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Blue Jewellery

Novel

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Based on a true story

Our group of children forms a herd.

The hay is our bed. The smell of cut summer. We lie across and atop one another. Who can say who this foot or that hand belongs to.

Mother?

We breathe deeply. We smell like the past day.

Like sweat, like sun. We fart into each other's faces.

I hear them say that we are ten children. I hear them say that I am the seventh.

Like a cow my mother drops children, one after the other, between sowing and harvest and sowing. Big and heavy she stands in the noonday heat and teds the hay. Between two haystacks, a child then falls from her lap. A girl, a boy, a girl, a boy, a girl, a boy, like pearls on a string.

Just once it was boy after boy, but he died, and then a girl came right after.

There are also other herds of children on our hills.

Our names are Aliye, Hüseyin, Fatma, Mehmet, Yıldız, Ali, Filiz, Sayit, Zehra, Remzi, Selin, Veli.

Goats, kids, sheep, lambs, children, cows, calves, donkey, horse.

We all are herd and shepherds at the same time. We herd each other. Nurture one another and hit each other in the flanks.

Mother protects us from father, father protects us from wolves, and us children protect each other like the sheep and lambs and goats and kids protect one another, Hüseyin and Mehmet herd

the cows, Sayit and Zehra the goats, Yıldız the sheep.

I herd the lambs.

Wolves come flying over the hill, one after the other, six, seven, a pack. They lunge for the sheep, teeth first, rip up the prey, guts and stomachs full of grass, rip the flesh from each other's mouths, trembling skeletons prancing among the kill.

Feeding.

The wolves eat the sheep. They gut them. They rummage around in their intestines.

Lungs, bowels, liver, spleen, heart.

Dying is red. Blood on white wool. Blood on green meadow. Blood trails, streaks of blood, dripping, flowing, pouring blood.

When the wolf pack retreats, the flies come.

Black clouds above the dead.

Yıldız suddenly stands among the sheep. Her black plait is dripping, still wet from playing at the stream.

Father is going to beat me to death! Father is going to beat me to death!

And:

Filiz! Filiz!

As if I knew what to do. I sense behind me:

Father. See him in Yıldız's face. He runs up the hill, lifts his tanned hands and cries desperately: Allah!

On the battlefield lies the tea, the sugar, the salt for the animals,
lie the clothes for the coming year.

Father calls for the sons. Hüseyin and Mehmet run to him and
curse and wail: Allah! Then they throw the carcasses onto
wheelbarrows.

In wheelbarrows the dead jolt back to the stable.

Yıldız has disappeared.

The rest of the family gathers in the stable, guts the animals.

Mother laments the bloodstained wool that she can't wash or dye
white anymore.

When it gets dark, father looks for Yıldız. Menacingly, he walks
through the stable and across the field. Yıldız has pressed herself
into the bushes like a rabbit.

When father spots her, she runs away, chases across the field,
across the hills, into the darkness of the meadow, and bolts up a
tree.

Father gestures threateningly towards the branches, tries to climb
up, falls, curses, falls.

It's dawning when father goes back to the house, to his bed.
That's where mother sleeps. With open eyes. She waits until
father's breathing is deep and steady, then she dares to go to the
tree. She hands Yıldız food into the branches:

Stay where you are.

From my bed, I see the sister between the branches in the moonlit
night.

The next day, we eat fried mutton.

We share our meat with the wolves.

When father enters the house, he brings the silence with him.
We rise, our eyes coordinating with each other, Yıldız moves a chair behind father, Fatma takes his jacket off his shoulders, I hurry into the kitchen to the barrel, scoop water into a bowl, three filled ladles. Fatma is crouching down in front of father, has untied his shoelaces, pulls the right shoe off the heel, I crouch down next to her and take the left one, father's foot is damp and warm. I dip it into the cool water and wash the day off his soles. Zehra hands me the towel, I rub the foot dry and let it slide from my hand into the sandal.

Mother has been baking. We have flatbread with beans and cheese and fresh ayran.

During the meal we sit silently. Just as father wants us.

Honour stands above everything, father says.
The sun alights from honour.
Honour lets us sleep peacefully.
We breathe it. In and out.
At night and during the day.
Honour has to thrive on our fields.
We eat it, and the women nurse their children with it.
Honour is the most important thing to my father.
More important than us children. Or mother.
Honour stands above everything, father says.
Honour outgrows me.

[...]

On hot days, we sleep outside. Seven children on mattresses filled with hay. Swarms of flies lay siege to our mouths and to the corners of our eyes. Mother starts a fire and burns dried cow dung. With her apron, she fans the smoke into our faces. That chases away the flies, she says. Sayit waggles his feet in front of my face.

They reek of cow dung, he laughs, that also chases away the flies. Sleep!, mother's voice falls onto his giggles, we have to get up early the next morning, there's plenty of work to do.

Behind the smoke, the stars are sparkling.

The brightest of them is mine.

There are one hundred blue women living in our valley. There are light blue women like Necla's mother and dark blue women like Fidan's mother, there are red-blue women and black-blue ones. There are women who carry their blue around their necks like a necklace or in the hollow below the neck like a locket, some carry their blue like a bracelet, some around their ankles.

Many women change their blue jewellery from week to week, some day to day. Some smile constantly, despite their blue jewellery, like Leyla, some keep silent in blue, like Zehra.

Light blue women become dark blue ones, red-blue ones become black-blue ones. Dark blue ones also become light blue, but that's rare, and women who wear black-blue, like Ayşe, don't ever let go of the black colour.

There are women whose blue jewellery no one knows, women who hide it underneath long clothes, beneath scarves, blue girls usually, like Elif and Selin, who still wear their blue anxiously like lip stick for the first time.

The women's blue jewellery bears the hallmarks of men. The tools, wood or iron, and the number of blows determine the shade of blue.

The blue women wear the colour of the sky. Cloud-streaked summer sky, icy winter sky, fickle spring sky, grey autumn sky, dusk, rainbow.

Only Songül is skyless and without blue. Wherever she appears, conversation stops.

What could you talk about with the skyless.

She walks through the village with unblemished skin. The women turn away, no word, no greeting to the skyless.

Look at her!, says my mother and strokes my hair with her blue-black hand, neither smart nor diligent. And still: not a single blue spot!

There are people like that too, she says, unfortunately.

When I grow up, I will be a blue woman.

I'm hoping for a shade of blue as light as the winter sky.

Mother thinks that I am six years old, Yıldız reckons that I'm seven already. I'm tall, everyone can see that, tall enough to herd: the lambs, my sister Selin and my virgin.

I know the lambs well. I know what they eat and drink.

I know Selin well. I know that she laughs when I stroke across her forehead with a poppy.

I don't know my virgin. But she lives within me and I mustn't lose her. I have to protect her and give my life for her if necessary, father says. I mustn't chew gum, that I know. Aylin got pregnant from a chewing gum her uncle brought her from the city. Lemons, Yıldız says, I mustn't eat either, they colour the red virgin white. I have lain awake at night before and was afraid that there had been lemon in the neighbour's stew.

I'm scared of the dark, because the dark impregnates. Especially the darkness in the forest and on the meadow. The darkness in the valley. And the window in the kitchen is open during the night! I don't know where the darkness of the meadow ends and the darkness of our house begins. Does the darkness of the meadow flow through the kitchen window and further along the corridor and into my chamber?

We're hanging the laundry, Yıldız, mother and I, we have washed it white. Hassan comes hopping out of the stable, young and strong like a horse.

Come!, he yells, Hüseyin, Mehmet!

The boys want to go to the stream. Longing for water.

Father is standing in the doorway. The field?

Hüseyin nods. Done!

The boys start running. Father looks after them.

Then he goes to the field. The clods are gleaming in the sun. With the tip of his shoe father brushes through the fresh soil. He bends down and swipes through the furrow.

Not deep enough.

Just like the next furrow. And the one after that.

The soil on which bread is to grow for the family!

Hüseyin!

Father's cry reaches all the way to the water, the boys come running, the stream still in their hair and eyelashes, father is now standing in front of the stable, a piece of wood in his hand.

Fury has gripped my father.

He roars and beats Hüseyin first to the floor and then into unconsciousness.

We're standing next to the wall of the house, Mehmet, Yıldız, Ali, Selin, mother and I, and look on without moving. Looking at the brother. At father.

Blow. After blow.

That's when mother jolts out of her paralysis, Mehmet throws himself between them, wrestling with father for the piece of wood, mother rushes over to Hüseyin and pulls the lifeless son onto her lap as if wanting to give birth to him once more. She rocks him back and forth and puts her hand on his forehead. She sings him a lullaby.

Father cowers silently next to the destroyed son.

Later Hüseyin awakens.

He sees his ribcage, his arms and legs and cries, with shame.

Blue jewellery is only meant for women.

The fun! The fun!

Mother often talks about the fun she once had in a long gone winter's night. She is rubbing the laundry on the board.

Once, I was a crazy horse.

It was during a night in the first winter. My newlywed father awoke, he felt around for his wife, but the bed was empty. He called out for her, but she didn't come, he called again, no answer. He got up, walked through the house, when he suddenly heard her laugh. He saw her through the window in the glistening snow, on the snow mountain he had scooped off the stable's roof, the headscarf had slipped down to her shoulders, hair in disarray, head thrown back, from her open mouth with the full lips white breath billowing from deep within her chest, the skirt had risen up above her knees, her legs straddling a burlap sack she was laughing. She pushed herself off the mountain peak with glowing white calves, skidded down the snow mountain whooping with joy, span out of control, cheering even while falling, tumbled over herself, slid further, stayed on the ground laughing in the snow.

My father pulled her into the stable by the hair, beat her head against the wall until blood ran into her loosened hair and along her neck and across the full lips into her open mouth.

Then he took his wife back into his bed.

I'm dreaming.

My mother is galloping over the hills behind our house, mane waving. Her nostrils are flared, her ears pricked up, I get in her way. Her big eyes are panicked, she looks at me, for a long time, turns on her hind legs and flees.

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My sister Yıldız loves to ride horses. She sits in the saddle like a man, wind her hair, in her clothes. The men's looks are flying behind her. Soon she will be too much of a woman to gallop, my father will get in her way, he will grab the reins, will pull her off the horse and send her to the kitchen. There, she is going to help mother, and the wind will fall from her clothes.

On the other side of the mountain is where the letters and numbers are.

With the satchel on my back, I have to cross the mountain pass every day. When father, mother and Hüseyin go to the stable, I climb up the mountain. I have a two hour walk ahead of me.

There are two classes. One for the children in grade one to three. Another for the children in grades four and five. We have two teachers. They herd us and teach us what we need for life. In the morning, when I open my notebook, I'm full of joy because I'm allowed to learn from Mister Barzan and Mister Gülabi. I like the numbers and the letters. I'm grateful that they come to me, to Yedisu. Come from far away. Even though I am young and a girl. I like the A and the Ş. Sometimes I write all twenty-nine letters in one line. I want to wrap them up as a gift and send them to mother and grandmother. Together they would untie the bow and the letters would jump from the box and walk out of the kitchen alongside them. But then I become scared that the letters could forget me and I whisper to them: Me! Take me! Take me with you!

I'm also friends with the numbers. I make an effort with them and soon I know them better than any other child in my class. I find numbers everywhere. None of them belongs to me. I don't

know how old I am. Father couldn't walk all the way to Kiğı for every single child in order to have it registered. He only went for every second or third one. But there were letters that belonged to me. I have a name. Even a surname. And that's more than what my mother had when she was a child. My grandfather gave the surname to our family as a gift. On Atatürk's command. Atatürk wanted for all Turks to carry a surname. Grandfather went to the ministry department and had them put on record: My name is now Lale. And so my name is Filiz Lale. I'm about ten years old.

Learning is important. I hear that daily.

Here in school, I learn for life.

Mister Gülabi and Mister Barzan will open the door to a better life for us!

I'm diligent. I read the chalk lines on the blackboard. I breathe the chalk dust. I don't want to miss anything that's important for that better life.

I sit in my seat quietly and have already opened the natural history book. The angler in the deep sea can create light for itself. Hassan whispers something to Musa, Musa is still giggling when Mister Barzan enters the classroom.

Musa falls silent.

Mister Barzan walks up to the teacher's table, opens the drawer, grabs his cane. We stand up and hold our hands out to him.

Each one of us picks a spot in the room on which to fasten their eyes and their soul, the wardrobe hook next to the door, the door handle or the window catch.

Mister Barzan approaches us, cane in hand.

One blow on the last joints of the fingers.

One blow on the joints closer to the hand.

One blow on the back of the hands.

One blow on the wrist.

Our hands swell up, we keep a straight face. Only Esma's sobs are our sign of life.

We're still holding out our hands.

My gaze is fixed upon the angler of the deep sea.

I try to create light for myself.

Mister Barzan hits everyone.

Selin, Fidan, Elif, Fatma, Veli, Zehra, Hatun, Hanem, Remzi, Resul, Zeki, Hülya, me, Müslüm, Nurten, Feride, Fidan, Halil, Necla, Berfin, Seda, Ali, Sayit, Dilber, Elif, Mehmet, Hassan, Musa, Seda, Ayşe, Aynur, Besime, Hatice, Ahmet, Sengül, Zarife, Selin.

It's got to be nice to bathe in the stream.

I stand at the bank, the noonday heat on my shoulders, I watch the boys, those big, happy frogs that jump into the cool and still have the luminous green in their eyes when they get out of the water.

My body longs for water.

I lie down on the ground and imagine swimming. The pebbles underneath my feet are cold, the water washes around my legs, splashes onto my belly, onto the neck, that's when a shadow falls on me, eyes upon mine: Yunus.

Almost naked, the suntanned skin full of glistening drops of water.

I can see muscles underneath the skin, bluish veins and sinews in the back of the knee. I see the impression of his member in his wet, blue pants. His hair is full, darker than black, his eyes are green from the stream. The large feet stand sturdy.

You're mine.

His voice is without doubt.

Without a word, he takes me by the hand. I go with him. I hold on to his large feet, his steps, his dark hair and his assertive gaze, don't have to hold myself up because he is holding me.

We don't say a word.

Above his right eyelid a birthmark shines.

Yunus opens the stable door, pushes me into the empty stable, because I am his.

I have to stay here, mustn't watch any other man swim from now on.

The stable door snaps shut.

I'm standing in the dark. Trembling.

I belong to him. I have a man.

I giggle, watch his strong legs through the crack of the door, his straight back, his flawless, thirteen-year-old body that is walking away from me.

I'm staying here. I will not watch another man swim again.

I'm his.

I think that I'll be eleven years old this summer.

I ask Yıldız and Aylin to accompany me on a pilgrimage to the holy tree so that we may see our future husbands in a dream.

The holy tree is an hours' walk from our house. He has healed many people. My mother as well. Shortly after Hüseyin's birth, an ulcer began growing behind her left ear, at first it was white and soft, then became harder and shiny red. Mother grew weaker and weaker and her fever rose and rose, the two children were clinging to her, one in the front, one in the back, and with sweat on her brow she fed the cows and the sheep and worked on the field. She couldn't move her head, neither twist nor turn it, and she prayed to Allah. One morning, she put on her clothes and left the house taking her children with her. For hours she dragged herself and the children to the holy tree. My mother drank from the spring close to the root, washed her wound, covered it with earth and hung a piece of cloth in the branches asking for healing. When, the next night, she was half asleep, she dreamt of a snake. It wound itself up her legs and up to her neck, rammed its teeth into mother's ulcer and drained the sickness from her blood. The next day my mother awoke: healthy.

So. So we make a pilgrimage to the holy tree. So we can see our future husbands through it. We have empty bottles with us as well as pieces of fabric that have our wish written on them: We

want to know who the man is that we are going to spend our life with. We hang the fabric into the branches. Our question blows in the wind.

We fill the bottles with water from the spring, carry them home. There, we bake bread with the holy water, bread that we oversalt and eat in the evening without drinking anything. The man who gives us water in our dream is going to be our husband.

I go to bed excitedly.

I'm dreaming.

The noonday heat is oppressive, no bird sounds.

I'm stacking wood in the courtyard, and that's when the gate opens silently and standing in the shadow is Yunus.

He smiles at me and holds a bottle of water out to me. I'm excited and happy and smile at him and reach for the water, he laughs and pulls it away from me.

My sleep breaks.

Fluttering wings. Humming up to the neck.

I get up, walk on tiptoes, get the big glass and fill it to the brim with water and finally quench my thirst.

Once I get aybaşı, mother says one day, I will have to be careful because no one can see it.

Aybaşı.

Mother's eyebrows are lifted, with a dark gaze she paints the word into my imagination. I don't know what aybaşı is, so I ask Yıldız, who laughs. Aybaşı you'll get for free, she says. From whom, I ask, and she laughs and doesn't give me an answer.

Aybaşı.

I search for it in gestures, smells and colours, but aybaşı doesn't show itself to me.

Aybaşı. No colour, no taste.

Leyla is beautiful. Leyla's gaze goes out into the distance.
I like to play with her. We collect treasures, gold and diamonds,
stones in which the trees are reflected or the clouds, strange
pieces of wood in which ghosts live, autumn leaves.
We exchange things. A plum stone polished by water for a piece
of bark crumbled into sand.

One day Leyla has disappeared.
Much later I see later through the window of the classroom. She
is wearing loose clothes that I don't recognise. Underneath them
a ball.
People point their fingers at her, the devil. They whisper.
Guilt, they say, is what Leyla is carrying in her belly.

Leyla walks through the village as though through fire.

I'm looking for coloured stones for Leyla at the stream, I want to
bring them to her.
No, says mother and takes the jewels from me, don't talk to Leyla
anymore.
Her hand pats my hair softly, Leyla didn't take care of her virgin.

The birds' twittering has burnt to noon. Silence.
I walk to the spring with two buckets. For the sixth time that day.
Today the animals need more than I can carry. I fill the buckets at
the stream.
Yunus.
He is handsome. Tall. Blocks the sun.
I don't move.
Promise that you will marry me!
The sunlight behind his head, a wreath of light that blinds me. I
put my hand up in front of my eyes.
I promise.

That night I wake up and know: He is gone.
On the way to his uncle in Germany he has stepped right over
me.

I will be his wife. His woman.
I will bake baklava for him and set the table.
I will milk his cows and give birth to his children and carry his
name:
Şahin. Filiz Şahin.
At wedding parties I will sit next to him, and when they play a
song that we like, we will dance.

Filiz and Yunus Şahin. What a beautiful couple!

I will be wearing a shimmering dress and our children will already be asleep. I will be radiantly beautiful by his side. And all the girls are going to admire and envy me.

I feel a drop on my thigh. I reach underneath my skirt, feel around for it. It looks like blood. I rub it between my fingers, it colours my skin red, I smell it, it smells like slaughter. My virgin! My virgin is running out from between my legs, runs down my thighs, drips onto the floor, seeps into the sand. I know, father, without my virgin I have nothing to expect from anybody! I run home, look for Yıldız, find her in the kitchen, drag her into the chamber, slam the door shut behind us, fall to her feet. I tell her about my virgin and hide my red-stained finger in my lap.

It's not my fault, I scream in a whisper, no man has touched me, Yıldız, I swear!

That can't be true! You've got to have done something with a man!

No, I haven't, no, I swear!

Then I remember that my uncle had kissed me, two weeks earlier, on the cheek, I hadn't wanted it, but he was quick, quicker than I could realise, quicker than I could put up defences, so my uncle,

my uncle has taken my virgin and my honour, yes, my uncle has touched me. So I am shame.

Better to die than to bring shame to my family.

Now Yıldız is laughing out loud, right in my face:

That's what mother was talking about. Aybaşı!

From now on, you'll bleed every month. Now you are woman.

It's deepest winter. Cold is crawling down the mountains and into the valley. Avalanches are hanging above us. Half the village is sitting in our house. I serve fresh mint tea and coffee to the men. Smoking, they sit in father's broadly striped wing chairs. Tangling men's voices and loud, deep laughter. No matter whether you like one another or not, you're thankful for the other's body heat. In winter we huddle close together like animals in hibernation, we duck under the cold, the snow and the hugeness of the massif. In the kitchen it's warm and full, the smell of the family. The cows are kicking against the wooden wall, the heartbeat of the house. Women's voices, muffled laughter, giggling, the mother, Hülya, Esengül, Fatma and I are baking poğaç and flatbread.

I don't know where Yunus is.

Filiz!

Mister Barzan puts his hand on my shoulder.

You're smart, girl. You have to go to school in the city. Learn a profession. I'll talk to your father.

I'm climbing into the brown of the mountains. And I say the word profession, and again: profession. And then: Filiz. Filiz's profession. Profession of Filiz. Filiz-profession.

For the first time, I stroll on the way home.

I'm waiting for Mister Barzan like I wait for dawn.

I can hardly take my gaze off the hilltop over which he will have to come, Mister Barzan.

For days.

For weeks.

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I'm straining milk with mother, and there he is standing in the stable: Mister Barzan. He wants to talk with father.

I'm standing at the barrel without moving. The cows smell like grass and milk.

I'll betray them, the cows, I'll betray them and leave them. The stable and the whole family.

No!

Father's no rings through the walls. He's hard as stone.

Hah! At dinner father laughs.

He tells the story of how he sent my oldest sister to school in the city. She was supposed to become a teacher for reading and writing. To have a profession, earn money. She wanted that. And so did he.

My father already saw the envelope lying on the kitchen table, filled with liras, a monthly financial aid in old age.

My sister was living with relatives and dragged potatoes into the city by the pound, and the brothers brought her fresh yoghurt and eggs, and still she regularly asked father for money in her letters.

Father sold a cow to the neighbour or gave away a sheep, cheap, too cheap, because it had to be fast, the penniless daughter in the big city had to be fed, kept alive in the city, a question of love and honour.

My sister was smart and hardworking and finished her degree.

Then she met her future husband. She got married and had four children, and since then she bakes flatbread and gömme in the stone oven and baklava on Saturdays. She has never stood in front of a student. She has never earned a lira.

An envelope for father never arrived.

Father says that Mister Barzan wants me to go to the city to learn a profession because he believes that I am intelligent, Mister

Barzan, very intelligent, and that a profession is a necessity for my future life, for my prospective, better life, such a necessity that he offered to let me live with his relatives.

I look at father, he nods at mother, she ladles green bean soup onto his plate.

Mister Barzan would take on all responsibility for me, father says, including all costs, and that he had refused him.

His family doesn't need anyone's support.

He doesn't need this help, my father says and eats his soup.

It's a question of honour.

My world is a long, narrow hallway from which countless doors go off left and right, hideouts, wooden dens, big, opulently decorated double doors, doors made of sandstone, of granite, doors with carvings, painted and unpainted, brown, red, black, gateways to mosques, cellar doors, barn doors, house entrances, I want to open them, see and enter the rooms behind them, but the doors are locked. I knock, but there's no answer. I press the door handle, jiggle it, nothing moves. I hear footsteps, I turn around and ask strangers for the key, but they don't give it to me because they don't have it, because they know nothing about it or because they don't want me to enter a room that is strange even to them, that could mean danger to me, or strength. So I stay on the corridor. They say, get ready for the night and forget about the doors, and I become tired and forget what a door is, what a keyhole is and what a door handle, and so the doors become a wall.

I lie still and breathe quietly.

At night fear seeps into the corridor, flows through the walls, through the non-existent keyholes and the cracks under the non-existent doors, like water into a leaky ship, fills the corridor, rises up to my neck. I can't put my head through the wall.

Aliye, Hüseyin and I are drinking mint tea when the doorbell rings. Aliye gets up, goes into the hallway and opens the door.

Yunus!

Her voice hurls the name into the room. A moment later: Yunus.

After three years, he has come straight from Germany. He simply brought the country with him, wears Germany on his lapel, it lends shine to his hair and makes his gaze manly.

Yunus is here! Yunus! I stutter a greeting, Aliye sends me away, into the kitchen, to make coffee.

I open the cupboard and close it again, open the next, open and close, open and close, don't know where the cups are, the pot, where spoons, sugar, coffee are. I'm dumb like a sheep.

Aliye joins me in the kitchen.

What are you doing?

I don't know, I don't know.

She laughs. She puts the pot in my hand, I stand shaking, she takes it off me, makes coffee, I wash my face with cold water, drink, take a breath, we go back to the room together.

Yunus is talking to Yussuf. His black hair falls in waves, his brown eyes shine, his lips are full, his hands manicured, his shoulders are broad, on his chest I want to lie down.

He is wearing a jacket that speaks of Germany and dark blue jeans. New white trainers with red stripes.

My feet are in homemade crochet socks and brown plastic sandals. I'm wearing the flowery skirt and the old blouse.

But I'm beautiful.

I have a young, slim body, a black shiny, thick braid and big brown eyes like a cow. They shine like stars, they say. I have long, dark eyelashes, thick eyebrows, full lips and healthy teeth.

I deserve men's feet in white trainers.

I'm worth a man in jeans.

Yunus and I hardly exchange a word. What should we say and how?

Then we're alone in the kitchen for a moment.

I want you.

He is desire. Pure will.

How do we want to live, Yunus?

In jeans. We'll be wearing blue jeans. In Germany.

When Yunus leaves, he brushes against my hand as if by accident, burning cheeks and a small envelope are what remain.

I slip it under the carpet.

When I'm finally alone, I take it out, steal myself away into the chamber and open it with trembling hands.

Yunus is looking at me.

The photo has been glued into a heart-shaped paper frame.

To Filiz.

Underneath it, a purple flower blossoms.

You have to open the button of a pair of jeans, a copper or silver coloured one, you have to pull down the zipper, spread the opening for the hips with both hands, stand on one leg like a stork and put the other one into the trouser leg, you have to point the toes so that the foot becomes small and can find the whole way through the long trouser leg until the toes reach the light on the other side of the blue tunnel and the foot finally stands on new ground, then bend the other leg, point the toes, put the foot that has become smaller through the second blue tunnel and onto the ground, the first step into a new life.

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No, says my father, no.

I do not have a daughter for Yunus!

Yunus's family leaves the house without a goodbye.

I hike to the holy tree. Without Yıldız, without Aylin. Yunus in my head and in my chest. Yunus before my eyes. His breath on my tongue.

Underneath the holy tree I kneel down.

Please, holy tree, make me his wife!

I stand on my tiptoes and hang a red piece of cloth into the bare branches.

Yunus and Filiz.

[...]

It's Friday, we got married one week ago today. I have just washed the floor in the kitchen. Yunus is lying on the sofa and calls me, I run to him.

Fresh shirt!

I get a fresh shirt from the bedroom, put it down on the sofa next to Yunus. He points at the buttons on his chest, I unbutton them, take off the old shirt, put on the new, button it up.

Jacket!

Shoes!

I giggle, Yunus, you're eighteen, not eighty!

I'm standing in the stable among the cows, in one of the empty boxes in which we milk them, hands on the iron rod. Behind me stands Yunus with the pitchfork in his hand. He beats me with the wooden shaft. The blows are muffled. The wood sounds muffled. Inside me. He hits harder and harder. When he is out of strength, he hits with the prongs of the iron fork.

Like beating a carpet.

I topple over. Hanging over the iron rod. Throw up on the concrete floor. The cows prance anxiously, crowd against the stable walls. The blows wander over my back, my neck, my head

and into my face. My eyes are bloodshot, red veins in the broken white, like marble. And blind.

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I'm lying in bed. I want to turn my head, but I can't.

Yunus is sitting next to me. He's crying. He has to have picked me off the iron rod like laundry off the washing line, folded together to be able to carry me better. He's kneeling beside the bed, holding my hand, and self-accusations are flowing out of his mouth like a constant stream.

Why?, I ask.

You must never defy your husband!

Yunus is suffering into my hand. It's blue, black underneath the nails.

I love you, Filiz! Forgive me!

Yunus's eyes are green from bathing in the stream. He's my husband.

Everything will be alright, Yunus. I'll heal.

[...]

It was my laughter that had the spider crawl from her hole, to the centre of the net in which I hang, in which I'm stuck, because this is my life now.

I know that it was my laughter. I have laughed too often. That was a mistake, I know, because I am a wife.

Don't laugh! She said that often enough, the spider, who is now my mother. I mustn't laugh, mustn't open my lips, because they're evocative of my labia, and those are now Yunus's property, just like my lips. I mustn't walk through the village and give away any inkling of my lips, my lips or my labia or even the smallest speck of my body.

Every phantasy about me belongs to Yunus.

I have laughed, opened my mouth and opened the entrance into my body, unashamedly and wide, and with it the entrance to my soul, because I have cast up my eyes, that's a mistake, now she is crawling towards me, the spider who is now my mother, black and fat it comes closer, circles around me and spins her net around me, spins and spins, and I stand still and pretend to be dead.

The spider has spun a cocoon around me.

I look in the mirror and can't find myself. I have disappeared into a mixture of polyester and nylon.

I'm a blind spot.

I sit on the bed for hours, just like a blind spot is supposed to.

I sit still, until the black of night falls.

When Yunus comes, he's drunk. He rips the spider's web from my body, throws me onto the bed.

Underneath his steady thrusts my gaze brushes back and forth over the nightshade ceiling, back and forth.

And so he makes me a woman again.

Yunus groans, falls into a deep slumber. I lie still. Yunus on me, alcohol in his blood and stomach, his sharp breath is the night I stay awake.

When dawn arrives, I wriggle out from underneath Yunus and put on my clothes, layer by layer, knickers, stockings, the floor-length underskirt, the floor-length overskirt, the long-sleeved blouse, the long-sleeved cardigan, over that, for the first time by myself, the non-body, the non-face.

I'm a blind spot.

I lift up my chest to catch my breath, walk down the stairs into the courtyard.

With every step I take, I push the non-body off me.

With every step, it comes back to me.

It hugs me.

I turn my head, cheek to cheek with the non-face, look outside.

The world retreats from me, it doesn't know me and doesn't communicate with me, the blind spot.

When girls from the neighbourhood come and their giggles flow into the courtyard, I cannot remain a silent shadow. The giggles reach up to my knees, and my heart beats.

I'm a child, wife that I am.

I join the giggles and hug the girls and I laugh and show my opened mouth.

Yunus is beating me.

He has to beat the child out of my bones.

The girl out of my guts.

He has to beat the wife into my brain.

[...]

In spring, Yunus finally sends the documents we need in order to enter Austria.

Sinner! Sinner!

The spider ambushes me. You want to live in Austria? With infidels! Everything you eat there is sin! The meat in Austria is sin. The carrots. The courgettes. The tomatoes. Each spoon of yoghurt is a spoon full of sin. Every sip of milk is a sip of sin. Every bite of bread is a bite of sin. Everything that grows among infidels is sin, every plant, every piece of meat! Sin that you'll imbibe!

I have observed my brothers slip into trousers, closely, I'll be able to do it once I'm holding a pair of jeans in my hands.
Yunus has found work in Austria. And an apartment.

Three passports, four airplane tickets, four visas. Again and again I leaf through everything, search for the photos in the passports. As long as our photos are in the passports, we're complete. Seda is registered in my passport, Seda doesn't have her own photo, Seda only has her name. I read it over and over, Seda Şahin, Seda Şahin, that's alright, you can't read it off the page, you cannot, it remains there, it's written on the page, plainly, in plain letters: Seda Şahin, Seda Şahin.

Yunus's cousin brings us to the airport, Seda, Selin, Halil and me, two suitcases, two bags, raging heartbeats and held breaths.

Four boarding passes, red and white with golden lettering, three passports, four visas held firm in hand, we enter the departure hall.

You have to go through there and then to B 62.

I don't know what B 62 is.

Passports!

I hand our passports through a glass window, the customs officer skims through our documents.

You had your first child out of wedlock?

No!

You had your first child when you were thirteen. You're not allowed to get married when you're thirteen.

I'm confused.

Come with me!

I follow him, Seda on my arm, Selin and Halil by the hand, through several swinging doors into an office. Police.

I'm sitting on an orange plastic chair, both girls on my lap, Halil presses against me. We have three passports and four visas, we have photographs and Seda's name in block capitals. But there are at least two years missing in my passport, one year in Halil's, a few months in Selin's, a few days in Seda's. We're smugglers of false numbers. Because we don't have any numbers that belong to us. That's not my fault, only a father can register his children officially. The chief of police leafs through our documents.

Where are you from?

Tekbaş, I answer quietly.

The chief of police smiles, just like my wife.

Headscarves pulled deep over my forehead, the three children on my arm and by the hand, I climb the stairs into the airplane carrying us into new freedom.

The plane carries us upwards, Turkey beneath us becomes small, finally we fly into the cheerful sky.

The plane doors open, we enter the country of blue jeans and trainers, the country of sin.

We're flowing from one floor to the next on metal stairs. Our suitcases come flowing just like us. We are being washed into a marble arena.

The roads are smooth in the serene sky. I'm looking out of the fogged window of the car and see women in blue jeans, with deep cleavages and free hands and arms, I see wafting hair.

Twenty square metres of hope. There are curtains on a silver curtain rail. They have a yellow and blue check pattern. There's a big bed in which Yunus, Seda and I are going to sleep and a smaller one for Selin and Halil. There are two bedside tables and two bedside lamps with yellow shades. There's a table, on it a tablecloth with blue sea shells, and two chairs.

Yunus leaves in the morning and comes back in the evening. He works. For four days. Then he leaves for three days.

For thirty days and nights, we only leave the room in order to go to the bathroom that we share with strangers we never see.

We occupy ourselves, play with five marbles that the children were given on the airplane.

A tree is in bloom outside the window. It's an apple tree.

There's a knock. Strange words come through the keyhole, I don't dare to open the door.

The knock returns. Every day. Always at the same time. The same words. The strange voice sounds warm. It's old and belongs to a woman. I risk it and open the door a tiny crack, something is being reached through, chocolate, wrapped in silver foil, it smells of nuts and raisins, I close the door. Every day something else is stretched out towards us through the cracked door. Chocolate with nuts, apples and chewing gum.

After thirty days I take the children firmly by the hand and for the first time we leave the twenty square metres of hope. We sneak down the stairs, crouching like dogs with their tails between their legs. We venture ahead step by step, into the strange territory.

We're standing timidly on a stretch of grass in front of the house and try to smile into the foreign land. We're quiet. Only briefly one of the children leaps across the grass, but turns back immediately.

When Yunus comes home, we're long since back in our room.

[...]

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Yunus is looking for a fight. He's searching my bags, my clothes, rummages through the children's clothes, digs around in the dresser, looks beneath the carpet, in every bag, in the porridge oats, in the fridge, in the jam jar for something he can take offence at, he ravages the apartment, then he grips my head, digs through my thoughts.

You're talking badly about me! With whom? With the Austrian woman?

He looks underneath my tongue.

He throws me onto my back and spreads my legs.

Do you desire another man?

He rummages through my hole with both hands, examines my desire, searches for another man. When he doesn't find anything he can take offence at, he opens his trousers and takes me.

There's a knock, the landlady yells, kicks the door, saviour.

Yunus dashes to the door, yanks it open, the landlady screams:

Enough! You have to move out!

Yunus grabs her by the shoulders, shakes her, wants to beat her, stops, kicks the door shut and beats me.

When I regain consciousness, we have one week to vacate the apartment.

With packed suitcase and the children by the hand, I'm standing at Johanna's fence, the only place I don't have to expect a fight.

The new apartment used to be a cowshed. The floor is damp like the walls, water seeps through the burst walls, a few weeks ago, the Danube was flowing through this room. With the flood, the flies came, Danube pebbles on the windowsill, alga-like growth that are sticking to the doorframe. The walls are slimy, the stench is hardly bearable, this has to be a mistake. Austria! Europe!

But an orchard stretches out in front of the damp cave and behind it, the Danubian wetlands begin. Nature is a paradise. Here, I can go outside with the children. Here, Yunus can beat me undisturbed. Here, nobody hears us. 2500 schilling a month, to us, it's worth it.

I chop wood and carry the logs. In order to dry the apartment before winter comes, I fire up all three ovens for weeks. I frequently re-paint the flaking walls. We live wall to wall with the cows, we hear their chains rattling and their hooves hitting the feeding trough. I buy milk from the farmer's wife who owns the apartment. I make butter, yoghurt and cheese our way, Yunus wants the taste of Turkey. At four in the morning, I prepare the cream for breakfast, bake flatbread and cook lunch, which Yunus will take to work with him. We have beds, all five of us, a table with chairs and a sofa from the flea market, a flower vase, a red, embroidered tablecloth and freshly painted walls. We

even have a television set. In front of the door, nature stretches out, lush green and fruit trees with crooked branches. They are heavily laden with fruit. Apples, pears, quince and plums in the grass, wasps buzzing around them. Sometimes I walk barefoot through the grass and lie down among the burst plums. Jewelled in blue, I lie among the blue fruit.

The farmer's wife takes Halil and me to school and, later, Selin and me to kindergarten. The teachers talk to me and smile at me, I don't understand them, I nod, they put their arms around my children's shoulders and lead them from the room.

In the mornings, I am now alone with Seda.

Halil and Selin bring bills home from school and from kindergarten, for the field trip and the school milk. Soon they are blue and burst open like plums in the grass.

For days they don't go to school and to kindergarten.

The farmer's wife gives me a stretch of the garden. I lay out a vegetable patch. This is where everything we need to live shall grow.

The farmer's wife is happy about the manicured garden and the cleaned carpet that's hanging out to dry in front of the house. She goes into the stable to take a look at her cows and at us. In the mornings and in the evenings.

Once, she leaves a warm jacket for Halil hanging on the door. Then there's a jug of milk on the threshold. I hang baklava on the fence for her.

The farmer takes Halil along on his tractor. Together they muck out the stables and examine the fishponds. When he comes home, Halil has meadows in his eyes. His gait is upright, his forehead smooth.

He calls the farmer Opa.

Selin and Halil bring excitement home from school and from kindergarten, Saint Nicolas is coming, Saint Nicolas is coming!

I don't know Saint Nicolas, watch the children's excitement like somebody who can't swim watches swimmers frolicking in a lake. The farmer's wife asks me if Saint Nicolas can come to our house. Yunus approves. I don't know if he knows Saint Nicolas.

The children are drenched in excitement and joy. I'm standing there swathed in my veils, not a single toe touching the water.

I'm firing up the oven when there's a knock on the door. Yunus opens it. A woman comes in, with a long, fake white beard, her mouth is invisible, she is wearing a tall, stiff hat made from paper. A red, floor-length coat. White cotton in her eyebrows. Strands of cotton in her gaze.

She's veiled like I am.

She has a big burlap sack with her and asks the children if they have been good. Halil and Selin recite a poem with hasty breath. Rhymes clear as glass that I don't know and don't understand. The children receive presents, chocolate, apples, tangerines and nuts. Selin is given gloves, Seda gets socks and Halil a pencil case. Selin and Halil sing a song, quietly and timidly.

Morgen Kinder, wird's was geben, morgen werden wir uns freuen.

I'm standing still. Wide-eyed and speechless. I don't know what will happen tomorrow. My children are pulling ahead of me, they are strong swimmers.

[...]

When I give Oma the two thousand five hundred schilling rent, she sometimes hands five hundred back to me. For me and the children.

She buys fabric and yarn for me, and I embroider blossoming tablecloths that she sells for me.

When Yunus notices, he takes the money.

I become smarter and practice lying, become better and better at lying, I lie into the mirror, lie to the children in order to train myself, I lie without a racing heartbeat, without my cheeks blushing, with open eyes and lids that don't twitch anymore.

I keep the notes between the cleaning rags. And coins, gold and silver.

With them, I pay the bills from school and kindergarten, I buy peace and quiet for us, I redeem the children from beatings and if I have money left, myself as well.

I calculate precisely. I always hold back a few coins. It's better for Selin to receive a few blows, so that I can keep a reserve fund in case of the catastrophe.

In my head, I keep an account of all incomes and all expenses, the bought peace, the prevented and unprevented blows.

How many blows for me equal one blow for the children, how many blows equal how many thrusts, how much is the prevention of a blow, how much the prevention of rape.

I calculate using my own measuring unit. The smallest unit is the blow. The blows on back and hip, on arms and legs are one point each, the blows to the stomach and the fingers are two points each, the blows to the head and into the face are four each, if they are carried out with a piece of wood, I double the points, if it's metal, it's four times as many, rape counts for eight points.

Lists of earnings, lists of expenses, lists of levies.

Once, Halil breaks an alarm clock while playing. How many blows for whom? Fifteen blows for Halil or maybe just ten? Thirty blows for me or ten blows and fifteen thrusts? I'm not sure about the number of blows, I'm certain about the thrusts. How much is an alarm clock, how much of a cushion do I have left, time is of the essence, I reach for the money between the rags and run to Oma, she leaves and buys an alarm clock.

The new alarm clock is ticking.

When Yunus comes home, he doesn't notice anything.

Tonight, it stays quiet.