bean soup, cake and borek all at the same time for breakfast.

In my grandmother's hallway, my father still blocks the way. In front of his feet is the baking tray that he has carried for me from the cemetery car park to the flat. I carefully lift it up and push past my father into the living room. As I do so, sesame seeds trickle onto the plastic tablecloth with the washed-out waves. The puff pastry glistens under the foil, it looks unusually similar to the one my grandmother used to make.

'Don't look so serious, little cousin, we'll manage.' That's what Nisa had said yesterday when I stood in front of her door with the shopping bag in my hand. She walked to the kitchen where the baking paper was already laid out on a baking tray. 'Same as usual?' She held up a red and yellow packet in front of her kitchen cupboard. The cappuccino powder from the discount store that we used to buy from our pocket money. Without waiting for my answer, Nisa stirred the powder into a glass. We never talked about that time, the months after her sixteenth birthday. About the months where we only waved at one another in the school playground, but never exchanged a word. At some point they were simply over. When Olga and Murat left the school and Nisa transferred to the upper school with me. Suddenly we saw each other again in the corridor, at some point we started visiting each other again in the afternoons. The closeness that had united us as children returned without us having to search for it for long.

In her kitchen, Nisa had carefully balanced the glasses over to the table. As she put them down, the towel that had been wrapped around her wet hair loosened. The black strands were shorter than the last time I had seen her at Christmas; they only just reached her shoulders. The new hairstyle made her almond eyes look even bigger. Why hadn't I picked up the last time Nisa called me? After I moved from Bremen Nord, we spoke on the phone every week. But then the calls became fewer. Maybe it had something to do with the pauses, the seconds before our sentences stopped faltering and flowed again. With each year that I no longer live at home, the pauses have become longer. During the last conversation with Nisa, I couldn't even remember Emre's name.

While Nisa occasionally meets him at parties, it's been years since I last saw him. Emre was wearing a reflective orange vest with a company logo and was gathering leaves together in front of my father's block of flats with a leaf blower. When he saw me coming out of the door, he looked away. I wanted to call out, but I didn't. What do you say when someone from the past suddenly won't acknowledge you when you meet?

As always, the cappuccino was far too sweet. I had taken another sip and put the cup down. 'Imagine, I greeted the priest in Armenian on the phone.' Milk foam gushed out of Nisa's mouth. 'Whaaat?!' She dragged out the vowel and for a moment sounded like when we were out on the streets with the others. Our words had been as boundless as we wanted to be ourselves. It was only in upper school that our vowels became shorter again, and today it is rare for one of our words to expand and if it happens it's usually by mistake. 'You probably didn't think that you'd ever have to play the foreigner in the family.' Nisa grinned and pulled her mobile phone out of her pocket. With her thumb she scrolled through her contacts until the display showed a short, round woman with facial hair. Nisa's Baba Anne, her grandmother. I had only met Baba Anne once before, three years ago on a trip to Turkey. Like my father, my Uncle Ismail - my Aunt Martha's husband - was from Istanbul. Nisa's grandmother still lived there. 'Why does Uncle Ismail say that he is Turkish, and you don't?' I had asked my father that once when I was a child. He had just muttered something and changed the subject. I never asked Nisa. Our fathers had no place among the Playmobil figures in our childhood bedrooms. Besides, my father didn't want me to talk to others about the fact that he was Armenian: 'It just causes problems.'

That afternoon in Nisa's kitchen I heard Baba Anne shouting through the phone. 'Nisa? Nisa?' I grinned. There was the same mixture of joy and indignation in her voice at what must have been a rare call from her grandmother that I knew well from my own grandmother.

Finally my name came up. 'My God, the Armenians really are good cooks,' Nisa translated. Then Baba Anne guided us through the recipe. But this time I remembered the spoonful of yoghurt in the egg yolk myself.

My father comes into the living room from the hall. His breath smells of cold cigarette smoke. In the past, he'd always regularly disappeared into my grandmother's small bathroom to smoke secretly at the window. Now he looks at my aunt who has taken a seat at the table, and then sits down on one of the armchairs. Only the sofa remains empty. This sofa, mint green with black speckles, looks exactly the same as it did twenty years ago when my father and my great-uncle Vartan carried it up to the fourth floor of the block of flats from the furniture store. I was six years old at the time. It was a Saturday and for that reason alone already a special day. We had never visited my grandmother on a Saturday before, and we never did again after that. In this family, where habits are one of the most important things to hold on to in life, Sunday was the only day of the week that we visited my grandmother together. Sundays, on which Aunt Yeva and my father always pulled out the furniture store catalogue again. My grandmother repeated her arguments like warning notices. Against the shape, against the price, against the colour, against the fabric. But finally the sofa was in her living room. My father and Aunt Yeva talked so insistently to my grandmother that not even she could find a space between their words. Anything that would stop her coming up with the idea of sending them back down the stairs with the sofa. But also because once you've done something, you don't just go back on it. There were two things that were not challenged in my family: my grandmother and fate.

I was lying under the table at the time. I ran my fingers slowly over the sofa. The cover was both scratchy and velvety soft at the same time, depending on the direction in which you stroked over it. As if the fabric could promise me that everything in my family had stayed the same, the first thing I did every Sunday was touch the sofa, even before putting my arms around my grandmother.

Today, my hands remain in my lap. I try to catch my father's eye. He could at least tell an anecdote. For example, about the Sunday when the television broke and my grandmother wiped the screen with a cloth to try and fix it. Or the time he brought her some ready-made puff pastry from the Turkish shop: 'Your grandmother gave me a right talking to'. But my father says nothing. And the longer his silence lasts, the more I feel I have to fill it. Just as I am about to open my mouth, Aunt Yeva claps her hands. 'Bon appetit.' She has doled out so much helva into the small bowls that the grains of semolina have poured over the edges. Only the bottom of her own bowl is still visible. She scrapes across the china with a teaspoon. The taste of honey, butter and pine nuts spreads in my mouth. I immediately have my grandmother's voice in my head 'Eat, Sweetie, eat!' If she were sitting on the sofa right now, she would still be holding the spoon in her hand. She would refill our bowls while we were still chewing. Especially Aunt Yeva's. We would eat until we groaned, and my father would bob his foot up and down, ready for his next cigarette. But on this day, he got up before he had even tried my borek. 'Let's get started then.' He pushes the armchair aside and walks out into the hallway. Surprised to hear his voice, I also put down my fork. Immediately afterwards, my father returns with a grey bag. He reaches for the bunch of keys that Aunt Yeva had put on the small telephone table and twists the angel out of the ring. 'Can this go?' When no-one replies, he throws the angel into the rubbish bag and lets his eyes wander around the room. The walls are empty, except for a tear-off calendar with pharmacy ads and two photographs in a gilded frame. One of them shows my father and Aunt Yeva as toddlers with their feet buried in pebbles, with the sea glittering behind them. In the other, we are sitting in the living room on the sofa. Black curls fall around my father's head. A white t-shirt is bright against his skin. Next to him sits my grandmother; her hair, still shimmering red at the time like mine, is permed. I can be seen in the background of the picture, in my washed-out flared trousers. The dark eyeliner that I drew around my eyes at the time is smudged at the edges. The night before, I'd been at the disco secretly with Janine. We had missed the night bus, and a fellow taxi driver told my father the next morning that I had dozed off in the back seat of his car. Even as he picked me up, I could see the anger in his eyes. That day, of all days, my aunt came up with the idea of taking a photo of us all.

My father's gaze follows mine. With the rubbish bag in his hand, he walks over to the wall. As he pulls the calendar off the nail, the plaster crumbles to the floor. It seems he can't wait to remove the traces of my grandmother from the walls. I hurriedly get up from my chair and stand in front of the photos. 'What about the last item on the list?' I point to the bedroom door. 'We should take a look in the chest of drawers.'

My grandmother's flat is not big. Nevertheless there are places where only she had access. One of them is her bedroom. The bed takes up almost the entire room. Two metres long, two metres wide. My grandmother had insisted on buying such a big bed. 'In case I can't get up any more one day.' Next to the bed is a dresser, chipboard in natural wood look, the same as the wall unit in the living room. The door creaks as I turn the key. My aunt lets out a low cry. On the top shelf lies the plush-covered hot-water bottle that my grandmother often tucked behind her back in the evenings. A sticky note is attached to the fluffy exterior: *Yeva*. My aunt's name is written neatly on the paper.

Next to the hot water bottle are two cartons of cigarettes, stacked edge to edge. I have never seen my grandmother smoke and I haven't seen the HB brand for a long time. My father reaches his arm out; he is the only one of us who buys a packet of cigarettes every day. But his hand remains hanging in the air. And at that moment, I too see it: a note with his name, *Avi*, is attached to just one packet. On the other it says *Daphne Grigoris*. The letters are written so neatly that we can't have misread them. 'Do you know this woman?' Aunt Yeva looks at us questioningly. We shake our heads.

Jewellery glimmers in the next drawer. A necklace with a flower for a pendant, green and sprinkled with silver glitter dust. *Nisa*, the note says. Next to the necklace, something pink shimmers. A pair of heart-shaped earrings, glittering rhinestones on silver-plated metal. *Karlotta*. It's been a long time since I've seen my full name on a piece of paper. Even my father only rarely calls me that. Gingerly I take the earrings in my hand and enclose them with my fingers as if I had to protect them from my father's rubbish bag.

'Look, there is something else.' Aunt Yeva points to the dresser. Further back on the shelf is a bangle; I carefully pick it up. Unlike the earrings, the gold weighs so heavily in my hand that it must be real. The note lying next to it is smaller than the others. The paper is cracked and has dark stains all over it. The handwriting also looks different. The letters look as if they were written in a hurry, steep and crooked across the paper. *Lilit Kuyumcyan*. Another name I have to read twice. This time, however, it is not addressed to anyone. Only a place: Yerevan, Armenia. 'I told you, your grandmother has been watching too many telenovelas.' My aunt is tapping her forehead. With the other hand, the hot-water bottle firmly in her fingers, she points to the door. 'What about the borek, do you still want to eat it?'

Half an hour later we are standing in front of my grandmother's house on the side of the road, waiting. Nisa fetches the VW Passat from the car park next to the cemetery; in a moment she'll appear around the corner and will drive us home. My father has just thrown the rubbish bag into the big bin. I hold my bag tightly in my hands. I have stored the two photos from my grandmother's wall, the earrings and the gold bangle inside beneath the zipper. The sun is already low in the sky, but the crocuses on the lawn in front of the house are still glowing. My heart beats faster as I turn to my father. 'Will you go to Armenia with me, Dad?'

[...]

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KARLA

That day at the airport, I just ignore the couple. His hiking boots, my sunglasses – if there were a mirror in the departure hall, I would probably not be able to take my eyes off my father and me either. From a distance it is obvious that we ourselves are not sure why we are walking through the airport on this day and whether it really was a good idea. 'I like Bremen airport, it's not so big.' My

father points to the departure board above our heads. 'Are you sure that you booked the flight properly?' I nod and push him on. Until we have passed the security checkpoint, there is always the chance that he might turn around and run back to the exit. It's been two months since my grandmother's funeral. When I'd asked him if he would go to Armenia with me, he just shook his head. 'Course not.' He got into the car with Nisa, in the passenger seat. I climbed into the back seat. We spent the rest of the drive in silence. Normally, I would have bought a train ticket that night and gone home. A few days later I would have called my father and asked him if he had had any good fares in the last few days. As he always does when he's driving his cab, my father would have shouted into the receiver and told me about the radio programme that was getting more boring by the day. We would have laughed at some bad joke that a passenger had told him. But this time I decided to stay longer in Bremen Nord, and the next evening I rang his doorbell. When my father saw me in the stairwell, he looked at me in amazement. 'I'll have to check if I have any fishfingers left,' he said, as he turned and walked ahead of me into the kitchen. The smell of potatoes and bacon fried in butter wafted in from the next-door flat. It was mixed with the smell of cleaning products and the damp that had been emanating from the cellar since the last rain. Lately, my father had been getting a letter from a new housing association every few months. But none of them ever bothered to renovate the house. Like my grandmother's, my father's two-room flat is only sparsely furnished. For as long as I can remember, there has been a filter coffee machine in the kitchen and a half-full ashtray. Only the radio seems to be superfluous. All the stations are static, no matter how carefully you adjust the big knob. Since my father got a smartphone, he has been listening to a Jamaican station on the internet most of the time anyway. That evening, the reggae melodies sounded tinny from the loudspeakers in his kitchen. However, my father didn't seem to trust the smartphone that much, otherwise he would have moved the old radio from the windowsill long ago.

As a child, I sometimes wished I could invite my friends into a big house, like Helena, the girl from my class with the neat pencil case. Instead, I lived with my mother in a three-room flat, and every other weekend at my father's. There was no record collection there, no expensive leather sofa. There was no fitted kitchen and no dining room table with the lamp hanging low over it. I didn't even have my own room but slept in his bed while he slept on the sofa. A few years later I would come here during the week too, especially when my father wasn't here. At midday, when we bunked off school for an hour, Janine and I would sit in the kitchen and heat up frozen pizzas in the oven that you had to hold a match to in order to light it. Before we left the flat again, I went into the bedroom. Next to his bed was a small box with the picture of a princess on it that I'd given him as a child. My father always kept a few grams of grass in it. 'Your dad is so cool,' Janine said when we closed the front door behind us.

When I was sitting in his kitchen after my grandmother's funeral, it smelled of onions and curry rice. The fishfingers in the frying pan had turned the colour I had wished them to be as a child, dark brown, almost black. My father divided the food onto two plates and carried them into the living room to the sofa. We sat down, he handed me a cup of yoghurt and half a lemon. The television was on; some game show. I turned the volume down.

'Have you thought it over, Dad?'

'We always eat fishfingers when you come to visit.'

'That's not what I mean.'

'How is your mother? Is she still exercising too much?'

'Dad, I'm serious. I want to go to Armenia with you.'

'Eat up, the rice is getting cold.'

'After all, it was Grandma's last wish.'

'Have you gone mad? How are you going to find a strange woman there without an address?'

'We can just go and visit the country - you've never been to Armenia either.'

'Oh, Karlotta, it's not good to dwell on these old things.' My father took the remote control from my hand. The next channel was showing an American comedy show. 'Oh, yes, the fat one, he is good!' He chuckled and turned the volume up again. I slowly pushed a fishfinger into my mouth.

A good month later I went back to Bremen Nord again, exactly forty days after my grandmother had died. The Armenian priest had told us to do this. 'When your grandmother leaves the earth for good,' he had pointed from her grave up to the sky, 'you have to say a final goodbye.' This time we all met at my father's flat. He had made kofta and green beans and home-made chips in the oven. While we all ate, he walked back and forth between the kitchen and the living room, bringing pots and dishes and the tea pot, quickly as if he were running away from my question. It was only when we were clearing the table that I caught him in front of the dishwasher. 'You never give up, do you?' My father raised his hands. 'Just like your mother, always arguing.' I was about to leave the room when his voice softened. 'When shall we set off then?' I almost stubbed my toe on the threshold. 'Well, I have time,' I said carefully. The basic sociology course which I was going to give this semester hadn't started yet. My father slapped his hand on the table. 'Well, then book a flight as soon as possible. I don't want your grandmother haunting me from up there.'

We've reached the head of the queue at the airport. My father is breathing heavily. 'If we ever make it to this Armenia, we'll take a luggage trolley.' I try not to grin. For the past three weeks my father had called me almost every day. 'Don't pack too much.' I could buy things like trousers, towels and toothbrushes in Yerevan. 'And don't bring all your books. You'll bust your back if you carry all that stuff.' As if it were easier to set out on a difficult journey if you went without a suitcase.

But today at the airport he suddenly has a travel bag of his own. It is bigger than my backpack. And so heavy that he struggles to get it on the luggage belt. The woman at the check-in desk takes our passports. 'Avedis Kunduraci,' she looks at my father. 'You are very punctual.' Although our flight is not leaving for another four hours. That is why it's not showing on the departure board yet. My father shrugs his shoulders. He had called me at six a.m. I could hear the doors of the regional train closing in the background. 'You're still at home?' He spoke so fast, as if even his voice couldn't wait to get on the plane. Although our flight wasn't leaving until the afternoon. 'Do you want to hang around at the gate for hours on end?' I rubbed my eyes. 'Better than sitting around at home,' my father exclaimed.

At the check-in, I push my backpack after his bag. I too struggle to get it on the conveyor belt. It never takes me long to pack for a trip, but it took me an hour this morning. How hot does it get in the Armenian mountains during the day, how cold at night? Alternately, I pulled clothes out of my wardrobe, trousers, t-shirts and polo-neck jumpers. In the end I put a bit of everything into the backpack. 'Just don't plan too much.' That is the second sentence my father has been repeating like a

mantra to me over the phone during the past few weeks. But I was allowed to choose the holiday apartment. No itinerary, no restaurants. I wasn't even supposed to check the weather forecast. 'Don't stress, we'll just see.' Normally I mumble in agreement when my father makes comments like this and then, once we've hung up, pretend I didn't hear him. Why did I do as he asked this time? Maybe because there is less danger of being disappointed if you don't make plans.

We are sitting at the gate when my father opens his hand luggage. A jute bag that he had quickly pulled out of his backpack at the check-in. He rummages through it for a while and finally pulls out a Tupperware container. Croissants, thickly smeared with butter and blueberry jam. My father puts one in my hand and bites off half of another. Chewing, he reaches into the bag again. A book with a yellow cover comes out with the snow-covered peak of a mountain on its cover. The receipt is still stuck between two pages. 'Look, I found this travel guide at the train station.' Without looking me in the eye, my father starts to browse through it. Most of the photographs are of churches, very old and built of thick stone. 'The Armenians and their monasteries,' my father says. Then he points to a tree growing next to a church wall. Small purple fruits hang down from the branches. 'Mulberries.' His voice grows softer. 'I used to eat them as a child.'

From between the packets of cigarettes in his jacket pocket, my father takes out a pair of reading glasses and pushes them back on his nose. He continues to leaf through the book with raised eyebrows. The next picture shows a woman. She is wearing a leopard-print dressing gown and standing in front of a small stone hut. The colour is flaking off the shutters. 'The Armenians are still so poor.' My father sighs. 'It says so everywhere on the internet.' I am too surprised to reply. In our last conversations on the phone, my father had seemed different. While his voice sounded sombre at the beginning when we talked about our trip, it became lighter and lighter as time went by. Yesterday he even told me that he had been to the bank, 'exchanging money'. Euros to Drams.

My gaze falls on his walking shoes again. He never goes to the mountains; even on long strolls he complains of knee pain. How come he is so well prepared for this trip? To get a better look at the pictures in the guide book, I go to brush a strand of hair from my face. Startled, I grab my hair. My sunglasses are gone. I turn to the left, to the right, but they are nowhere to be seen, not on the seat, not on the ground. My chest tightens. I grab my hair once more. The sunglasses are gone. The stabbing in my chest is growing stronger.

My father has buried his face deep in the guidebook. He doesn't move when I get up from the seat. Only when I bend down and look under the rows of chairs does he lift his head. 'My sunglasses,' I say, louder than I mean to. The last thing I need right now is for him to tell me not to get upset. But my father just looks at me questioningly. '*The sunglasses, you know the ones!*' Finally he seems to understand. He hastily puts the guidebook aside, slides off the seat and searches the carpet on his knees. He pushes his head under the upholstered rows of seats, gropes around in the darkness, but in vain. Then my father, still kneeling on the ground, reaches for the guidebook. But this time he doesn't open it. He knocks on the spine of the book like on a piece of wood. Three times. With a wave of his hand he tells me to do the same. 'Then you pinch your earlobe and kiss your fingers, that way we trick the evil omen.' I have to smile, but then I start thinking again. Why did my father let himself be talked into this trip? And, the main thing: why is he suddenly taking it so seriously? It's as if something inside him has started to crumble since my grandmother's funeral. In a place where the rock was particularly inaccessible, a narrow gap has opened. Slowly the pressure in my chest eases. As we sit back in our seats, I gently touch my father's arm and he grunts.

'Does the name mean anything to you?'

'What name?'

'Lilit Kuyumcyan, the woman from grandma's list.'

I had put on the earrings that grandma left me straight after the funeral. But I removed them a few minutes later because my skin underneath began to itch. I slid the bangle through my fingers again and again over the next few days. Two fine lines ran through the gold, carefully shaped, without the slightest deviation. Tiny discs hung from the bangle, ten of them, one after the other, threaded through the gold from little loops. But unlike the two lines, the discs suddenly stopped as if someone hadn't had time to finish the work. I tried to remember if I had ever seen my grandmother wearing the bangle. But apart from the cross, she hadn't worn any jewellery for years. I examined the inside of the bangle. No words were engraved on it. 'How are you supposed to find someone without knowing who you are looking for?' my father had said to me. The morning before we were due to fly, I wrapped the bangle in a tissue and carefully put it in the compartment at the back of my small bag made of dark leather, my hand luggage. Ever since, my fingers have rested on the zipper.

'Kuyumcyan was your great-grandmother Armine's surname.' My father closes the guidebook. Lost in thought, he stares out at the runway. I open my mouth but close it again straight away. A plane takes off, another slowly rises above the horizon. 'Hopefully we won't be flying through any air pockets today.' My father follows the planes with his eyes. I shrug my shoulders. It's still twenty minutes until take-off.

[...]

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AVI

Even after three years in the monastery, Avi was still wondering about the walls. They were thicker than any other wall he had ever seen before. And Avi might only be fourteen years old, but he had certainly seen more walls during his wanderings through his home town of Istanbul than all the priests here in Jerusalem put together. Walls of ancient buildings that had stood up to the salt water

drops in the air for centuries. Walls of high-rise buildings that would collapse like a house of cards in the great earthquake that the whole city was waiting for.

Avi had seen the walls of churches, walls of mosques, walls of houses in which politicians made laws, walls of people who owned half the city. He had never understood why rich people liked to live in houses with the thin walls. The walls were not made of stone, but of cardboard. So unstable that they had to be protected by another wall. Not a very clever calculation, if you asked him. However, Avi had never seen such a modern building from the inside. His father's house had had no walls at all, just wooden panels that the wind whistled through. And they didn't need a stone wall to protect them. Only a very stupid thief would have thought of breaking into their house.

But now it was a matter of breaking out. Avi stood in front of the wall, supporting Mher's foot in his hand, and pushed his friend up the wall. Charles, called Charlie by everyone at their boarding school, had long since reached the top. And Avi himself didn't need any help, he could get up just about any wall. He looked around. The three of them had timed the moment for when the gardener was visiting his lemon tree. By now they knew his routine, once in the morning before school, twice in the afternoon when school was out. The tree grew in the middle of the courtyard and was screened by a fence. The more effort the gardener made to hide the lemons from the pupils, the more Avi and the others crept around the tree. In the evenings, when they lay in their beds, they plotted how they could cut a hole in the meshes and empty the branches of fruit. Right down to the last one, surely the sourest of all. Once, a couple of bigger boys had actually succeeded. When Avi returned to the boarding school from class, the tree was stripped of fruit and there was a jug of lemonade in the hallway. If he had seen who the thieves were, he would have bowed low before them.

Mher stood with both feet on the wall. Avi took one last look over his shoulder into the courtyard. No-one to be seen. He pressed his fingers against the wall and swung himself up. The wall was so solid that he could easily sit on it with his legs stretched out. For a moment, Avi paused. The afternoon sun warmed the stone beneath his feet like a radiator. The monastery was visible from up here. The people who had built it a long time ago must have been the fearful type. Why else were there two of all the important things here – two churches and even two schools? One in the courtyard from which Avi had just climbed out, and one on the opposite side. There - where he himself had lived until recently. Avi jumped. When he reached the ground, he gave the other two a quick high-five, then off they ran. It had been barely fifteen minutes since the maths teacher had closed her book and sent them out of the door. They had two hours before they would be called for dinner in the main hall. It was the only time of the day when the teachers were not busy making life boring for Avi and the others. In a shady corner at the edge of the wall, the three of them stopped once more. They had made it out of the courtyard, but freedom was still a long way off. The monastery complex was enclosed by another wall. And it was so high that even Avi couldn't climb over it. 'Which exit do we take?' Mher looked around. 'We can forget the one at the front,' Charlie said. 'That's where the porter with the glasses sits.' 'The main thing is not the one on the right, do you hear me, Mher?' Avi frowned. He knew that his friend would prefer to take the easiest way, but of course it was the least exciting. 'I don't understand how cacti and stone houses are enough.' Charlie nodded in agreement and turned to the left. The third exit led into the Arab quarter, the part of East Jerusalem where in every alley there was a whole world waiting to be discovered. Avi reached for Charlie's upper arm. 'We still have a bit of time,' he said and gestured to a path a few metres

away from them. It led to the other side of the monastery, there where their old school used to be. 'Come on, let's go and scare the girls.'

Avi would rather have learned the bible off by heart than say it in front of the two of them, but lately images kept popping up in his head. The playground where he had taught the other children backgammon. The teacher who had taught him the Armenian alphabet. At first, Avi never spoke up when he was asked to repeat vocabulary. At home, he had spoken Armenian with his parents, but always the same words, integrated into their Turkish sentences. Here at the boarding school, the priests insisted that they speak Armenian with them. And grumbled when they heard the boys speaking Turkish in their free time. But the teacher had never picked on Avi without warning. Most of the time he sang songs with the students because a language is learned most easily when the melody writes the words into the heart, he said. The teacher particularly praised Avi's voice. Once he even asked him if he would like to learn the piano. Of course he had shaken his head back then. He was already in danger of being considered a nerd because he had moved up three times in two years. First to the second, then to the fourth and finally to sixth grade. And this despite the fact that he had had so little schooling in Istanbul that he had initially been sent to pre-school in Jerusalem at the age of eleven.

What Avi really wanted to see were the girls, especially Anush, of course. With the bows in her hair, Anush reminded him a little of the children in the old black-and-white films he had seen in the open-air cinema in Istanbul. Anush had sat two rows in front of him at school last year. When she sang, her two pigtails bobbed up and down, and Avi imagined himself dancing with her to the tune. In all that time, he had never once spoken to her. And now it was too late. Now he was not even allowed to see Anush any more. A few months ago, Avi's life had changed completely. For the second time. The first time was three years ago, when his father sent him from Istanbul to Jerusalem. He hadn't told him why. His father had announced it in the kitchen and Avi had not contradicted him, because it was evening and, at home in the evenings, when his father was tired, it was better to keep your mouth shut, especially in the kitchen where the cooking spoons lay around. Besides, the word had echoed in his head. Jerusalem – a name like an adventure. The very next day, Avi had climbed into the white box with the words EL AL painted on the side in blue. Until then, Avi had only seen aeroplanes in the sky or rather he had heard them and asked himself if the people inside were deaf with all the noise they made. But now he himself was sitting in one of those machines and he found it surprisingly quiet. But he could feel it falling. Every few minutes a little bit. It wobbled, deep into his belly. 'Turbulence' said the man in the black robe who had introduced himself to Avi and the other boys as Pastor Hayg called it. Pastor Hayg had picked Avi up that morning at the gate of the church in their neighbourhood. His father had said to the priest: 'His flesh is yours, his bones are mine.' The teachers were allowed to beat him, but not kill him. He had given Avi a brief hug goodbye. But Avi had stiffened. Little did he know that the aeroplane was not just taking him on a trip, but to a new life.

Mher and Charlie had sat in the seats right behind him, they had slept in the same room at boarding school to this day. It was also the two of them who told Avi that they were the social work of the Armenian Church. Children who were so poor that they were gifted a bed and an education. 'You ungrateful boy,' Pastor Hayg said every time he caught Avi skiving. Yet Avi had never asked for help.

At first, he had just looked down at the floor in silence when he was scolded. Until his life changed for the second time on his fourteenth birthday. At home in Istanbul he would have spent that day with his friends, maybe having a fish roll by the harbour. A pack of cigarettes in his pocket and, with a bit of luck, a beer or two. When his mother sent an envelope from Germany and he managed to get his hands on it before his father, maybe even a few more beers. But the Bosphorus was many kilometres away. In Jerusalem he didn't celebrate his birthday, he moved. From one side of the monastery to the other. Since then, it had no longer been enough that Avi went to church twice a week, on Saturdays and Sundays. Now he had to go to prayer three times a day. And he had to go to another school. Without backgammon and above all, without girls. Since then, the only time he had seen Anush was when he had stayed in bed in the mornings and claimed he had a headache. During the break, he would sneak to her courtyard and hide behind a bush. While the branches scratched his forehead, he imagined Anush batting her eyelashes with which she could most probably fly. The wind would take them both away from here, far away from here, to Istanbul, or even better straight to Germany.

'The girls went home ages ago.' Charlie pointed at his wristwatch. The hand was so far past the end of school that the door was probably even locked by now. Avi grunted. Then he followed Charlie out of the monastery into the maze of alleys. As soon as they left the walls behind them, they started running. They zigzagged through the narrow streets. Past men in caftans and women with shawls over their dark hair. Some house entrances smelled of roasted meat, from others there was the sound of people working hard. They ran to the left, to the right, so fast that no-one could tell if they knew the way very well or not at all. But Avi knew exactly where to turn so as to avoid running into anyone. Three corners before the little shop where Pastor Hayg bought the candles. Into the side street parallel to the barber where his sports teacher had his beard trimmed. There was one path here in Jerusalem that Avi would have found even if he had been woken up at two in the morning without a single light in the streets. The way to the Church of the Resurrection. That was the only excursion Pastor Hayg took him and the others on from the monastery. Once a week, always the same route. They walked two abreast through the alleys, Pastor Hayg in front, next to him a man holding a staff with a metal tip in his hand. Every few steps, the man tapped the ground with it as if the rhythm of the stick could keep the students from straying from the path. And even though they left the boarding school at the same time each week, Pastor Hayg kept glancing at his wristwatch as he walked. Avi knew that they would have to share the Church of the Resurrection with other Christians, with Catholics and orthodox Greeks; even Egyptian Copts and Ethiopians had a small niche there. And yet Avi grinned every time he thought about the fact that they all believed in the same God but fought over who could talk to him at what time of the day, even at what time. So much so, in fact, that a Muslim kept the key to their church.

Avi blinked. All he could see of Charlie now was the bandage. In dirty white, it fluttered from his arm like a makeshift patched flag. Charlie's body was always broken in one way or another. Last week he'd fallen off a rotten branch and had to stay in bed for two days. But that didn't stop him from galloping through the alleys like a crazed donkey. Avi followed him without protesting. He'd reached his goal after all. To get outside the monastery walls, where Pastor Hayg least wanted him to be. Annoying him was the only fun that Avi still had here in the monastery. How on earth did his father get the idea of sending him here? Living at boarding school. Becoming a priest. He wondered if his grandmother had known about it?

Finally Charlie stopped. Avi immediately saw where he was headed. To the place where you can find the best adventures in every city in the world: the bazaar. Avi was certain that there was none better than the one in East Jerusalem. He breathed in. Not through his mouth, as he'd done on the street, but through his nose. Deep and long. At the entrance to the bazaar, there was the smell of coffee and cardamon. Old men sat here on stools and brewed mocha in copper pots. They filled it into small glasses with gold rims and handed them to passers-by. Even customers who were in a hurry would stop and take a sip. A clear head made for better haggling.

Avi and the others pushed their way past the men and their copper pots into the catacombs. The alleys arched above their heads. It was so dark in the bazaar that it was only when he stepped close to them that Avi could make out the turquoise mosaics and the colourful patterns of the carpets hanging on the walls. You could buy anything worth having if you had money in your pocket. But Avi had no money. So he took another deep breath. He had never smelled anything like the smells here in the bazaar. Despite the fact that he'd grown up in a market. But the bazaar in Jerusalem smelled different from the one at home in Istanbul. Different spices were piled up like pyramids here, and the leather of the bags sold in Jerusalem had a different smell. 'Could you identify a city by the smell of its markets?' Abi spoke so softly that the others could not hear him. His words were swallowed by the arches, but he didn't repeat them. There was so much to see here at the market that you could not spend too long on a single thought.

On their way to the Church of the Resurrection with Pastor Hayg they also passed the bazaar every week. But they never stopped. The staff hit the ground too quickly. But now that there was no knocking, even Charlie strolled slowly from stall to stall, trailing his limp bandage behind him. The merchants who beckoned each customer with a friendly smile did not give the three of them a single glance. The fact that they had no money and not even a purse made the boys invisible. In contrast to the other visitors, this meant that they could look around the market undisturbed. One stall particularly caught Avi's attention. He didn't look at the goods; he was watching the customer. The man who was haggling over a pot with the seller wore his blonde hair shaved so short that it seemed almost white. His tight abdominals were apparent beneath his shirt and a machine gun dangled over his shoulder like a handbag. Had the man been there when the bombs exploded? About a year ago, the windows in the classroom had rattled, the explosions close enough to touch. No-one told them why they had started. Nor did they know why they stopped after almost a week. So Abi had taken the bombs the way you take things when you can't change them.

'Hey, are you daydreaming again?' Mher pulled him onwards. Charlie had reached the end of the alley; his hair was already shining in the daylight. Avi hurried to follow him. Even he couldn't memorise the pathways in the labyrinth of the bazaar. As a result, none of them could tell where they would come out when they left the bazaar. When Avi stepped out behind Mher, he looked around. The houses were similar to those on the other side, but they were closer together and their outlines already cast shadows. Charlie was off again. Avi ran after him. But something was different on this side of the bazaar. Avi felt people staring at them. While the boys had just blended into the chaos around them, they now no longer seemed to fit into the scene on the street. An older woman stopped, and a man pointed to them. Avi did not blame them. Since he had been here in Israel, he no longer knew exactly who he was. They continued walking, leaving the people behind them until they no longer saw anyone on the streets.

Suddenly Avi heard a bang. A red pebble landed a few metres away from him. The stone was not big, but it was thrown so hard that it dug a small hole in the ground. There was another bang; sand splattered against Avi's leg. He looked around but could see no one. Suddenly stones, big and small, flew from all directions. 'Yahudi, yahudi.' Avi looked around but couldn't see where the voices were coming from. He was sure they belonged to children. He did not understand their language. Only this one word, 'Alyahudi' – 'Jew' - which confused him even more, for the shouts seemed to be aimed at him and Charlie and Mher. The next load of stones. Avi ducked under a window ledge. Charlie cried out. Blood was dripping from his forehead. 'Run, hurry,' Avi shouted in Turkish. He grabbed Charlie by the arm and shouted once more in Mher's direction. Then they ran back where they had come from, on and on until they met people again. To the bazaar and further, until they could finally see the outline of the monastery. For the first time, the walls did not seem to Avi like the walls of a prison. The monastery was suddenly a bulwark, a safe place for those who had overdone their adventure. But above all for those who were being pursued.

He stopped and gasped for breath. The others also slowed down. Charlie bent down and touched his head. The blood had dried; a small gash gaped on his forehead. The stone had only grazed him. Charlie would have to scrub the stains from his trousers later. Fortunately, the blood was barely visible against the dark fabric. It would be easy to remove, unlike the wax that regularly dripped from their candles onto the robes. They had to lay toilet paper over those stains and iron over it until all the wax was absorbed.

'You again!' The scream made Avi wince. He was about to start running again, when he realised that the voice was not coming from behind him, but from in front. A man rushed towards them from the shadows of the monastery. Avi recognised him by his silhouette: small and bulging in all the places where a gym teacher shouldn't be bulging. It was only at that moment that Avi realised that they had not run to one of the side entrances. They were standing directly outside the main entrance. 'Run off, but too stupid to sneak back in, right?' Avi could already smell his breath. The peppermints that the gym teacher sucked couldn't mask the smell. 'Well, I'll show you what a stupid idea that was!' With one hand, the gym teacher grabbed Avi's ear, with the other, Charlie's. Ignoring the wound on his forehead, he pulled them both along with him. Mher trotted after them. In the courtyard, right next to the fence round the lemon tree, the gym teacher finally stopped. Without removing his fingers from their ears. 'Avedis and Charlie, of course,' he shouted. 'And Mher, you are stupid enough to join in?' Avi said nothing. He knew that his hands would hurt again later. They would probably have to stand in front of the wall again and stare at the stones. Like that time just before Christmas, when he had had the idea of taking a slingshot and shooting marbles at the school windows. One marble struck. It punched a hole in the glass, but it didn't shatter it. So he and the others had taken another shot. They had had to stare at the wall for three days. Luckily, they still had the marbles in their pockets. When the gardener disappeared to his lemon tree, they threw the little glass balls, which already had a few cracks, across the sand. One after the other. The one who got the farthest won.

'Squat down!' Avi and the others squatted down. They knew this from class - bending their knees and then standing to attention, that was the only thing the teacher did with them during the lesson. Standing to attention, at ease, to attention, at ease and the right leg to the side. And squat. Until Mher fell over. The gym teacher went over to him and pulled him up by his ears. 'I said squat,' he barked, 'have you no respect?' Mher went back down, his legs staggering. But now Avi

straightened up. The gym teacher took a step towards him, but he remained where he was without moving. Anger rose up in him, black and hot.

‘So you don’t want to obey?’ The gym teacher was shouting now; Avi put his hands on his hips. ‘Oh, so you think you’re brave, huh?’ The teacher snorted. ‘Do you think you’re stronger than me?’ Avi shook his head. ‘But I will be when I grow up.’

For a moment, Avi thought his ears would be ripped from his head. Fingers dug into the flesh, a dull pain reaching all the way to the corners of his mouth. The gym teacher left the others standing. He dragged Avi with him, into the building, up the stairs. Step by step, up to the headmaster’s office. While the heat had built up in the courtyard, the building was pleasantly cool. The heat in Avi’s stomach was also decreasing. The thick walls, which absorbed the heat of the day on the outside, preserved the cold of the night inside. Avi studied the back of the man standing by the window of the large room. He looked as if he would rather be outside in the evening sun than in here among the old books. ‘A beautiful day, don’t you think?’ the headmaster asked without turning around. Avi nodded. ‘I can understand that you find the world out there interesting.’ The headmaster turned around. Avi tried to interpret his expression. Unlike the gym teacher, he didn’t raise his eyebrows, didn’t even frown. ‘But you are not a little boy any more, Avedis,’ the headmaster said seriously. ‘And life isn’t all fun and games; you have to learn that if you want to become a priest.’ ‘But I don’t want that.’ Avi bit his lip. He was one of the best in his class. Although he never studied, he knew most of the names of countries and cities. He could show on a map where Turkey was, where Israel, where Armenia. He knew why Armenia was a country that they all called home here, even those who had never been there. ‘If you want, you could make it to patriarch,’ his old teacher had said to him. The headmaster tilted his head. ‘But surely you know how lucky you are?’

‘No-one asked me if I wanted to come here.’ Avi ducked but nothing happened. Slowly he straightened up. The ruler was still on the desk. Calmly the headmaster continued to speak. ‘Good, then I’ll ask you now: what do you want?’ Avi’s eyes widened. He wanted to say something, but no words came out of his mouth. Instead, images appeared; the gym teacher, the walls, a wooden house, Anush, his father, even his grandmother. The headmaster repeated his question. Then it burst out of him. ‘I want to go home.’ This time Avi pulled his head right down. He waited a moment, then two. When he looked up again, the headmaster said: ‘If that’s the case, call your father, he should buy you a ticket for the flight home.’ Avi snorted. ‘My father doesn’t even have a telephone. If you want to get rid of me, you’ll have to arrange the flight yourself.’ The headmaster gestured silently to the door.

A few days later, Avi was eating breakfast in the dining hall. He was chewing listlessly on a piece of bread with hummus and discussing with Mher why everyone in Israel was so crazy about this chickpea paste when it tasted like gruel made of sandstone. Then Pastor Hayg approached their table. ‘Hurry up, Avi,’ he said. ‘Pack your bags.’

His plane left that same afternoon.

[...]

P. 201-212

MARYAM

Back then, shortly before her wedding to Hagop, her mother had taken her to the town centre. She had given her the green dress that made her look so grown up and had walked with her to an office building. Inside, her mother had knocked on a door and said: 'It's me, Armine Kuyumcuoglu.' The man had looked up briefly as they crossed the threshold. Her mother had pressed banknotes into his hand. And he had handed her a document. Maryam could read numbers. Her mother had taught her to count so that the traders in the market would not cheat her. In this document that her mother was holding in her hand, she was given something for free, for once: four years of her life. On paper, she was eighteen, not fourteen. 'You want to marry, don't you?' her mother asked on the way home. Maryam nodded. 'Then be happy, because now you are old enough.' In fact, Maryam had already laid out her clothes weeks before the wedding. She wanted to stuff them in the bag as soon as the donkey cart stopped in front of her door. But when she went to Hagop's small flat after the wedding, she sensed that her new life was going to be different from her mother's, but not easier. Hagop got up every morning, sat at the table and ate whatever she put out for him before he set off to the cobbler's shop. At noon, she filled two metal boxes. One contained rice or potatoes, and the other aubergines or courgettes in tomato sauce, some days minced meat too. Maryam clamped the boxes together with a band and took them to her husband in the shop. Then she returned home so that the next meal would be ready on time when Hagop came back from work.

While he ate, her husband barely spoke to her. 'What should a man have to say to a woman?' he replied the one time she had asked him. Only when she got pregnant with Avi did he suddenly have more words for her. He told her about the customers in the cobbler's shop; sometimes he even laughed. But most of the time he talked about the military, about the great war they had prepared for, although he and the other soldiers were never called up. His eyes darkened so much that Maryam quickly put another piece of baklava on his plate. But since Avi had been born, silence had returned to the flat. For several months, Hagop had hardly spoken to her at all. He just asked: 'You haven't been talking outside, have you? You'll end up telling a stranger your real name.'

Maryam hastily shook her head. Ever since she was a child, she had removed her first name on the doorstep like a coat. At home she was Maryam, outside she was Meryem. Hagop's name was Hussein. Only the H was above the door of the cobbler's shop in front of Kunduracı; his surname, which didn't need to be hidden because it was already Turkish. As soon as her son could walk, Maryam would call him Ali outside in front of the neighbours. That is why she had christened him Avedis and given him the nickname Avi. The priest raised his eyebrows when he heard it and even she herself had never met an Avedis shortened in this way. But her son would only have a single letter to switch around when he left the house, so that he would not make a mistake.

'We have a different name on the street.' Her mother had often said that to her when she was little. Sometimes she added: 'Be happy that you can do it. Imagine if you lived in a village where everyone knows what kind of family you are from.' Once, Maryam had dared to ask her mother why she hadn't just given her a Turkish name. She had looked at Maryam in such astonishment that she never asked the question again. Not even to herself when she was pregnant with Avi years later.