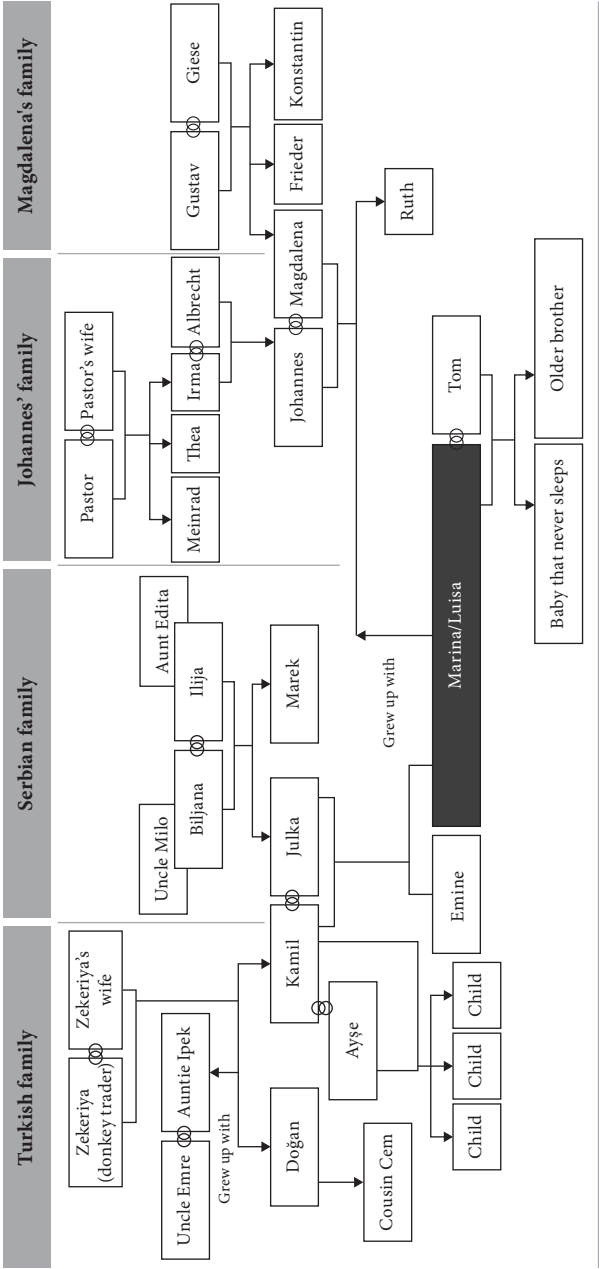


Those
we
Love
Pia Ziefle



Stammbaum







Kızım

YOU NEVER SLEEP.

Not in our arms. Not in the pram. Not in your cradle. Not at my breast.

Instead we carry you, alert and bright-eyed, about our dark, silent house, wearily humming lullaby after lullaby.

It'll sort itself out, we told ourselves that first summer. It'll sort itself out.

There's nothing the matter with her.

It's just that she isn't tired.

We'll get there, we said in the autumn.

One of these days.

Just a little more patience, a tiny little bit more.

But now the second winter has set in, bringing the icy east wind and lining the roads with waist-deep snowdrifts – and still you're wide awake every night.

At the very edge of the village is the tiny house Tom and I found a few years ago. It's almost invisible, tucked away at the foot of a steep slope, beneath crags and an impenetrable little wood.

Whoever built it wasn't rich, but then nobody ever got rich here, in this country marked by temperance and hardship.

Rough pasture and meagre fields, harsh winters and dusty summers have shaped the landscape. When it rains, the chalky





soil doesn't hold the water, so it digs itself subterranean caves and bursts out again in unexpected places.

Your Grandfather Johannes grew up in Karst territory, and as I roam the countryside with you and your brother, I remember what he used to tell us children about the invisible forces at work deep down in the Karst mountains – how they gouge out funnel-shaped hollows and sometimes even tunnel-like, bottomless chasms, as black and narrow as if they led straight to hell.

Tom and I decided to move here when I was pregnant with your big brother. At the time, I had lived in Berlin for almost a decade, but I didn't feel that it was a good place to bring up children. Our children were to grow up in the country like us.

We got the house here for very little rent. I didn't know the place itself or the exact dialect spoken here – there are variations even from one village to the next up here on the plateau. But much in the village seemed immediately familiar to me.

When we moved in, our new neighbours brought us homemade bread and salami; some even gave us home-brewed schnapps. They came straight from the cabbage fields, wiping the first of the spring sun from their foreheads with their earthy hands before pointing to our cellar and then to our kitchen window and saying, 'That's where the baker's used to be – and that was a grocer's.'

I proudly took them around our plot of land, showing them the old kneading troughs on their crooked stands and the dented dough vats, which I had found in the old henhouse and planted with summer herbs.

Then, sweating from the effort of trying to find the right words in standard German, and merry from the schnapps, they told us how the old baker had got into trouble with the verger



opposite because of the noise he'd made in the bakery as he went about his tasks in the early morning.

'And because of his wife!' they cried. She, it seems, had run off to heat another man's oven. They told us how people had avoided the baker if they were on the verger's side, and bought twice as much bread if they sided with the baker.

They said the baker had to shut up shop in the end – 'his health was that poor' – and the village community had decided to set up a bakehouse where the local women could take their dough to bake – 'and sit around and gossip,' they said, laughing.

I drank in their limpid stories and treasured them. These were people who had grown old farming – people who had spent their lives contending with the hardships of climate and soil. I wanted to hear all about it because I had a yen for a simple, neatly plotted life.

At night the street lamps were switched off, and if the moon wasn't shining, you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. I would hear footsteps in the yard and voices in the chimney, and I'd fetch Tom who would come and stand beside me and say he couldn't hear a thing.

When I listened again, I too heard only the wind.

'You're from Berlin?' the neighbours asked when they saw the registration plates on my car.

'I lived there for a few years,' I said evasively, 'but I grew up round here.'

'You don't speak the dialect,' they said, surprised.

I could have explained, but didn't feel like it.

'When's the baby due?' they asked after a pause, with an off-hand gesture at my belly.

'In the autumn,' I said shortly.

*



‘You don’t even have central heating in there,’ they said with a sceptical glance at our house.

In Berlin, I told them, I’d had coal-burning stoves in my flat – one in each room. I could see they didn’t believe me and added that sometimes the toilets there were out on the landing, even in the west.

The neighbours shook their heads. They couldn’t imagine that. For them, Berlin was built of gold.

Then they began again – did we know our house was almost washed away once?

‘Sudden thaw,’ they said. ‘The ground was still frozen and it came rushing down from up there.’

They pointed to the crags and the little wood on the slope above us, gratified at the look of disbelief on my face.

‘Don’t get that kind of thing in Berlin,’ they said with satisfaction.

I loved the house the moment I set eyes on it, especially its creaking stairs, its two wood-burning stoves, its draughty windows and the low ceilings where Tom bumped his head if he stood upright. I loved it even though everyone who came to visit found something to criticise.

‘It fulfils our needs,’ I would say.

I even loved it when the floor had to be ripped out of one of the rooms because of an old wastepipe which had burst years ago, rotting the ancient floorboards under the carpet and making the place stink. We shovelled out the sludge and filled the cavity with cement.

‘Patch-up job,’ said our visitors.

‘My house,’ I said.

*



The day you were born, *kızım* – my darling little daughter – I walked around the yard with contractions at five in the morning; the sun hadn't yet risen over the roofs of the village and no human sounds were to be heard. It was the way I had imagined it many a night in Berlin: quiet and uncomplicated and full of peace for what awaited me.

I looked at the vegetable garden. My work had paid off. Although it was still early in the year, we'd already picked the first tomatoes and, if the summer continued as hot, we'd soon have our second crop of strawberries.

I went over to my plants – flowers and bushes and fruit trees, all growing and flourishing the way you grew in my belly. Nausea had plagued me all autumn, alleviated only by the citrus fruits I usually loathe.

'Eat oranges, child,' your Grandmother Julka told me. 'When I was pregnant with you, I ate nothing but oranges.' I laughed and said no wonder I didn't like the things; after all, we both knew how all that had ended. 'Had an orange patch on your forehead the size of a five-Mark piece,' she went on, and I said brusquely that the Deutschmark had been gone a while now, to distract from the fact that any talk of the circumstances surrounding my birth inevitably evoked the unspoken question about the circumstances surrounding my conception – and about my father.

The contractions grew stronger.

Your brother and Tom were still asleep. I kindled a fire in the kitchen range and put on a kettle of water for tea. I checked the soft towels we would later warm in the oven for you and looked in the birth basket to make sure we had all the odds and ends the midwife had told us to get in.

You were born on the due date, in a few intense hours. And at full moon.



‘Magical,’ said Hofer, the village doctor, as he entered the data in his records.

Hofer had also been there at the birth of our first child. He seemed not a little surprised that we, the city folk, should be having our baby the old-fashioned way, when the local women now made the arduous drive to the hospital in the valley, rather than give birth at home. But it was immediately clear that he hadn’t lost his touch with newborns.

This time, too, he exuded calm and authority, in spite of having to stoop under the low ceilings. It seemed to me that he recognised something special in you, but perhaps it was only my heightened sensitivity after giving birth which made me think that.

When he brought you back to me, he laid you in my arms with a smile of satisfaction. ‘A real old soul you have there,’ he said.

We dressed you in the clothes I had sewn, and ate cherry cake for lunch. Your brother looked at his tiny sister and laid his little hand carefully on your tummy. You looked at him wide-eyed. Then you turned your head and fixed me with your searching gaze. Your unruly curls were jet black and stuck out all over the place.

‘Witch’s hair,’ Andrusch said when he saw you. I told him not to use such words. Just because he lived with your grandmother, it didn’t give him the right to talk like that, and I said as much.

‘You’ll see soon enough,’ he muttered stubbornly.

For weeks I carried you around, my beautiful and indefatigable child, hoping that you would at least doze off for a few minutes – but soon I no longer knew the difference between





day and night, and was visited in a dream by an old man I had almost forgotten.

He was wearing a pot-like thing on his head and a long embroidered coat. His feet were shod in soft slippers. He smiled and I saw that he was glad to see me.

‘I left you in Berlin,’ I said, perhaps more sharply than necessary. ‘I’ve moved here with Tom. I’ve had two children – a son and a daughter. What are you doing here?’

The old man sat on a carpet in a smoke-blackened house and spoke long sentences I hadn’t heard him speak before.

Melodious sentences in a foreign language.

‘Why?’ I asked.

His lips shaped single words as if he wanted me to repeat them, but I couldn’t understand him, no matter how hard I listened – no matter how much effort I made. I shook my head. He looked at me for a long time.

Then he got up and walked out. At the door he turned round to me once more, perhaps uncertain whether or not to ask me to go with him. But I couldn’t get up and follow him.

I heard only the rushing of waterfalls and a shrieking bird of prey.

The paediatrician said the baby was very small for her age. I said that wasn’t the problem.

‘The problem is that my daughter never sleeps.’

It could be a hormonal defect, said the doctor. That was very rare, it was true, but they could do blood tests.

Then you set up that shrill wail we knew so well. The doctor glanced at his tables and diagrams and said, ‘Now then, her growth’s almost at a standstill; we must keep an eye on that’ – but



not to worry; he'd make an appointment with an endocrinologist. Maybe a few days in the clinic would be a good idea?

You cried.

They had a lot of success with hormonal treatment, the doctor said. It only resulted in slight disabilities and sometimes none at all. 'We should X-ray – do you think the child is going to calm down?'

You didn't calm down.

No, no, he said, when he mentioned disability, he was just making sure everything had been covered – nothing left out, you know. Need to get the facts straight from the beginning. Better now than too late. They wouldn't be able to get precise diagnoses for a year or two, but still . . .

'It would be best to make an appointment in the clinic in the next weeks – I'll ring up straight away. Any growth failure in the family?'

'Family?' I heard myself ask.

'Yes, family,' the doctor's voice said. 'Father, mother, paternal and maternal grandparents. Uncles and aunts. First and second cousins.'

All those people in a family?

'Everything's fine on the father's side – no one smaller than they should be.'

'And on your side?'

'I don't know.'

'Why don't you know?'

'Complicated story,' I said wearily.

German adoptive parents, I told him. An unknown Turkish father who is unaware of my existence. A Serbian mother – or perhaps Croatian; it's hard to say nowadays. Might even be



Slovenian. I must ask her some time before I go and make a false statement from sheer exhaustion.

I rocked you gently and you quietened down.

‘How about a sister?’ I offer. ‘I have one of those – same father, same mother.’

‘The grandparents’ generation,’ said the doctor, ‘is particularly crucial.’

When I left the practice, I could no longer remember the details of our talk, but new, unfamiliar words echoed in my head. ‘Hormonal consultation’ and ‘growth plates’ went round and round on an endless loop.

Day and night.

The words made me look at you with new concern; they scared me. But at the same time I had the feeling there was something behind them – that I had to clamber through them to find what it was you were really missing.

‘I’m going crazy,’ I told Tom. ‘When you go to work tomorrow you can take me along to the clinic with you. I’ll find myself a bed to lie down in, and you can bring me some pill or other.’

‘You’re just tired,’ he said tenderly.

That must be it, I thought.

I’m just tired.

All those sleepless nights.

Nearly a hundred.

I’ll have a lie-down.

A little lie-down.

I found myself back in the old man’s hut. He was sitting at a low table and greeted me as I went in. Several roughly hewn





wooden figures, about a span's height, were set out in front of him.

He motioned to me to sit down and held my gaze for a second. Then, with rapid movements, he picked out a figure which looked child-sized beside the others, and handed it to me.

It had no face and only a suggestion of limbs.

'Is that me?' I asked, pointing first at the little wooden doll and then at myself.

He smiled dreamily, taking two more figures and putting them down on my side of the table. They were turned away from each other, but seemed to belong together.

Then he pushed another two figures very close to the first two and gestured to me to add the child I held in my hand. I didn't know where.

Four people and a child – where do you put the child, and who are the four people?

At last I found a place in the middle that seemed right to me, but when I withdrew my hand, I saw how alone the child was and felt tears welling up in my eyes.

The old man let his finger wander from figure to figure, from head to head, heart to heart.

'They all belong together,' I said softly.

Then, one day, I remembered the village doctor and how he had called you an old soul.

The people in the village say he only has to look at you to make a diagnosis. You don't even have to tell him where the pain is; he always knows immediately, and fetches medicine which you're supposed to hold in your hand without looking at it. Then he sort of squeezes your arm to make sure it's the right remedy.





That's what people whisper to each other, but it doesn't stop them going to him. This is partly because he's the only doctor far and wide, but it's also because his methods are strangely familiar to them; they don't like to admit it, but they all farm by the moon and the doctor's remedies, they tell themselves, can't do any more harm than saying your prayers in church on a Sunday. Besides, the medicine almost always helps.

I pondered his words on our nightly rounds, and the longer I turned them this way and that, the more entangled they became with my dreams of the old man and his wooden-hearted figures. The least I could do was to ask Hofer what he had meant by his remark.

The walls of Dr Hofer's consulting room were hung with oriental carpets and certificates in Asian writing. So that's what it looked like, I thought. Like a Berlin practice; not like a country doctor's surgery in Swabia. I smiled and turned to the man I was counting on for an answer.

'She doesn't sleep,' I said, pointing to you.

'Does she cry?' the doctor asked, without taking his eyes off you.

'Sometimes. It's more that she's always awake,' I said.

You scrutinised the unfamiliar man with your wide eyes.

'Where do you keep her cot?' he asked, as a matter of routine, raising his hand to touch you.

You made yourself all stiff, the way you always did when a stranger came near, and you began to scream, so that I couldn't answer the doctor's question. It wasn't until I carried you around, humming the little tune I always hum when you're fractious, that you quietened down, but it didn't take as long as usual.

'Is she often like that?' the doctor asked.



I nodded and told him about the paediatrician's theory – and that I didn't think much of it.

'Why not?' he asked.

I looked at the oriental carpets on the wall and felt the tears well up in my eyes just like in my dream of the wooden child, who had looked so forlorn in the middle of the four grown-ups.

I rocked you in my arms.

'When she was born you said something about an old soul,' I said. 'What did you mean by that?'

I could feel you start to fidget, and set you down on the floor beside my chair. You leant against me and looked back and forth between us. Hofer suddenly turned away from you and looked me squarely in the eyes.

I held his gaze.

I wanted an answer.

'What did you mean?' I repeated.

'Do you ever dream?'

Yes, I said, and told him about the old man, remembering to mention that he had also visited me in Berlin.

Did that surprise him?

'Not in the least,' he said with a roguish smile, and went on to ask whether I could imagine that each of us had a purpose in life – and that children chose their own parents.

'Are you sure?' I asked.

Tom says the same, and we often argue because I refuse to accept that I can't blame anyone for the pain I've suffered in my life. And yet here I was with this layer-on-of-hands, this pendulum-asker, because I was sure my child wasn't going to be helped by blood tests and hospital stays, and didn't know who

else to turn to. And as I talked, I began to realise that my family was also yours and – more than that – that your story didn't begin with me and Tom, but with our parents and grandparents.

'Your daughter is with you, because she chose to be. Follow the signs she gives you.'

'Is that all?' I asked, strangely relieved.

Hofer gestured from you to me, reminding me of the old man in my dream with his wooden dolls.

'She can't put down roots,' he said slowly. 'You must find yours.'

That afternoon I went home and began to look out my family papers – they fill an entire folder. I noted down names, looked up phone numbers and spent weeks tracing the addresses of various bureaux and hospitals on the Internet. I even learnt a bit of Turkish in the process.

I wanted you to be able to put down roots, *kızım*, even if it meant I had to trawl through painful old stories and grapple with new and unexplored ones.

And do you know what? Thanks to all my efforts, I am now, over a year on, able to tell you what a luckless Anatolian donkey trader, a storm in Serbia, a world war, a window display of golden hamsters, the laws of Islam and a German political decision have to do with each other and with your life.

If you are to understand how all these things are connected, I must begin with two brothers, a goatherd and a poet.

A man who longed for a better life, and another who would have followed his brother anywhere.

A man who went abroad and fell out of luck, and another who is no longer alive.

You watch me as I get our suitcases ready and pack our bags. You listen as I tell you about Anatolia. Because that's where we're going.

To the place where, forty-nine years before I first heard from my father, a six-year-old boy hung on the jacket sleeve of his older brother Doğan, clamouring, 'Take me with you!'

His face was red from the effort of keeping up with Doğan, who was already eight and had much longer legs.

'Go home, Kamil,' said Doğan, trying to shake off his little brother. 'You're peskier than a swarm of locusts. Help Auntie with the chickens. Or go and play something.'

But Kamil knew his brother. You only had to persist for long enough and he would give in.

'You're a pest,' Doğan said, gently rapping him over his tight little knuckles with his crook. Then Kamil knew he had won. He let go of his brother's jacket, jumping in the air and whooping.

'Don't breathe a word to Uncle though, do you hear?' Doğan said urgently. Because although their uncle was a lovely man during the day, he could turn nasty when he'd been drinking.

Zeki, the children's father, was only seldom at home during the summer months; he travelled the country selling donkeys. 'I'll be back a rich man by the autumn,' he'd say each time he set off.

Their mother had died giving birth to Kamil, and so Auntie Ipek and their uncle had more or less become parents to them, at least for the summer months. In the winter Zeki joined them and would continue to do so until the building work on his own winter house was complete.

'When I'm big, I'm getting out of here,' Doğan would say, as he and Kamil sat on the big rock behind the house.



You could see the waterfalls from there, but only in the spring, after the thaw. In the summer, the leaves on the trees were too dense and the river often dried up in the heat, although it usually returned in the autumn. This year it had dried up early.

They had reached the goats. Doğan began the milking. Auntie Ipek made the best goats' cheese far and wide.

'One of these days I'll go to town,' she would sometimes say, 'and sell this cheese that you guzzle so unappreciatively.'

Doğan and Kamil admired Auntie Ipek.

'Aren't you afraid of Uncle?' Kamil had once asked when he was smaller.

'Afraid?' she had said, laughing. 'What difference do you think it would make if I were afraid? He'd drink just as much. And I'd rather he hit me than you, because he can't harm me. My heart is with him.'

Kamil didn't understand what she meant by that, but it reassured him. He was too little to notice that Auntie Ipek, too, enjoyed the evenings when she could sleep in his bed, undisturbed by hot, clammy, drunken hands.

'Where will you go once you're out of here?' Kamil asked when the work was done and the brothers were lying in the grass.

'How many times are you going to ask me that?' Doğan replied wearily.

He was hungry, but since he'd only packed enough food for himself, he'd have to hold off for the moment to make it last them both till evening.

'I'd climb up the rocks and walk to the source of the waterfalls,' said Kamil, and Doğan laughed.

'Quite some journey,' he said with a grin. 'You'd be back home in three days.'



‘Where else? Into the valley?’

There was a little road, more of a track really, which led into the valley, and was known to Kamil only through hearsay. From there, it was said, you could go either north to Yozgat or down into the south of the country. There were buses there. Kamil had never seen a bus, but the *Hodsha* talked of them, and the more he talked, the bigger the bus in Kamil’s imagination grew; he saw it gleaming and glistening in the sun and before long it had a hundred wheels. There was a river there too, he’d heard, which flowed all the way to the Black Sea. But he wasn’t sure.

‘I’d like to see the sea,’ said Doğan.

‘The sea?’ Kamil asked warily.

He was afraid of water, even if it was only the water in Auntie Ipek’s bath bucket. On some days there wasn’t enough firewood; then she poured the water over the children cold. When that happened, Kamil hated his uncle for his miserliness.

Besides, he couldn’t swim. In summer the other children teased and taunted him when they met at the tiny lake the sun had left. Even the smallest boys jumped blithely in from the shore on the deep side. Only Kamil didn’t. Doğan had made several attempts to teach him to swim, but nothing was any good. He got him to lie flat on the table to practise the leg movements. No luck. He lay him across a chair – that, too, was fruitless. Kamil couldn’t get his arms and legs to move at the same time.

In a last-ditch attempt, Doğan carried him down to the shore in his arms and slowly waded into the lake with him, but as soon as Kamil got wet, it was over. He jumped, panicking, out of Doğan’s arms to get back to the safety of the shore, and almost drowned because he fell and hit his head on a stone and then passed out under water.



‘The only stone far and wide,’ his uncle roared.

Auntie Ipek took him to Hatice, who had him to stay for three days. She knew all about healing herbs and was summoned to tricky births, whether the mother-to-be was a woman or a sheep. Men were freaked out by her, but nobody dared criticise Aunt Hatice openly, for fear she might put a curse on them. ‘Really,’ said Auntie Ipek, ‘why would she put a curse on them? Their stupidity will be the death of them.’

And so, for good reasons, the sea was not a place Kamil longed to be.

‘Wouldn’t you like to know what comes after Turkey?’ asked Doğan.

‘Don’t be silly,’ said Kamil. ‘After Turkey comes Syria, Uncle says so.’

‘No,’ said Doğan seriously. ‘That’s not what I mean. I mean places like France – Paris, the Eiffel Tower, the university!’

Kamil had no idea what his brother was going on about.

Doğan began to draw little lines in the sand with his crook, muttering names, adding dots. ‘That,’ he said with a proud flourish at his work of art, ‘is Europe.’ Kamil didn’t understand.

‘Do they have donkeys there too?’ he asked.

Doğan drove a fist into his shoulder, knocking him onto the sand so that the map was obliterated.

‘You are an incurable idiot,’ he said. ‘If I wanted donkeys, I’d stay here!’

Kamil struggled to his feet and Doğan grasped him by the shoulders, gave him a good shake and then suggested they share out the small amount of food he’d brought with him and eat it right away.



From then on, Kamil accompanied his brother every day, and in the evenings they sat together on the rock under the oak tree and waited for their father to return.

But that autumn, only a handful of donkeys made it back.

Zeki had crossed the mountains with his herd, sold most of them and then set off on the arduous journey home with a dozen new donkey mares. Business had gone well, if not as well as in previous years. He trekked along the river for days. He was tired.

‘Just cross that damn road and I’m nearly there,’ he must have thought, tying the donkeys together with a single rope, looping the end around his belly and heading for the new road.

He’d cursed that road for months, because it carried buses and trucks. One village after the other had built sandy tracks to ‘facilitate participation in the new traffic project,’ as the powers-that-be in Ankara put it. Zeki hadn’t attended school for long, but he got about the country and kept his ears pricked. ‘What good is that supposed to be, throwing money away on useless roads?’ he would say to the other villagers in the winter. ‘Apart from anything else, they’re doing me out of my livelihood. Who buys a donkey when he can travel faster and more comfortably in a truck?’

He thought with delight of his sons and the winter he was going to spend with them – of their faces when he showed them the new herd. His new winter house was finished at last too; they wouldn’t have to stay at his brother’s this year.

He looked for a spot where the embankments either side weren’t too steep, took up the guide rope and pulled his herd after him to the middle of the road.



At that moment there was a long-drawn-out hoot. The truck drivers had got into the habit of sounding their horns when they approached one of the countless bends, to forewarn anyone who used the road as a footpath and give them time to get to the side.

‘Easy,’ said Zeki to his donkeys, pulling the rope tauter. ‘Easy.’

This particular driver clearly took his job seriously, for he honked not once, but twice.

The donkeys shied and tugged at the rope. Zeki stumbled and fell.

Half the donkeys were caught by the police and taken to the two orphan boys along with Zeki’s corpse. On the day of the funeral, the boys’ uncle appropriated not only all Zeki’s money, but also the herd of donkeys, which he sold for a good price to another livestock trader. The brothers didn’t see a single lira of their inheritance.

Auntie Ipek later said Zeki’s death had been the first sign that the new times would bring bad luck to the family.

‘First a donkey trader gets killed by a lorry,’ she said, ‘and the next thing we know, our sons will have forgotten how to harvest wheat.’

‘Nonsense,’ said their uncle. ‘What do you think happens in other countries? People have to till the soil the world over, so that there’s food to eat.’

‘What do you know about the world?’ said Auntie Ipek.

It was Auntie Ipek who took Doğan aside about ten years after his father’s death and told him to go to Yozgat.



‘There’s a new office there,’ she said. ‘They’re looking for men who want to get out of Turkey. Go and make enquiries. Maybe you really will get to see France one of these days.’

Doğan did as his aunt told him and signed the recruiter’s forms without a moment’s hesitation.

‘Germany,’ he told Auntie Ipek.

‘Take me with you,’ said Kamil.

That was the beginning, *kızım*, and now it’s only seven days until we get to taste Auntie Ipek’s goats’ cheese.

In seven days I’m going to meet my Turkish family for the first time. That gives me seven nights to tell you the whole long story – a story as rambling and full of secrets as an ancient, overgrown garden.

You shall be the first to hear it, *kızım*, because without you I would never have discovered it.

First Night





IT HAS STARTED to snow again.

Did you see your big brother chasing snowflakes this morning, and do you remember, *kızım*, how nicely he shared his snowballs with you afterwards?

Tom took him to the woods in the afternoon and cut down a Christmas tree for us, just like the other men in the village. While he was out, I tried to bake cinnamon stars following our old family recipe, but I botched them and your brother ate rather a lot of raw biscuit dough. He was lucky he didn't get a tummy ache.

I'll have to go out again later to fetch wood for the range; the embers aren't going to keep us warm much longer. And we mustn't forget to check the water pipe in the bathroom; it freezes easily because the walls are so thin, and for days now the bitter east wind has been whipping around them.

In seven days we'll board the plane and fly to Istanbul. Then we'll catch a bus, or maybe hire a car. Cem's in charge of everything; I can't keep all the place names in my head.

When Cem organises something, you're best putting all the plans and maps he gives you in a folder and referring to them whenever he asks if you know this or that. If you don't get the folder out and wave it around, he prints everything out all over again. That's my cousin for you.



Come on, we'll go and look at the tree and I'll show you the Christmas box where we keep your Grandmother Irma's Christmas decorations. She gave them to me a few years ago along with all her recipes, and I ought to mention that Irma's cookery books gather almost a hundred years of family history. She came from a vicar's family – a vicar's dynasty, you might almost say – there was always a son to carry on the tradition.

The recipes in her cookery books are interspersed with diary entries, and there are notes on family customs jotted in the margins, and sometimes newspaper cuttings which she used as bookmarks.

She had her secrets, but some of them, like her recipe for cinnamon stars, she has handed down to me. I am always careful to keep everything in order and not lose the cuttings. Among them is the notice announcing the christening of her only son, Johannes.