

The Cocoon / Fatma

The days come and go. We get even more furniture from the German neighbours. I'm rather pleased about the doll they gave us. She's missing a leg, but I don't think it's a tragedy. I knit her a little dress out of an old pillowcase so that she looks whole again. Yılmaz finds a porcelain pot. I brew tea in it, even if it does taste a little bitter here, I don't mind, I'm slowly making this place my new home. The teapot gives me the foundation I need to spread my wings.

Yılmaz gives me 20 German marks so that I can go out shopping on my own. First, I think about all the things I could buy for my family in Türkiye with the money. But it's still too early. I take the note and go into a shop, I don't really pay any attention to the packaging. A man in a white coat wearing glasses stood behind the counter- this is how professors dress back home. He wants to say something to me. *Nikkis, nikkis ...* I throw a few items into the basket, I give the man the money, and he gives me two coins back. I have four German marks still left in the bag and with it I buy bread from the bakery and return home proudly. Yılmaz gets back from work, looks at the items and roars with laughter. I bought soap instead of butter, liver pâté instead of jam, shampoo instead of oil. He laughed like a colt on his wedding day. *May God punish you, I say, you're making me look like a fool, you're laughing at me!* He laughs louder, I throw the packages at his enormous head, he hides behind the door and carries on laughing.

The men come in the evenings, some of them even have wives now. With each meeting we drink between two and three pots of tea. The women's faces are like crumbling garden gates. *We're tormented by longing, longing for people, here you only see machines,* most of them complain. *We have to come to terms with our fate* I snap back at them like a commander. The men's joy is lost too after a short while. They're getting fed up with the life in cheap worker's hostels. They've got the rent, the responsibility, and a self-pitying wife. Even the pleasure of fucking doesn't make up for all the downsides, the women just end up pregnant and moan even more.

Yılmaz gives me 50 German marks; I should go for a wander around the park with the women and get them to cheer up. Good, the parks are the cheapest places after all. Every time we get together, we wonder why the ducks are still alive swimming in the pond, they should have gone in the pot a long time ago. Ah well, new country, new customs. Before I sort my own problems out, I'll take on the role of the experienced tour guide *ha maşallah!* Every weekend we get together with the newcomers. We give it our all trying to turn village women into elegant ladies. Even though we wear miniskirts we don't want to be completely godless, so the headscarf stays on. Every evening the West German Radio features a Turkish broadcast. We hear the voice of Yüksel Pazarkay urging us to act reasonably: *please ladies, don't go out onto the street in your indoor clothing, you don't want to give guest workers a bad name now, do you?*, whatever that's supposed to mean. But obviously we're used to doing what we're told. We are willing servants of fate.

On the border with the Netherlands, it's said that there's a small village called Lobberich. Workers are needed. The bosses stand outside of the gates with big posters and throw their arms around everyone that passes. Yılmaz, my great oaf of a husband, doesn't want to work in the mine and wants to see the village for himself. *We have our home here, a little place of our own, please let us stay here,* I beg him, but he ignores my pleading. We pack our things and travel to this small village, Lobberich. Yılmaz gets a job at the foundry. I'm still waiting for a child. All I want is for everything that flows within me to sprout into new life, but nothing is happening. My womb remains a barren chamber, a little stage for my monologue. Our first family picture comes from the village. Mama is in the middle, Hasan on the right, Mehmed Ali on the left. Hasan's handwriting is on the back, *a lifeless memory of my sister,* he writes, *Lifeless? Come on, Hasan, why lifeless?* I can see what makes your

whole world go round just from your faces alone. I put the photo on the bed side table next to the alarm clock. When Yılmaz sleeps, I speak to the photograph, and I cry secretly. Yes, I long for my home too, a longing that is often stronger than the pull of fate.

Months pass and I'm still not pregnant. *Yılmaz, I want to work, find me a job.* He manages to get me a job at the shoe factory. Sevim, who works on the same line as me, tells me she's pregnant. I hug her. Afterwards I can't help but think: where's my baby? Tears fall to my feet. I can't stop them. The foreman Willi stands in front of me and shouts at me, I don't understand him. He shouts and my lips tremble. He shouts, I cry, he shouts, my lips tremble more. He gets even louder. I throw a shoe at his head and at the top of my lungs I yell *you asshole!* God forgive me! Shocked, he takes a step back. So that's how it is here too, you have to stand your ground and puff your chest out like a cockerel if you want to be left alone. I shut myself into a toilet cubicle and I cry until at last my tears refuse to come.

In the evenings there's a programme on the television called Heidi. It's about a girl without parents who lives in the mountains with her grandpa, it's always cheerful and everyone runs about and dances barefoot. They even look happy drinking goat's milk. Heidi is my sister-in-arms. We laugh together and we cry together. I gather a couple of pairs of shoes from the factory that were sorted from the bin. I want to send them to her. I ask Willi if it's possible to do so and he laughs at me. *What an asshole!* Can anybody help me? I think about Heidi, she's going to catch a cold, there must be a way to send the shoes to her, there must be!

Our family grows and flourishes in Germany. Many of them come as tourists, they remain here, then they find work illegally- just like my brother. Until they find their own place to live, we take them all in ourselves. As I've said already, Yılmaz is a great big oaf. Complete strangers he met in the pub try to persuade him that he can import weaving machines from Istanbul and sell them on here for four times the price. He quits his job and flies to Istanbul. And guess who doesn't come back again... Yılmaz. I go to the bank, and I tell the man behind the desk to give me 100 German marks. He shakes his head, *that I can't do*, he says, *you're 20,000 marks in debt.* Ach Yılmaz, what have you done, what have you done...

Yılmaz forged my signature to take a loan out at the bank. After six months he comes back home with his tail between his legs. Of course, someone's ripped him off. One day five men knock on the door wanting to see Yılmaz. *Why* I ask. He borrowed money from them too. My brother-in-law Mustafa and I beg to have another two months. I run straight to Willi and put myself on the rota for every weekend shift and every hour of overtime I can get. I spend more than twelve hours a day in the factory. I count it all up in bed and it's still not nearly enough. I go to my brothers, to my friends and to relatives who found jobs with Yılmaz's help to beg them all for money. The latches are thorny, the hinges are sharp, the locks are rusted. *Unfortunately, Fatma, unfortunately, Fatma ...*

My brothers are already having their first houses built in Türkiye. *Unfortunately, sister, unfortunately, sister ...* they tell me I should split up with Yılmaz. *But without him we'd all still be in Türkiye, he made it all possible for us to be here.* Nobody wants to hear a word of what I'm saying. No, I won't turn my back on my husband over money. He's lazy, too comfortable perhaps, but compared to other men he's nice to me. No! No! I don't want to hear another word of it, I may as well be deaf, I may as well be deaf. I drive to Grevenbroich with Mustafa, my brother-in-law, to see an old colleague of Yılmaz called Ibrahim. I tell him the whole story. *Yılmaz has behaved like a complete and utter fool, but I beg you, sister Fatma, don't leave him. You know a divorced woman is like prey for people with bad intentions, even your brothers will show you the door after three days* he says as he counts the damned money in his hands.

The complete oaf that I call husband doesn't learn his lesson and tries his hand at another get-rich-quick scheme. He buys every kind of garlic sausage he can in bulk from a Turkish merchant in Düsseldorf and tries to sell the foul-smelling things in the pub. Who on earth wants to buy sausage here? Everyone wants to save up for more houses in Türkiye, one isn't enough, two is the bare minimum, three, four, then a summer house, a shop perhaps ... Fatma is sitting on a mountain of debt whilst everyone else is off building their houses.

Yılmaz inherits a pub- that's a second job for me then. Before my shift at the factory starts, my day kicks off with cleaning in the pub. After my shift in the factory, it doesn't stop. The dishes in the sink, the shitty toilets, full ash-trays, everyone and everything relies on me. I'm still not pregnant. I don't have time to comb my hair, but I still take in the neighbours' and relatives' children. I cook for them, breathe the air of childhood into my lungs, sing lullabies, knit vests and socks. One morning I'm sweeping leaves away from the door of the pub and Mother comes to me holding a plastic bag. She's argued with her daughter-in-law again, *of course you can stay with me, Mother*. She sets herself down on the step by the entrance as a German woman and a dark-skinned child pass us by hand in hand. My eyes brim with tears, *God, You are the Almighty, You are gracious, please ...*

My mother can't control her temper once again, *what's the point of a child like that, you don't want something like a puppy, do you? A child, mother, I would like to have a child, it could be made out of dust and mud for all I care, there's nothing I want more in life than a child that I can hold to my breast*. Yılmaz brought home a video player and a couple of tapes, on one of them my favourite actress Fatma Girik plays a nomad who moves from one land to another with her folk on camelback. She gives birth to a child. Whilst finding somewhere new to settle, her child is stolen by an eagle from the cradle on the camel. She hunts the eagle down and finds it on the crest of a mountain, then she fights for her child and then they both fall off the mountain and perish. *Burn in Hell, you rotten eagle* I roar at the television screen, I howl and roar, I howl and roar, I howl with snot and tears, *you rotten, vile eagle*.

I quit my job at the shoe factory and start working at another company that manufactures carburettors for Mercedes. The hourly wage is better so I can pay off the debt quicker. Everything's going fairly well in the pub, the earnings aren't bad, but the bottom line is the business is losing money. The punters, as well as friends and relatives, borrow money from Yılmaz. With the money they borrowed they go to casinos and brothels in secret. Yılmaz can't bring himself to say no. The list of debtors keeps getting longer and longer. The regulars only pay for tea so they can pace themselves and play cards all day long. For many, even going into the kitchen isn't crossing the line, I'm greeted daily with an overflowing sink and an empty fridge.

My brother-in-law Mustafa, who's been living with us since his arrival, has two children with his wife who remained in a village in Türkiye. The pair don't particularly like each other, in fact he's rarely in Türkiye, yet it's still possible to have children somehow, it's the work of God!

Again, I come back home after a long shift to find both children, Iskender and Hasan, in the pub on the fruit machines. Mustafa had flown back to Türkiye to see his children. He told his wife who lives in the village that he's taking them into town to buy clothes and toys, instead he brought them here to Germany. The two of them look afraid and malnourished and haven't got a clue where they've ended up. I shout at my brother-in-law, *you have no right to take the children away from their mother, you can't do that to a woman*. Yılmaz sends his father a telegram telling them not to worry about the children, they're in Germany now.

Even though my sister-in-law feels awfully sorry for me in this situation, it's wonderful to have children running about the house. This is how time flies by... the time that always seems to stand still is passing at last. I've been here for thirteen years. I still don't have a child. I go to see the hoca, an Islamic teacher and spiritualist, and receive blessings, I even pay to see psychics. Yilmaz takes me to a clinic in Cologne. The doctor says there's a narrowing in the fallopian tubes that can be corrected with an operation. Yilmaz translates. Before he could utter another word, I lie on the bed and spread my legs. *Cut out everything that's blocking the way, now, at once!* I beg the doctor, *now, right now.*

[Photo] The first photo in Germany: Fatma and Yilmaz, 1967

[Photo] Guests arrive, 1967

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